

PHILOSOPHY OF INTIMACY AND THE THEORY OF JUSTICE

Studies in Generative Relational Being

VOLUME III

Happiness, Ethics, Aesthetics, and Culture

Wanhong Huang

FIRST EDITION

Philosophy of Intimacy and the Theory of Justice
Studies in Generative Relational Being

Wanhong Huang

FIRST EDITION

2026

© 2026 Wanhong Huang.

Each paper in this volume has its own copyright holder and license;
these are those stated at each paper's original place of publication.

All rights reserved except as so stated.

FOREWORD

This book is written in gratitude to one I deeply love: the girl of the forest and the mountains, who loves to travel, and loves the natural world, and above all the mountains and the forests, and who loves political economy and culture. We are natives of the same homeland, yet it was only in Japan that we met, as though by a miracle. She became the reason I wrote this series of papers and this book, and the moving force behind my building, and my living out, of its theory.

谨以此书，感谢自己深爱的一位爱旅行、爱大自然、尤其爱山与森林，也爱政治经济学与文化的“森林与山之女孩”。我们本是同乡，却直到日本才奇迹般地相遇；她成为自己写下这一系列论文以及本书的动机，也成为自己建设并实践自己理论的重要动力。

Contents

1	On the Emergence of Happiness and the Self-Continuation of Generativity	1
	The Phenomenon	4
1.1	The Plain Happiness across Theoretical Horizons	7
1.1.1	Joint attention and intersubjectivity	7
1.1.2	Psychoanalysis: drive, the symbolic–real gap, and being quietly present	9
1.1.3	Phenomenology: passive synthesis, intercorporeity, releasement . .	11
1.1.4	The eudaimonist tradition	12
1.1.5	Neuroscience: low arousal and the calm of prediction	14
1.1.6	Structuralism and post-structuralism	15
1.1.7	Political economy and Marxism	16
1.1.8	Aesthetics	17
1.1.9	Process philosophy and relational ontology	18
1.1.10	The convergence: a common blind spot, and a silence not yet spoken	20
1.2	From Relational Ontology to Generativity	21
1.2.1	Catching the silence of §1.1.10	21
1.2.2	The grounding of a relational ontology	22
1.2.3	The source of dynamism: drive as the symbolic–real gap	23
1.2.4	Two modes of operation: drivenness by lack versus dwelling in fullness	24
1.2.5	The hermeneutic character of happiness and the inescapability of the symbolic	26
1.2.6	The background manifold: dynamics as the ground on which meaning unfolds	28

1.2.7	A methodological self-defence: how an interpretive theory can be tested	31
1.2.8	The demarcation from process philosophy	33
1.2.9	The plain happiness, said from the standpoint of the generative relation	35
1.2.10	The self-limitation of the saying: even “generativity” is in motion	35
1.3	The Modes Redrawn: A Morphology of Happiness from the Standpoint of the Generative Relation	36
1.3.1	From sketch to redrawing	37
1.3.2	Mode one—abiding: a being-with already in continuance	37
1.3.3	Mode two—waiting: a proceeding toward a common rhythm	37
1.3.4	Mode three—...(left open): the chapter’s reticence	38
1.3.5	The methodological discipline of the morphology	38
1.4	Charting the Ground: The Underlying Dynamics as the Background Manifold on which Meaning Unfolds	39
1.4.1	What this chapter guards against	40
1.4.2	An arraying of candidate properties: each dynamical property courts an intuition of happiness	40
1.4.3	Dynamics as a lingua franca: how the same phenomenon is explained by, and connects to, other theories	42
1.4.4	The conflict: these properties cannot be jointly maximised	44
1.4.5	Non-adjudicability: no meta-criterion within dynamics selects “which property is happiness”	45
1.4.6	Rejoining §1.2 and §1.3.4: how the open thesis stands “above” these properties	45
1.4.7	Closing: the ground is laid, happiness unfolds upon it	45
1.5	A Neural Illustration: The Mechanisms of the Plain, Shared, and Waiting Happiness	46
1.5.1	The systems implicated: a structured review	46
1.5.2	Two review tables	48
1.5.3	Part A revisited: the value-signalling of waiting	48
1.5.4	Part B revisited: the mechanism of two plainnesses	49

1.5.5	Synthesis, and the single boundary the breadth reveals	49
1.6	The Hermeneutics of Shared Happiness: Resonance, not Merger	50
1.6.1	The question: does shared happiness require shared meaning?	50
1.6.2	The danger: hermeneutic annexation—the symbolic form of the dissolution of co-existence	51
1.6.3	The positive form: translatable yet not exhausted by translation —the structure of resonance	51
1.6.4	Taking up the earlier material as subordinate illustration: waiting / shared slowing	52
1.6.5	Close	53
1.7	Silence as Fulfilment: The Completion of Three Silences	53
1.7.1	Silence is not aphasia: a re-placement at the symbolic level	53
1.7.2	The threefold of three silences (load-bearing; the series' convergence)	54
1.7.3	The Eastern interface: arriving from within, not borrowing authority	55
1.7.4	Close and transition	55
1.8	The Impossibility of Writing as the Self-Verification of the Thesis	56
1.8.1	Returning to the quarry of the opening	56
1.8.2	Unwritability is structural, not a matter of ability	56
1.8.3	This impossibility verifies the thesis (the self-referential closure) . .	57
1.8.4	But this chapter does not slide into the unsayable or the mystical (self-brake one)	57
1.8.5	Nor into self-congratulation (self-brake two)	58
1.8.6	Close: the fitting end is to lay down the pen	58
	Envoi	58
	Acknowledgements	63
2	The Hydraulic Virtue of Intimate Relations	69
2.1	From the Hydraulics of Value to the Ethics of Water	73
2.1.1	Water-good, not formlessness	73
2.1.2	A structural, not a cultivational, reading	73
2.1.3	Water-good as the water-phase of the dark virtue	74
2.1.4	A source, not an ending	75
2.2	The Ethics of the Water-Virtues: A Doctrinal Survey	75

2.2.1	Political economy and the scale of distribution	76
2.2.2	Political philosophy and the scale of institutions	79
2.2.3	Relational ontology, the many, and the ecological scale	82
2.2.4	Subject, duty, and the meta-ethical layer	84
2.2.5	The cultivational reading set aside, and a methodological specimen	87
2.2.6	Summary: five challenges, and the home of the unanswered	88
2.3	The Generativity of Non-Contention	90
2.3.1	Generating yet not possessing	90
2.3.2	Non-contention in intimacy	91
2.3.3	Non-contention as non-domination	92
2.4	The Political Economy of the Lowly Place	92
2.4.1	Dwelling where others disdain	93
2.4.2	Dwelling-below in intimacy	93
2.4.3	The deferred challenge	94
2.5	The Dialectical Core: Water-Good, Not Formlessness	95
2.5.1	First cluster: the rigid lower bound	95
2.5.2	Second cluster: the survival condition	97
2.5.3	Kant, already discharged	98
2.5.4	The good/bad criterion	98
2.6	Non-Fullness and Renewal	99
2.6.1	The ethics of the unfilled	99
2.6.2	Non-fullness in intimacy	100
2.6.3	Non-fullness as the avoidance of solidification	101
2.7	The Practice of the Water-Virtue: Water-Good Conduct in Intimate Relations	101
2.7.1	The practice of non-contention: giving without reclaiming command	102
2.7.2	The practice of dwelling-below: flowing to the other's low ground .	102
2.7.3	The practice of non-fullness: leaving room, not seeing-through . .	103
2.7.4	The practice of not-ruling: not shaping the other's becoming . . .	104
2.7.5	The unifying criterion: every practice holds the rigid lower bound .	104
2.7.6	The limit of practice: the water-good cannot be made a procedure	105
2.8	Watershed: From the Dyad to the Basin	106

2.8.1	From two drops to a watercourse	106
2.8.2	The fidelity of the scaling is an open question	107
2.9	Formal Expression: The Translation Layer	108
2.9.1	Non-contention as non-possessive surplus	108
2.9.2	The good and bad low place as a Helmholtz decomposition	109
2.9.3	Non-fullness as the refusal of solidification	109
2.9.4	The water-good shapes power's geometry, it does not abolish it	110
2.9.5	The non-substitutability of intimacy as the flesh	110
2.9.6	Epistemic incompleteness	111
2.10	Directed Fissures	111
2.10.1	Watershed justice	112
2.10.2	The temporal dynamics of water	112
2.10.3	Water and vessel	113
2.10.4	The subject of the highest good	113
	Acknowledgements	114
3	The Field of "Travel"	117
3.1	Introduction: Travel as a Special Field	120
3.1.1	From the fixed background to its deliberate exchange	120
3.1.2	What kind of field: spaciousness rather than novelty	121
3.1.3	Presence, being, and the field they presuppose	122
3.1.4	A note on method: the journey as concrete universal	123
3.1.5	The plan of the paper	125
3.2	The Field of Travel and Its Constitutive Features	125
3.2.1	The temporal arch I: co-creation	126
3.2.2	The temporal arch II: reshaped time	127
3.2.3	The openness I: suspension	128
3.2.4	The openness II: contingency	129
3.2.5	The conditions of being-together I: liminality	129
3.2.6	The conditions of being-together II: symmetric unfamiliarity	131
3.2.7	The conditions of being-together III: forced co-presence	132
3.2.8	The underlying condition: spaciousness	133
3.2.9	The features in tension: the field as a dynamic system	134

3.3	From Revelation to Generation: The Self-Presence of Relational Dynamics	135
3.3.1	The field as touchstone: revelation	136
3.3.2	The field as catalyst: generation of the “we”	136
3.3.3	The self-presence of relational dynamics	137
3.3.4	Two contrasts: the solitary traveller and Hegelian recognition . . .	139
3.4	The Political Economy of Experience: Reproduction and the Circulation of Relational Wealth	141
3.4.1	The experience of the journey is relational wealth	141
3.4.2	Retelling as the reproduction of subjective experience	142
3.4.3	Reproduction is the establishment of a good cycle	143
3.4.4	Dead material and living labour: the photograph	144
3.4.5	The return: the critical juncture	145
3.4.6	The justice of reproduction	146
3.5	The Ethics of Shared Travel	147
3.5.1	Facing contingency together	147
3.5.2	The ethics of reproduction	148
3.5.3	Sustaining the good cycle	149
3.5.4	Facing the third-party other	150
3.5.5	The failure and collapse of shared travel	151
3.5.6	Conflict as positive wealth: the ethics of transfiguration	153
3.5.7	The common good: the capacity to face the world together	154
3.6	Relational Production and Its Ethical Principles	156
3.6.1	The category of relational production	156
3.6.2	The keystone: the principle of subject-preservation	157
3.6.3	The four operative criteria	158
3.6.4	The method: seeking common ground while preserving difference .	160
3.6.5	Recapitulation: the ethics of relational production	161
3.6.6	First application: the just reproduction of suffering	162
3.6.7	Second application: the ethics of aesthetic disagreement	163
3.6.8	Relational production within historical structure: dialectical subla- tion in shared praxis	165
3.7	The Construction of the Field: An Aesthetic, Not an Engineering, Problem	171

3.7.1	Praxis: theory descending into practice	171
3.7.2	The paradox of deliberate spontaneity	171
3.7.3	Intention on the boundary, not the content	172
3.7.4	Controlled contingency: the dialectic	173
3.7.5	The two failure poles	174
3.7.6	Thesis One: construction is aesthetic, not engineering	175
3.8	Creation and Co-Creation: The Unity of Aesthetics and Production . . .	177
3.8.1	From construction to creation	178
3.8.2	Under the relational ontology, creation is co-creation	179
3.8.3	Co-creation is relational production: the unity of the two lines . .	180
3.8.4	The ethics of creation: co-created works and the question of de- struction	181
3.8.5	Creation, the public sphere, and the limit of the theory	184
3.9	The Core Problems of the Classical Philosophy of Beauty	186
3.9.1	The problem of definition: the <i>Hippias Major</i>	187
3.9.2	The antinomy of taste: the subjective and the objective	189
3.9.3	First stage of the resolution: aesthetic judgement across the three registers	190
3.9.4	Second stage of the resolution: the relational subject and the disso- lution of the antinomy	192
3.9.5	Travel as the field of the shared aesthetic accord	194
3.9.6	The sublime: when the Real predominates	196
3.9.7	The beauty of suffering	197
3.9.8	Conflict as relational wealth	199
3.9.9	The just reproduction of suffering: four criteria, and an opened question	201
3.9.10	The metaphysics of beauty: from Plato to Hegel	205
3.9.11	East Asian aesthetics: an independent pillar	206
3.10	The Evolution of Aesthetic Judgement: A Dynamics in the Reproduction Cycle	209
3.10.1	Aesthetic judgement is not a point but a trajectory	210
3.10.2	The reproduction cycle as the engine of evolution	211

3.10.3	The dynamics: good and bad evolution	212
3.10.4	The dialectic of the general and the particular	213
3.10.5	A light formal rendering: two coupled fields	215
3.11	The Aesthetic Perception of Contingency	218
3.11.1	Contingency is everywhere; the problem is catching it	218
3.11.2	The three moments of the perception	219
3.11.3	A skill, not an engineering: the portable container	221
3.11.4	Eastern resources: the poetics of the wayfarer and the landscape	222
3.12	Aesthetic Education: Cultivating the Judgement of the Good	223
3.12.1	Why aesthetic education, and not simply ethical education	224
3.12.2	Thesis Two: receptive beauty and enactive beauty	225
3.12.3	Thesis Three: ethical judgement is, at its limit, aesthetic	226
3.12.4	The strongest objections, and the reply	229
3.12.5	The classical theories of aesthetic education	232
3.12.6	The modern theories of aesthetic education	233
3.12.7	How it is cultivated: the mutual aesthetic education of two	236
3.12.8	χαλεπὰ τὰ καλὰ: that the beautiful is difficult	237
3.13	The Continuity of Ethics and Aesthetics: A History of the Debate	238
3.13.1	The affirmative lineage: the good and the beautiful as one	239
3.13.2	The temptation and the danger: Nietzsche	241
3.13.3	The strongest opponent: Kierkegaard's rupture	242
3.13.4	The reply: the consumptive aesthetic and the enactive aesthetic	244
3.13.5	The location of Thesis Three in the debate	246
3.14	The Political Economy of Beauty: The Contested Remainder	247
3.14.1	The costly emptiness of Ginza Six	247
3.14.2	The first reading: capital's capture of the aesthetic	248
3.14.3	The second reading: the irreducible remainder	249
3.14.4	The dialectic: beauty as a contested field	250
3.14.5	无之以用: emptiness confirmed by capital	251
3.14.6	The spectrum of cases	252
3.14.7	How beauty creates a value cycle: the mechanism	253
3.14.8	The good and the bad value cycle	255

3.14.9	The value cycle as relational production	256
3.14.10	The emancipatory upshot: aesthetic education as micro-politics . .	257
3.15	The Generalized Field of Travel	258
3.15.1	Travel as a functional concept	259
3.15.2	From scaffolding to skill	260
3.15.3	The de-alienation of the everyday, and the answer to elitism	261
3.15.4	Generative openness: a principle, and a limit	262
3.15.5	An opening, not a conclusion	263
3.16	The Closure of the Temporal Arch, and Directed Fissures	264
3.16.1	The closure of the temporal arch	264
3.16.2	A note on the paper's length and difficulty	265
3.16.3	Directed fissures	266
	Acknowledgements	269
4	Relational Aesthetics and the Construction of the Field	277
4.1	Introduction: From the Museum to the Kitchen	281
4.2	The Generative Dialectic: Method	284
4.2.1	The necessity of reconstructing the dialectic	285
4.2.2	Against three other dialectics	285
4.2.3	From the concentration of force to the direction of attention	286
4.2.4	Principal and secondary contradictions in the field	288
4.2.5	The sharpest consequence: the inherited error of aesthetic education	289
4.2.6	The generative dialectic and dialectical materialism	290
4.3	The Ontology of the Field	292
4.3.1	The field: a conditional environment of coupling	293
4.3.2	The field and the subjects it couples	294
4.3.3	The field and spaciousness	295
4.3.4	The depth of a field	296
4.4	The Construction of a Field Is Not an Engineering Problem	297
4.4.1	The nature and the requirements of engineering	297
4.4.2	The state-dependence that escapes specification	298
4.4.3	The strongest objection: architecture and design	300
4.4.4	The transmissible and the discerned	301

4.5	The Pattern and the Nameless Quality: A Design-Theoretic Support . . .	302
4.5.1	Patterns: aids to perception, not specifications	302
4.5.2	The discipline of a perception that no rule captures	303
4.5.3	The convergence and its significance	304
4.5.4	The limit of the analogy	305
4.6	The Genealogy of the Aesthetic Grounding of Ethics	306
4.6.1	Confucius: the person is completed in the aesthetic	307
4.6.2	Schiller: the moral problem is first an aesthetic one	307
4.6.3	Wittgenstein: ethics and aesthetics are one	308
4.6.4	Scheler: value is felt before it is reasoned	308
4.6.5	Gadamer: taste was a moral power before it was an aesthetic one .	309
4.6.6	Williams and Murdoch: the analytic recovery of perception over theory	309
4.6.7	The dissenting witness and the danger it marks	310
4.6.8	The disagreements among the witnesses	311
4.6.9	The limit of each witness, and the critiques they have drawn . . .	312
4.6.10	The common structure	314
4.6.11	The asymmetry of East and West in the genealogy	315
4.6.12	The gift and the reservation of the genealogy	316
4.7	The Coupling Mechanism: Sensibility and Moral Resolution	317
4.7.1	Appropriateness: the signature of accumulating holonomy	318
4.7.2	Perception by resolution, not by rule	320
4.7.3	The resolution, at once aesthetic and moral	321
4.7.4	The direction of grounding	322
4.7.5	The predictive reading, kept to its level	323
4.7.6	The philosophical position of the identification	324
4.8	Refinement Is Not Direction: The Orthogonality Guard	326
4.8.1	The counterexample that will not go away	326
4.8.2	Two features of the field, not one	328
4.8.3	The survival of the coupling under the orthogonality	329
4.8.4	The guard carried into the practice	330
4.8.5	The coexistence of the two cultivations	330

4.9	The Three Beauties and the Beauty of Perception	332
4.9.1	Three faces of one sensibility	332
4.9.2	The beauty of perception	334
4.9.3	The principal and secondary aspect within perception	335
4.10	The Field Becomes Visible: Perception and Its Contending Theories . . .	336
4.10.1	The problem: why appropriateness goes unseen	336
4.10.2	The predictive route	338
4.10.3	The Buddhist route	339
4.10.4	The phenomenological route	341
4.10.5	A Daoist second voice	342
4.10.6	A bridge: perceptual expertise	343
4.10.7	Three real conflicts	344
4.10.8	The hardest step: non-division grounds discrimination	345
4.10.9	A layered synthesis	348
4.10.10	The reach and the defeat of each route	349
4.10.11	The materialist resolution and its philosophical position	351
4.11	The Beauty of Practice	352
4.11.1	Practice: the generation of appropriateness	353
4.11.2	Practice is the dominant aspect, and its transformation	354
4.11.3	Against the over-correction toward doing	356
4.12	The Beauty of Maintenance: The Metaphysics of Repetition	357
4.12.1	Maintenance, repetition, and the two repetitions	357
4.12.2	The craft tradition and the conditions of good repetition	358
4.12.3	Alienation and the ownership of the cycle's yield	360
4.12.4	The dominant aspect within maintenance	361
4.13	Relational Aesthetics and the Cultivation of the Field	362
4.13.1	Beauty is produced relationally	362
4.13.2	The grounds for a model, and for these four steps	366
4.13.3	The four steps under the generative dialectic	368
4.13.4	The work of the following sections	370
4.14	The Ethics of Reception	370
4.14.1	The semantic pivot: to receive beauty is to receive the other	371

4.14.2	Levinas: the welcome of the other	372
4.14.3	Psychoanalysis: defence, containment, holding	373
4.14.4	Gelassenheit: the posture of letting be	374
4.14.5	The mirror that does not store: an Eastern principal voice	375
4.14.6	Two real conflicts	376
4.14.7	The hardest step: responding-yet-not-storing grounds healthy re- production	378
4.14.8	A layered synthesis	379
4.14.9	The reach and the defeat of each account	380
4.15	The Birth of the Relational	382
4.15.1	The semantic pivot: sharing generates rather than transmits	383
4.15.2	Joint attention and the structure of the between	384
4.15.3	Witnessing: the ethical weight of the shared	385
4.15.4	Dialogue and resonance: the movement of the shared	386
4.15.5	A sociological voice: the effervescence of the gathered	387
4.15.6	Music and the common: an Eastern principal voice	388
4.15.7	Two real conflicts	389
4.15.8	The hardest step: sharing is grounded in the preservation of difference	390
4.15.9	A layered synthesis	393
4.15.10	The reach and the defeat of each account	394
4.16	Repetition without Return	395
4.16.1	The semantic pivot: reproduction returns to the root, not the origin	396
4.16.2	The two repetitions	397
4.16.3	The political economy of the reproductive act	398
4.16.4	An anthropological voice: ritual and the cultivation of repetition	399
4.16.5	Sedimentation and renewal: an Eastern principal voice and a phe- nomenological one	400
4.16.6	Two real conflicts	402
4.16.7	The hardest step: reproduction is fed by the prior three and so closes the cycle	403
4.16.8	A layered synthesis	405
4.16.9	The reach and the defeat of each account	406

4.17	Observable Signatures: An Implementation-Level Interface	408
4.17.1	The condition: an interface is not an identity	408
4.17.2	Perception: sensitivity to deviation	409
4.17.3	Reception: integration rather than gating	410
4.17.4	Sharing: inter-brain coupling	412
4.17.5	Reproduction: experience-dependent plasticity	413
4.17.6	The purpose of the interface	414
4.17.7	The interface and the relational ontology	415
4.18	A Worked Example: The Cultivation of Contingency	416
4.18.1	Perceiving contingency	416
4.18.2	Receiving contingency	417
4.18.3	Sharing contingency	418
4.18.4	Reproducing contingency	418
4.18.5	The shape of the practice	420
4.18.6	The aptness of the contingency example	421
4.19	The Aesthetic Everyday and Aestheticized Consumption	422
4.19.1	The counterfeit and its appeal	422
4.19.2	The criterion: which cycle does the attention serve	423
4.19.3	The counterfeit in the register of the imaginary	424
4.20	Micro Self-Legislation: Field-Building and the Remedy for the Symbolic Crisis	426
4.20.1	The smallest scale of meaning-production	426
4.20.2	The structure of micro self-legislation	428
4.20.3	Against the misreading of withdrawal	430
4.21	The Political Economy of the Field	430
4.21.1	The charge at full strength	431
4.21.2	The account refutes the charge	432
4.21.3	The structural remainder	433
4.21.4	Aesthetic education and structural change	434
4.21.5	Those who most need it	435
4.22	The Terminus of the Reduction Chain: The Unification of the Series's Fields	436
4.22.1	Every paper described a field	436

4.22.2	One capacity, many conditions	438
4.22.3	The everyday, the privileged site	439
4.22.4	The choice of the name aesthetic education	440
4.23	The Beauty of Transmission: Why Aesthetic Education Is an Education .	440
4.23.1	The limit of instruction in transmission	441
4.23.2	Transmission requires co-presence	441
4.23.3	The child and the inheritance of a sensibility	443
4.23.4	The paper, an instance of its own transmission	444
4.24	Contributions and the Structure of the Paper	445
4.24.1	The reduction chain	445
4.24.2	The four-step model, mapped	446
4.24.3	The four hardest steps, unified	447
4.24.4	Three beauties and four movements	447
4.24.5	The genealogy, gathered	448
4.24.6	Contributions	448
4.24.7	The structure of the paper	450
4.25	Polyphonic Conclusion: Against Reducing Aesthetic Education to a Method	450
4.25.1	The framings, unsynthesised	451
4.25.2	The form, the final argument	452
4.25.3	Envoi	452

5 The Aesthetic Philosophy of the Quotidian and the Cultivation of Perception 459

5.1	Introduction	462
5.2	The Phenomenology and Diagnostics of the Everyday	466
5.2.1	The phenomenology of the everyday	466
5.2.2	Three pathologies	467
5.2.3	The everyday as the field of contingency	469
5.2.4	The dynamics of flourishing	469
5.3	The Generation of Perception: Several Schools	470
5.3.1	The phenomenological genealogy	471
5.3.2	The cognitive-scientific genealogy	471
5.3.3	The psychoanalytic genealogy	472

5.3.4	The objection that there is no aesthetic perception	473
5.3.5	The generation of atmosphere	474
5.4	The Symbolic Order and Its Two Fates	474
5.4.1	Symbolisation as the condition of shared perception	475
5.4.2	The generative fate	476
5.4.3	The appropriative fate	476
5.4.4	The criterion	477
5.5	Value, Perception, and Circulation	478
5.5.1	The perception of value across the registers	478
5.5.2	The political economy of the senses	479
5.5.3	The value of everyday aesthetic perception	480
5.5.4	Circulation and the justice of return	481
5.6	The Philosophy of the Body	482
5.6.1	The phenomenology of the body	483
5.6.2	The enactive genealogy	483
5.7	The Neural Plasticity of Perception	485
5.7.1	Plasticity as the empirical premise of cultivation	485
5.7.2	Perceptual learning and cortical reorganisation	486
5.7.3	Expertise and the reorganised perceiver	486
5.7.4	The predictive implementation	487
5.7.5	The objection from pleasure	488
5.7.6	The line between refinement and commodified training	489
5.8	The Convergence of the Schools: Toward Generative Relational Aesthetic Education	490
5.8.1	Phenomenology and the predictive brain	490
5.8.2	Psychoanalysis and the frame	491
5.8.3	The historical production of the frame	492
5.8.4	The shared structure	492
5.8.5	From the structure to the proposal	493
5.9	Aesthetic Education: From Tradition to the Relational	494
5.9.1	The tradition at its strongest	495
5.9.2	The shared presupposition	496

5.9.3	The relational difference	496
5.9.4	The individual and the relational in cultivation	497
5.10	The Design of Space and Perception	498
5.10.1	The phenomenology of built space	499
5.10.2	Atmosphere and attunement	499
5.10.3	Affordance and the design of the everyday	500
5.10.4	The production of perceptual space	500
5.10.5	The home as a field of perceptual generation	501
5.11	The Theory and Existing Forms of Everyday Practice	502
5.11.1	The theory of practice	503
5.11.2	The practical methods of aesthetic education	503
5.11.3	The sub-field of everyday aesthetics	504
5.11.4	The practice traditions of the East	505
5.11.5	What the field leaves undone	506
5.12	A Typology of Everyday Aesthetic Practice	506
5.12.1	The common skeleton	507
5.12.2	Model I: perceiving, receiving, sharing, reproducing	507
5.12.3	Model II: silence, receiving, sharing, relational reproduction	508
5.12.4	Model III: the leaving of emptiness	510
5.12.5	Model IV: iterative symbolic refinement	511
5.12.6	The unity of the typology	512
5.13	The Distribution of the Sensible	513
5.13.1	Rancière and the distribution of the sensible	513
5.13.2	Generative aesthetic injustice	514
5.13.3	The spectacle	515
5.13.4	Beauty and ethics at one root	516
5.14	The Ethical Limits of Aesthetic Education	517
5.14.1	Against procedure	518
5.14.2	Cultivation and discipline	518
5.14.3	The ordinary evening	519
5.15	Directed Fissures	520
5.15.1	The sedimentation of shared perception	521

5.15.2	The perception that cannot be shared	521
5.15.3	The scale of the impersonal	521
5.15.4	The perception of the last day	522
6	The Emergence of Culture in Intimate Relation	529
	Part One — Ontology and Epistemology	535
6.1	Introduction: The First Fissure and the Problem of <i>Wen</i> and <i>Hua</i>	535
6.2	A Taxonomy of Definitions of Culture	538
6.3	Transmission and Collective Representation	541
6.4	Symbol and Interpretation	544
6.5	Structure and Reproduction	546
6.6	Power as the Ontology of Culture	548
6.7	The Chinese <i>Wen-Hua</i> Tradition	551
6.8	The Dialogic and the Unfinished	554
6.9	East and West: An Unactivated Resonance	556
6.10	The Three-Register Dialectic of the Relational Real	559
6.11	The Shared Presupposition and Its Inversion	564
6.12	Culture as the Exteriorization and Organization of Drive	566
6.13	The Dialectic of the Material and the Ideal	569
6.14	The Emergence of Culture in Intimate Relation: A Definition	572
6.15	The Dialectical Sublation of Power	574
6.16	The Dialectic of Cultural Evolution	577
	Part Two — Phenomenology	583
6.17	Intimate Relation as a Special Site of Cultural Emergence	583
6.18	The Description of Private-Cultural Phenomena	585
6.19	Participatory Knowing and Epistemic Exclusivity	587
6.20	The Dyad and the Vacant Big Other	590
6.21	The Double Interweaving of Drive	593
6.22	High-Density Sedimentation and Accelerated Time	596
6.23	The Special Configuration of the Three Registers	599
6.24	Fragility and Reversibility	602
6.25	The Hermeneutics of Private Culture	605
6.26	Emergence-Moments and the Outer Symbolic Order	608

Part Three — Ethics and Praxis	613
6.27 Family Ethos as a Middle-Scale Case: <i>Jiafeng</i>	613
6.28 The Production of Culture	618
6.29 The Capture of Intimate Culture by Capital	621
6.30 The Closed Loop Back into Intimate Relation	625
6.31 Constrained but Not Determined	628
6.32 The Ethics of Cultural Cognition and Practice	630
6.33 Cross-Scale Retrospect and Envoi	633
7 Optimization Theory and Rationality in Intimate Relations	639
Part One — Optimization as a Worldview	645
7.1 Introduction: An Operation Mistaken for a Law	645
7.2 The Formal Anatomy of an Optimization Problem	648
7.3 The Genealogy of Optimizationism	651
Part Two — Four Impossibilities	659
7.4 The First Impossibility: The Non-Structurability of Value	659
7.5 The Second Impossibility: The Relationality of Value and the Absent Quantifier	664
7.6 The Third Impossibility: Incommensurability	667
7.7 The Fourth Impossibility: The Constitution of the Subject	671
Part Three — The Cost of Optimizationism	677
7.8 The Damage to Generativity	677
7.9 Optimizationism as a Symptom of Modernity	680
7.10 Optimizing Practice Is Not Ethical Practice	683
Part Four — A Non-Optimizing Relational Rationality	689
7.11 Rationality Is Not Optimization: Reclaiming the Word	689
7.12 The Form of Relational Rationality	691
7.13 Non-Action as the Highest Rationality	694
Part Five — Close	699
7.14 The Polyphonic Conclusion	699
7.15 Envoi: A Promise That Is Not Optimized	701
Acknowledgements	702

8	The Limitation of Language in Intimate Relation	707
	Part One — The Six Dimensions of the Limit of Language	713
8.1	The Limit Proposed, Not Lamented	713
8.2	The Being of a Relation	715
8.3	The Living Present	718
8.4	Relational Value Without a Place to Be Priced	721
8.5	The Aesthetic Measure of the Ethical Response	725
8.6	The Generativity That Justice Guards	728
8.7	The Unsayable Direction of Growth	731
	Part Two — The Phenomenology of the Gap	739
8.8	Entry into the Symbolic and the Pre-Symbolic Remainder	739
8.9	The Two Faces of the Real	742
8.10	The Descent of the Object at the Gap	744
8.11	Drive That Circles, Desire That Slides	746
8.12	The Closure That Would Extinguish	749
	Part Three — The Persistence of Drive	755
8.13	The Symptom as Fidelity to the Unsymbolizable	755
8.14	The Early Signifier and the Time of Relation	757
8.15	Making Room for the Other's Core	759
8.16	The Interweaving of Drive in the Couple	761
	Part Four — The Generativity of the Limit	767
8.17	The Poem, a Language That Circles the Gap	767
8.18	Room for the Core Without Possession	769
8.19	The Guarding of Generativity	772
8.20	The Co-Structure of the Limit	774
8.21	Objections and Replies	779
	Part Five — Polyphonic Close	785
8.22	The Limit as Ground	785
	Envoi	787
9	Relational Understanding in Intimate Relations	791
	Part One — Background	797
9.1	Understanding as a Crossing of Worlds	797

9.2	The Epistemology Recalled	798
9.3	From Concepts to Persons	800
	Part Two — The Functional Case	805
9.4	Trust	805
9.5	The Recognition of Shared Value	806
9.6	The Easing of a Class of Conflict	808
9.7	The Quality of a Shared Life	810
9.8	The Work of the Two Characters	812
	Part Three — The Normative Case	819
9.9	The Insufficiency of the Functional Case	819
9.10	Legitimacy without Correctness	820
9.11	Ethical Legitimacy Observed across Traditions	823
	Part Four — The Special Problem of Intimacy	831
9.12	The Wager, not the Rehearsal	831
9.13	The Field of Cultivation and the Field of Exercise	833
	Part Five — The Practical Theory	837
9.14	The Capacities, not a Procedure	837
9.15	The Throwing of a Generative Thing	840
9.16	The Preservation of Relational Experience	842
9.17	Non-Possession as the Condition Throughout	845
9.18	The Practical Theory Embodied	847
	Part Six — The Dialectic of Understanding and its Remainder	853
9.19	The Remainder that Sustains the Bond	853
	Part Seven — Polyphonic Close	859
9.20	The Crossing Left Open	859
	Acknowledgments	860

CHAPTER 1

On the Emergence of Happiness and the Self-Continuation of Generativity

*This paper analyses a form of happiness that resists the standard theories of well-being: the plain, shared happiness in which nothing happens, nothing is achieved, and nothing is lacked, yet which is full rather than empty. Such happiness is neither a **state** attained nor an **event** undergone. The paper argues that it is instead an **emergence**: a fullness arising from the way a generative relation continues itself, irreducible to its substrate, and whose form is fixed not in advance but historically and materially. A survey of the major traditions—joint-attention psychology, psychoanalysis, phenomenology, eudaimonism, neuroscience, structuralism, political economy, and process philosophy—shows that each reads such happiness either as a **lack** or as a **static satisfaction**, and so misses its distinctive feature: that this stillness is not stagnation but continued generation.*

*To articulate this, the paper develops a relational ontology in which the individual is a knot, not a premise, of relation, and locates the engine of generation, by way of psychoanalysis, in the irreducible gap between the symbolic and the real. The same gap can be lived in two modes: a mode of lack, in which the subject is driven to fill it, and a mode of fullness, in which the subject dwells in the openness it sustains. Happiness is the second mode. The paper further argues that happiness is **hermeneutic**—given only as meaning to a subject of the symbolic—and therefore that no purely dynamical account can reach it; it demonstrates this by pressing the dynamical-systems vocabulary to its limit and showing it cannot adjudicate competing intuitions of happiness. The dynamical is nonetheless retained as the **background manifold** on which meaning is laid down: meaning is not reducible to it, but cannot stand apart from it, so happiness is neither physical fact nor arbitrary reading.*

From this follow two results. First, shared happiness is not the merger of two subjects into one symbolic order—hermeneutic annexation—but the resonance of two meaning-worlds that remain mutually translatable without being exhausted. Second, the silence proper to such happiness completes a series: the silence of obligation, of restraint, and of needlessness. Throughout, no single form is permitted to occupy the place of happiness's essence.

致她——

For her—

那个属于森林与山之女孩，

the girl who belongs to the forest and the mountains,

与我一同，什么也不做地，看着窗外的雨。

with whom, doing nothing at all, I watch the rain beyond the
window.

致我最爱的人。 To the one I love most.

The Phenomenon

Before any theory is brought to bear, the object to be explained must be set out in its own terms. This preliminary section does only that. It describes a phenomenon and marks it off from its neighbours, using as little theoretical vocabulary as possible; the terms by which the later chapters will explain it—“generativity,” “the symbolic,” and the rest—are deliberately withheld here, since to describe the phenomenon in the language of one’s eventual explanation is already to prejudge it. What follows is a description of how the thing is given, not an account of what it is.

The datum

Consider two people who, on an afternoon with nothing to do, sit together and watch the rain beyond a window. They are not talking, or not much; there is nothing they are trying to settle, nothing they are waiting for, no task to complete and no decision to reach. Nothing, in any ordinary sense, is happening. And yet they are happy—not euphoric, not moved to any peak, but plainly and unmistakably content, in a way neither would hesitate to call happiness if asked.

The phenomenon has a feature that makes it difficult to place: it is full without being eventful. The contentment is not the residue of something that has just occurred, nor the anticipation of something about to occur. It does not point beyond the afternoon to an achievement secured or a lack supplied. It is simply, and without remainder, the quiet fullness of the present hour. This is what the standard theories of happiness find hard to accommodate, and what the rest of this paper is written to address. For the moment it is enough to record it as a datum: there is a happiness that consists in nothing happening, and that is nonetheless full.

The features of the phenomenon

Stated more carefully, the phenomenon shows several features, each of which can be recognised without any theory.

Uneventfulness. Nothing is achieved, undergone, or resolved. No new state is reached and no event occurs. This is the feature that most resists the received accounts, which tend

to locate happiness in an attainment or in the intensity of an experience.

Fullness. Despite the absence of event, the condition is not one of boredom, emptiness, or torpor. It is full. Here “full” is used only as a plain description of how the condition is felt, not as a theoretical claim; the question of what this fullness consists in is left entirely open.

Sharedness. The happiness is essentially a happiness of being *together*. It is not felt as belonging to either party alone but as belonging to the situation the two of them are in. A single person reproducing the same outward scene—the same window, the same rain—would not necessarily be in the same condition. Whatever the fullness is, it is located in the being-with, not in either of the two.

A faint movement, not inertness. The condition is still, but not with the stillness of a stone. There is in it something difficult to name—a slight, unhurried liveliness: the shared breathing, the common direction of attention toward the same rain, the slow passage of the hour. It is not a stop. It is more like a quiet, unhurried proceeding that is not in any haste to arrive anywhere.

Absence of want. There is no sense of lack, no felt pressure of “something still missing.” And just for this reason there is nothing that needs to be said and nothing that needs to be settled—a plain, unspoken ease.

Demarcation from neighbouring conditions

The phenomenon is easily confused with several conditions it resembles, and the description is not complete until these are set apart. The distinctions can be felt at the descriptive level, before any theory; their theoretical characterisation is deferred.

Against boredom and depressive withdrawal. These too are “uneventful,” but they are conditions of staleness, emptiness, or entrapment, whereas the present phenomenon is one of ease and fullness. The two share the absence of event and differ in everything else. This already marks something the later chapters must respect: there are two stillnesses, an empty one and a full one, and they are not told apart by whether anything is happening.

Against satiety or the relaxation of a satisfied need. Satiety is the aftermath of an event—the having-eaten, the having-obtained—and points back to a want just supplied. The present phenomenon points to no such want and is not the “after” of anything. It is not a discharge of tension but a condition with no tension to discharge.

Against the peak experience. Rapture or ecstasy is the summit of an intensity and is itself an event. The present phenomenon is the opposite in form: low in intensity, without event, and indefinitely sustainable. It is not a height but a level.

Waiting: a neighbouring mode of the same phenomenon

There is a second scene that belongs to the same family. Two people slow down for one another, wait together for a while, watch the light fade as evening comes on. Here too there are uneventfulness, sharedness, faint movement, and the absence of want; but there is in addition an *orientation*—toward something not yet arrived: the evening coming down, the other catching up.

A plain observation distinguishes this from its counterfeit. This kind of waiting is not restless; it is, if anything, sweet and full. It is wholly unlike the waiting of one who has missed a train—which is fretful, out of one’s control, and oriented toward a lack. The two kinds of waiting are felt to be quite different, and the difference can be marked here even though its mechanism and structure are left for later. What this mode shows is that the family of the phenomenon includes not only an “already at rest” but also a “slowly under way”; its modes are plural.

The limit of description, and what follows

This section has done only what description can do: it has identified a phenomenon, set out its features, and marked it off from its neighbours. It has not answered—because description cannot answer—what this fullness is, why it is full rather than empty, or where exactly the line falls between the two stillnesses and the two kinds of waiting. These are questions of explanation, not of description, and they require theory.

The order of what follows is accordingly this. The next chapter listens to how the existing theories explain this already-delineated phenomenon, and finds that they converge on a

common omission. The chapter after that advances the paper’s own account and grounds it. Only then are the modes redrawn, and only then are the several illustrative registers—dynamical, neural—allowed to cast their partial light. The phenomenon, for now, is simply on the table.

1.1. The Plain Happiness across Theoretical Horizons

The phenomenon having been delineated, this chapter asks how the major theoretical traditions explain it. The method is comparative and expository: each tradition is taken on its own terms and allowed to illuminate the plain happiness once, in the idiom proper to it, without being corrected or absorbed into any other. The traditions are placed side by side rather than woven together, and the work of drawing them into relation—of asking what they share and where they fail in common—is reserved for the final section, §1.1.10. The aim of the juxtaposition is not eclecticism but exposure: the thickness of the phenomenon is best shown by how many independent traditions find in it something they recognise as their own. Throughout, points requiring exact textual attribution are flagged for verification rather than asserted from memory.

A word on order. The sections proceed, loosely, from the most proximate register—the bare structure of two people attending to the same thing—outward to the most structural, the place of such happiness in an economy of production. The ordering is heuristic; the sections are mutually independent and may be read in any sequence.

1.1.1 Joint attention and intersubjectivity

The minimal structure of the datum, considered psychologically, is that two subjects attend together to the same object without the need for speech. The question this tradition poses is why such a wordless sharing of orientation should itself be a form of contentment, rather than a mere coordination of two perceptual states.

Developmental psychology has made the sharing of attention foundational to its account of how human sociality arises. In the framework of Trevarthen (1979), a *primary* intersubjectivity—the early affective attunement of infant and caregiver, a direct coordination of two subjectivities—is succeeded, after roughly the ninth month, by a *secondary* inter-

subjectivity in which a third term, the shared object, is drawn into the dyad, so that the relation acquires a triadic structure: I, you, and the object attended to together. The plain happiness of watching the rain together has the form of a mature secondary intersubjectivity: a triadic engagement in which the object is not a topic of communication but the common pole of a shared regard.

Tomasello (2008) makes the sharing of intentionality the cognitive origin of human cooperation and culture, and isolates as its core a capacity for *joint* attention that is not reducible to two parallel acts of individual attention: there is a “we” that is not the sum of two “I”s, a shared intentional state with its own structure. On this view the togetherness of the datum is not an aggregate but a unit; the happiness, if it is located in the togetherness, is located in something genuinely irreducible to the two parties taken separately.

Stern (1985) adds a feature especially pertinent here. In his account of *affect attunement*, what passes between infant and caregiver in their wordless exchanges is not the content of a feeling but its dynamic contour—its *vitality affect*, the shape of its rising and falling. This is a description of a sharing that has no objective content and yet a definite dynamic form: precisely the combination—contentless yet moving—that the datum exhibits in its “faint movement, not inertness.” The tradition thus already possesses a vocabulary for a togetherness that is full of movement without being full of any particular content.

What it illuminates. The minimal unit of the plain happiness of being-with is a wordless *co-orientation*, a shared direction of regard, rather than any communicated content. Watching the rain together is satisfying because it instantiates the purest case of a shared attentional state: a being-present-together that requires nothing to be said.

Its limit. In the developmental framework, joint attention is positioned as a cognitive *milestone*, or a capacity, rather than as a mode of happiness in its own right: it explains how the “we” becomes possible, not why the “we” should be a fullness. More tellingly, the teleological cast of the framework tends to read joint attention as a way-station *toward* language and cooperation—a means—whereas the plain happiness of watching the rain together is precisely an end in itself, leading on to no subsequent attainment. This tension—between the milestone read as means and the togetherness lived as end in itself—is one

the tradition cannot dissolve from within.

1.1.2 Psychoanalysis: drive, the symbolic–real gap, and being quietly present

Psychoanalysis takes drive and desire as its underlying dynamics, and this gives the datum a double edge. On the one hand, if happiness is conceived as the discharge or satisfaction of desire, then an uneventful, low-tension being-together is hard to count as a fullness rather than as the mere temporary absence of tension. On the other hand—and this is the feature the present paper will draw upon most heavily later—psychoanalysis is almost alone among the traditions surveyed here in offering a candidate *source* for a perpetually renewed dynamism: if such a source can be identified, the tradition will have supplied not merely a picture of the plain happiness but an engine beneath it. The first edge is developed in this chapter; the constitutive use of the second is deferred to the next.

Freud: drive and the economy of desire. Freud’s *Trieb* is a frontier concept between the somatic and the psychical, possessing a source, a pressure, an aim, and an object, of which the object is the most variable while the pressure is constant (Freud 1957). The drive is thus, by its structure, never finally satisfied: the object may be replaced, the pressure does not extinguish. This is the earliest psychoanalytic model of a dynamism that does not stop. Against it stands a contrary tendency in the same corpus: the *Nirvana principle*, the trend toward the reduction of excitation to zero, which Freud (adopting Barbara Low’s term) formulated in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and aligned with the death drive—distinct from, though entangled with, the *constancy principle*’s tendency to a low or stable level (Freud 1955). Under it the plain happiness would be read as a tending-toward-stillness close to inertness—the psychoanalytic form of precisely the “empty stillness” the present paper must guard against. The fullness of the low-tension condition has therefore to be distinguished, within psychoanalysis itself, from its deathlike counterfeit.

Lacan: desire as the gap between the symbolic and the real. The decisive resource lies here. In Lacan’s topology the real is what resists symbolisation, and the symbolic, the order of signifiers, never captures it without remainder (Lacan 2006). This structural shortfall of the symbolic with respect to the real—the irreducible gap between

them—is what sets desire in motion; the *objet petit a* marks the leftover of that gap, the object-cause around which desire turns. Desire is therefore never satisfied, perpetually displaced along the chain of signifiers, never filled by any particular object, not because it lacks some specific thing but because it is driven by the unclosable gap itself.

The proposition to be carried forward is this: *the gap between the symbolic and the real is a source-model for a generative dynamism*. It accounts for why there should be an unceasing movement, rather than positing that movement as an unexplained axiom. Generation does not stop, on this account, because the gap cannot be closed.

But a tension is built into the resource, and it must be marked here rather than resolved. In Lacan the gap drives the *perpetual frustration* of desire—an economy of lack, of the *manque-à-être*—in which the subject, driven by the gap, pursues and forever misses. The datum of this paper, by contrast, is a *plain, contented, low-tension* happiness. How can a dynamism driven by an unclosable gap, condemned to miss its object, be the source of a contented fullness? The contradiction is left standing here, suspended as the entry-point of the next chapter.

Winnicott: the capacity to be alone—the object-relations wing. A different wing of psychoanalysis describes the plain togetherness directly. Winnicott’s paradoxical formulation is the *capacity to be alone in the presence of another* (Winnicott 1965): the mature ability to be alone is founded on an early experience of being quietly alone in the mother’s presence, where no interaction and no tension of desire is required, while an unobtrusive ego-relatedness is sustained. This is almost an archetype of the plain happiness of being-with: the adult form of being, quietly, oneself in the other’s presence. The associated notion of *going-on-being*, whose opposite is impingement, names just such an uninterrupted, plain continuance of existence. Yet this wing stands outside the economy of drive, and so cannot answer the question of the dynamism’s source; while the wing that can supply the source (Lacan) locks it in lack. The two wings hold opposite ends, and a later chapter must rejoin them: the dynamism of the drive and the quiet of object-relatedness, reunited in a single account.

Bion and extensions. The picture is filled out by Bion’s *reverie* and the container-contained relation, in which wordless accompaniment is itself a structure of containing

(Bion 1962), and by Balint’s account of a harmonious, conflict-free interpenetration, a benign regression in which the plain being-together approaches a quiet commingling (Balint 1968).

What it illuminates. The plain happiness is a being-together that needs no tension of desire to sustain it (Winnicott); the highest intimacy may be one in which ego-relatedness is quietly present without the activation of drive. And, uniquely among the traditions here, psychoanalysis touches what lies *beneath* the plain happiness—the question of where its dynamism comes from—and offers a candidate answer in the symbolic–real gap.

Its limit. The dominant lines (the Freudian Nirvana principle, Lacanian desire) tend to read the plain happiness as the temporary absence of tension, a subtraction, or to lock its dynamism into an economy of lack. The Winnicottian line comes closest to a positive account but, standing outside the economy of drive, does not address the question of the source; its “uninterrupted” is a negative determination, not yet a positive generation. Psychoanalysis thus bequeaths to the sequel two legacies: an *asset*—the symbolic–real gap as engine of dynamism—and a *debt*—the default confinement of that dynamism to the mode of lack. The task of the next chapter is to inherit the asset while breaking with the debt.

1.1.3 Phenomenology: passive synthesis, intercorporeity, releasement

Phenomenology’s commitment is to describe how things are given. The question it poses to the datum is whether the still afternoon, as a given fullness, can be grasped *at the level of description*—whether one can characterise a “full without event” in terms of the structure of its givenness.

Husserl: passive synthesis and inner time. For Husserl the fullness of the afternoon need not be constituted by any active synthesis; at the level of *passive synthesis* it is already given as replete (Husserl 2001). And the structure of inner time-consciousness—the threefold of retention, primal impression, and protention—means that the present is never a static point but always carries, in its protentional edge, a slight openness toward what is coming. The still afternoon is therefore not a motionless instant but a

continually self-renewing flow: phenomenology, at the descriptive level, already registers a faint movement within the stillness. The fifth Cartesian Meditation’s account of *pairing* (*Paarung*), in which intersubjectivity is passively constituted in the coupling of bodies, supplies in turn a descriptive ground for the joint attention of §1.1.1.

Merleau-Ponty: intercorporeity and the flesh of the shared. For Merleau-Ponty the watching-together is two bodies sharing one world; the being-with is given pre-reflectively in *intercorporeity*, the intertwining (*chiasme*) of the flesh, rather than in any agreement of two consciousnesses (Merleau-Ponty 1962). The “we” of the plain happiness is a matter of the flesh, not of a contract of minds.

Heidegger: attunement and releasement. The plain happiness is a *Stimmung*, an attunement prior to the division of subject and object, a low-intensity, open mode of finding-oneself-disposed; it is not the absence of mood but a quiet, open one. *Gelassenheit*—releasement, the letting-be that neither forces nor manipulates but lets things be as they are (Heidegger 1966)—names the ontological vindication of the afternoon’s “doing nothing,” and stands in close kinship with the Daoist non-doing. *Mitsein* ensures that being-with is an original structure, not a later addition.

What it illuminates. The plain happiness is a *given fullness*, with an attunement-structure (*Stimmung*) and a faintly open temporal structure (protention); phenomenology lets us say that it is not empty but a replete givenness.

Its limit. Phenomenology is expert at describing how a thing is given and *stops at description*. It can render the structure of the afternoon’s givenness with great precision, yet methodologically brackets the genetic-dynamic question of why this is a *generation*, whence this fullness continually grows. Protention touches the “faint movement within stillness,” but phenomenology does not ask after the *source* of that movement, nor after its plasticity under historical and material conditions.

1.1.4 The eudaimonist tradition

The question here is in what sense the classical theories of well-being can accommodate a happiness that is plain yet full. The decisive fault-line runs between conceiving happiness

as an *activity* and conceiving it as a *state*, and between conceiving pleasure as *kinetic* (in process) and as *static* (a settled absence of disturbance). The plain happiness falls exactly on this line: uneventful (near the static), yet full (near the activity).

Aristotle: *eudaimonia* as *energeia*. For Aristotle happiness is not a state but the soul’s activity in accordance with virtue—an *energeia* (Aristotle 2000). Its highest form, *theoria*, is an activity outwardly still yet inwardly most active, which gives the “plain yet full” a classical foothold; and *scholē*, leisure, is not idleness but the condition under which free activity becomes possible. Watching the rain together might be read as a low-intensity shared *energeia* rather than as doing nothing. The strain is that Aristotelian *theoria* is solitary and self-sufficient, ill-suited to the dimension of being-with, and that it retains a determinate object, whereas the plain being-together has none.

Epicurus: *katastematic* pleasure. The highest pleasure is *katastematic*—not the kinetic pleasure of sensory stimulation but the settled state of freedom from pain and disturbance (*aponia*, *ataraxia*) (Epicurus 1994). This is nearly the most direct classical advocate of “plainness is fullness”: the plain is not the absence of pleasure but the very form of the highest pleasure. Yet the *katastematic* is a subtractive ideal—the removal of want and disturbance—whose fullness is a “being-without-deficit” rather than a “being-that-grows”; it cannot speak to the growing side of the plain happiness.

Stoicism: *apatheia* and accord with nature. The plain as a stability undisturbed by the passions, the product of accord with cosmic reason—an achievement, not numbness. But *apatheia* remains a negative determination, a freedom-from-disturbance, and its ideal of individual self-sufficiency is likewise ill-fitted to the growth of a shared condition.

Eastern parallels: Zhuangzi’s plainness and the Confucian joy. Zhuangzi’s *tian-dan* (plainness), the “empty room that gives forth light” (*xushi sheng bai*), and the saying that the plain and limitless is that from which every beauty follows—here plainness is the *condition of generation* (emptied, it lets something be born), which is the crucial difference from the Western static-pleasure tradition: Zhuangzi’s plainness is generative rather than merely undisturbed (Zhuangzi 2013). The Confucian joy of Yan Hui amid poverty, and the “Zeng Dian” vision of bathing in the river and returning singing, place

a plain, shared, seasonal joy at the heart of virtue (Confucius 1998). The Eastern tradition, Zhuangzi above all, already harbours the “stillness that generates” the Western eudaimonism lacks—an important anticipation of the next chapter, though it is left there as an anticipation, untheorised.

What it illuminates and its limit. The eudaimonist tradition wins for the plain a positive evaluative standing (it is not a deficiency). But the Western mainstream (Epicurus, the Stoics) reads it as a subtractive, undisturbed stillness; Aristotle’s *energeia* has a “motion within stillness” but confines it to solitary contemplation with a determinate object, ill-suited to the growth of an objectless being-with. Only the Eastern line (Zhuangzi) escapes this, harbouring the “stillness that generates”—but as an intimation, not yet a theory.

1.1.5 Neuroscience: low arousal and the calm of prediction

The neural picture of the plain happiness is, at first glance, one of “lowness”: low arousal, low prediction error, low phasic dopaminergic activity. The question is whether neuroscience can distinguish, within this lowness, two conditions—an empty lowness and a full one. The question is only raised here; its positive resolution is deferred to §1.5.

Arousal and the autonomic tone of calm. The plain being-together corresponds to a safe, low-arousal, parasympathetically dominant tone—in the terms of the polyvagal account, a ventral-vagal state of safety and social engagement (Porges 2007), physiologically the signature of “safe presence.”

Predictive processing and free energy. The plain corresponds to a persistently low prediction error: the world is well modelled and the cortex need issue no large signal of surprise (Friston 2010). But in the dominant narrative low prediction error can equally point to *low information*, to boredom—and the difference between empty and full cannot be told apart at this level. This is flagged here as exactly the criterial problem that §1.5.4 must address: not the height of the error but the tone of the neuromodulation and the character of the resting activity beneath it.

The default mode network and rest. Resting-state activity in the default mode network is associated both with calm introspection and with rumination and negative self-reference (Raichle et al. 2001); “rest” is therefore in itself neutral, its value depending on the character of the activity—again pointing to the criterion of §1.5.

What it illuminates and its limit. The plain happiness has a neural substrate, a describable condition of calm (safe, low-error, parasympathetic). But the mainstream framework tends to read “low arousal / low error” as *low value* (boredom, low information), and cannot at its own level distinguish empty from full. More fundamentally, neuroscience describes the *substrate*, and does not answer the normative–ontological question of what this fullness is or why it is an end in itself; it is a necessary witness, not a ground. The gulf between the mechanistic “low” and the experiential “full” is one neuroscience cannot itself cross.

1.1.6 Structuralism and post-structuralism

If meaning is fixed by position within a system of differences—with no positive terms, only differences—then what place does the plain, as a low-intensity condition of meaning, occupy semiotically? Can structuralism speak of *fullness*, or only of *operation*?

The structuralist ground. On the Saussurean basis—*langue* and *parole*, value as differential, a system of differences without positive terms (Saussure 1959)—the plain figures as a temporary anchoring of the chain of signifiers, a low-intensity state of the play of difference.

Barthes: the Neutral, tenderness, the lover’s discourse. In *A Lover’s Discourse* the undramatic, eventless moments of tenderness; in the lecture course on *the Neutral*, the celebration of a Neutral that suspends the conflict of paradigms (Barthes 1978; Barthes 2005)—the plain as a *le Neutre*: a suspended presence that does not stand within the intensities of binary opposition. Here structuralism’s heir comes closest to naming the plain positively, as a low-intensity mode of meaning.

The post-structuralist extension. Deleuze admits a positive extension—the plain as a low-intensity becoming, a micro-perception on a plane of immanence (Deleuze and

Guattari 1987); but Deleuze has already departed the structuralist “difference as absence” toward an affirmative becoming, and so constitutes a potential bridge to the next chapter. His “becoming,” however, is impersonal and cosmological, and lacks the relational, two-subject, self-continuing dimension this paper requires; the difference is to be marked in §1.2.8, not here.

What it illuminates and its limit. The plain is a low-intensity mode of the operation of meaning, with a definite semiotic place (the Neutral, tenderness, the anchoring of the signifier). But classical structuralism is adept at saying how meaning *operates* and inept at saying how meaning is *full*: on a base of “difference, no positive terms,” a positive fullness is nearly unsayable—it can locate the plain’s “place” but not give its “repletion.” Post-structuralism (Deleuze) turns toward affirmative becoming, but its becoming is impersonal and cosmological, lacking the relational and two-subject character at issue here—a difference deferred to the next chapter.

1.1.7 Political economy and Marxism

This section moves the plain happiness into the historical-material horizon: in a social form governed by the imperative of production and exchange-value, what place does an afternoon of doing nothing occupy? Is it waste, to be optimised away by the logic of capital, or an escape from and resistance to that logic?

Labour, alienation, and free time. Against alienated labour—the fourfold estrangement of the 1844 Manuscripts—Marx sets *disposable time*, free time, and “the development of human powers as an end in itself” (Marx 1973; Marx 1976). The plain, non-productive time of being-together is the obverse of alienated labour: in it, the exercise of human powers becomes an end in itself rather than being pressed into the service of exchange-value. Marx’s “realm of freedom,” which begins where labour determined by necessity ends, gives the plain happiness a positive location in political economy.

The critique of productivism and leisure. Lafargue’s polemic against the cult of labour (Lafargue 1907); Adorno’s analysis of the colonisation of leisure by the culture industry, in which “free time” is still shaped by the logic of production (Adorno 1991).

A tension follows: even when one escapes productive time, leisure may be recolonised by the logic of consumption—so that whether the plain happiness’s “non-productivity” can truly escape is itself a political question.

Reproductive labour and invisibility. The material conditions that make “an afternoon of doing nothing together” possible—who sustains the reproduction of life, by what division of labour this leisure is underwritten—cannot be romantically effaced (Federici 2004). The plain happiness has material preconditions, and honesty requires acknowledging them; this connects to the questions of power and asymmetry treated in Paper XVII (Wanhong 2026).

What it illuminates and its limit. Political economy can locate the plain happiness’s *political value* (as the obverse of alienation, an escape from the imperative of production) and its *material conditions*. But its determination is primarily negative and relational: the plain as the obverse of alienation, as resistance to productivism—and resistance is a negative determination, not yet a positive account of the fullness itself. It tells us what the plain is *not* (not production, not alienation) and what it *opposes* (productivism), but not what its repletion itself *is*, nor how it continues to generate.

1.1.8 Aesthetics

Kant. Purposiveness without purpose (*Zweckmäßigkeit ohne Zweck*), the disinterested satisfaction of the aesthetic, the free play of the cognitive faculties (Kant 1987)—the plain as a purposeless free play of the faculties, satisfying without serving any end. This gives the afternoon’s “doing nothing” an aesthetic vindication: a contentment that is precisely not instrumental.

East-Asian aesthetics. The Japanese *ma* (the interval, the negative space) and *wabi-sabi*; the Chinese painterly category of *liubai* (leaving-blank) and of *pingdan tianzhen* (plain and natural), in which the plain is the *highest*, not the lowest, aesthetic category—the *yipin* or “untrammelled grade” of Ni Zan and the literati tradition. That plainness ranks as the supreme aesthetic value in East Asia directly supports this paper’s “the plain is fulfilment.”

Its limit. Aesthetics accords the plain its *highest* evaluative standing, yet relies on a particular framework of transcendence (aesthetic autonomy), and offers no account internal to *relation and history* of the plain as a generation.

1.1.9 Process philosophy and relational ontology

The traditions juxtaposed in this section stand closest to the account this paper will develop—so close that, left undemarcated, they would absorb it. Their function here therefore differs from that of the others: where most were marked as “grasping the stillness and missing the growth,” these have already placed *generation*, *process*, or *relation* at the centre of their ontology, and are the strongest of the “marginal symptoms” that escape the common blind spot of §1.1.10. Yet—as the close of this section notes—they either lack the dimension of justice or take *completion* as their rhythm, and so do not reach the generative relation this paper requires. The full demarcation is reserved for §1.2.8; here they are placed alongside the rest, illuminating once.

Bergson: duration and the vital impulse. The plain afternoon as pure *durée*—an interpenetrating flow of experience not parcelled into a sequence of events, whose “uneventfulness” is precisely the qualitative repletion that resists spatialised measurement (Bergson 1910). *Durée* supplies a philosophy-of-time description for “full without event.” Its limit (deferred to §1.2.8): *durée* is the duration of an individual consciousness, thin in the intersubjective dimension; the *élan vital* is an impersonal cosmic impulse, lacking relationality and normativity.

Whitehead: process philosophy—the nearest interlocutor. For Whitehead the basic unit of the real is not a substance but a process-pulse: each *actual occasion* prehends its antecedent world, reaches *satisfaction* (self-completion) through *conrescence*, then perishes, and through *objective immortality* becomes datum for its successors; *creativity* is the ultimate category by which novelty perpetually enters (Whitehead 1978). The plain being-together might be read as a series of low-intensity, harmonious conrescences. The kinship with this paper (the side of inheritance): relation (prehension) and process (becoming) are *prior* to substance—an actual entity just is what it prehends—so that “the individual is a knot of relations” is here already in embryo. The divergences

(the side of the break, marked here, detailed in §1.2.8): (i) *rhythm*—Whitehead takes *satisfaction* as rhythm, the occasion completing itself and perishing, whereas this paper takes the *refusal to settle* as rhythm (cf. Paper IX (Huang 2025)); “completion” is, for this paper, close to the death of the good cycle; (ii) *temporality*—Whitehead’s “perpetual perishing plus objective immortality” against this paper’s *self-continuation*; (iii) *normativity*—Whitehead’s is a descriptive cosmology with no internal criterion of justice, not asking whether a given prehension effaces the subjectivity of what it prehends, whereas this paper’s ontology is normative from the outset.

Simondon: individuation prior to the individual. The individual is not a given starting point but the result-and-process of a continual individuation out of a pre-individual, metastable field; relation precedes its terms (“relation has the status of being”) (Simondon 2020). This resonates with the relational ontology to come—more directly, in some respects, than Whitehead. Its limit: Simondon’s individuation is chiefly a technical-physical-biological genesis, with the intimate and the normative undeveloped.

New materialism: Barad. *Agential realism* and *intra-action*—relation prior to relata, the relata determined only within the intra-action (Barad 2007)—is the sharpest contemporary statement of “relation before its terms,” directly supporting the relational ontology, though its frame is post-human and physicalist and its intimate-normative dimension needs separate grounding.

What it illuminates and its limit. The plain can be read as the qualitative repletion of pure duration (Bergson), a low-intensity harmonious concrescence (Whitehead), a metastable state of continual individuation (Simondon), or an intra-action prior to relata (Barad). This is the group, among all surveyed, that comes *closest* to the “stillness that generates”—it has genuinely grasped generation, process, relation. And yet: these frameworks are either impersonal and cosmological (the *élan vital*, creativity, intra-action), lacking the two-subject, intimate, relational concreteness this paper requires; or they take *completion/perishing* as rhythm, the reverse of this paper’s “refusal to settle plus self-continuation”; and they almost uniformly lack the dimension of *justice*—they say how the real operates, not whether a relation effaces. Process philosophy is thus the strongest marginal symptom of a “generation not yet rendered relational-ethical.” It lights the gap

most brightly of all, and still does not fill it.

1.1.10 The convergence: a common blind spot, and a silence not yet spoken

The chorus: what each illuminated. Set side by side, the traditions each disclosed one facet of the plain happiness. Joint attention: its minimal unit is a wordless *co-orientation*. Psychoanalysis: it is a being-together needing no tension of desire (and, uniquely, it touched the *source* of dynamism, the symbolic–real gap). Phenomenology: it is a *given fullness*, with the structure of attunement and a faintly open temporality. Eudaimonism: it has a positive evaluative standing, the classical ideal of tranquillity (and, in Zhuangzi, a generative plainness). Neuroscience: it has a calm substrate. Structuralism: it is a low-intensity mode of meaning (the Neutral, tenderness). Political economy: it is resistance to productivism, a time that is an end in itself. Aesthetics: it is the highest, not the lowest, of categories. Process philosophy: it is duration, concrescence, individuation, intra-action—generation itself, all but named.

The common blind spot: two reductions. Beneath the chorus runs a single omission, in two forms. The first is a reduction to *lack*: the plain read as the absence of something—of stimulus, of tension, of arousal, of intensity, of production (the Freudian Nirvana, Lacan, the Epicurean and Stoic freedom-from-disturbance, the neural “low,” the structuralist “no positive terms,” the political-economic “non-productive”). The second is a reduction to *static satisfaction*: the plain read as an attained, motionless state—a balance after needs are met, an undisturbed repose (the eudaimonist mainstream, the teleological reading of joint attention, *apatheia* and *ataraxia*). Both reductions share a result: the *moving, growing* dimension of the plain happiness is systematically omitted. None of the traditions can say why this afternoon, in which nothing happens, is not stagnation but something still *growing*.

Naming what was omitted: the paradox of “still yet generating.” The phenomenon itself presents a duality: it is at once *still* (no new state, no event, no tension) and *full and growing* (replete, still being generated). The traditions either seize the stillness and miss the growth, or—as with Zhuangzi, Husserl’s protention, Deleuze, Whitehead, Winnicott’s going-on-being—*touch* the growth without theorising it. These are the

marginal symptoms that escape the blind spot and so anticipate exactly where the gap lies. This “still yet generating”—uneventful yet continually generating—is the silence on which the whole chorus finally converges.

Toward the next chapter. To speak that silence positively requires a perspective whose centre is *self-continuation*: a category able to hold at once the “stillness of no-event” and the “continuance of generation.” The perspective this paper proposes—*generativity*—is offered to fill this gap. But, in keeping with the methodological reticence stated throughout, generativity is not enthroned as a new “essence of happiness”; it is one further voice, brought on *after* the chorus, and aware that its own saying is likewise in motion. The next chapter brings it on.

1.2. From Relational Ontology to Generativity

This chapter is the load-bearing wall of the paper. Were every illustrative chapter that follows—the dynamical, the neural—removed, this chapter would still have to stand on its own and carry the whole of the core argument. Its task is threefold: first, to ground a *relational* ontology; second, to establish the dynamism and the identity of *generativity* by way of two nearest kin—process philosophy (an ontological lineage) and psychoanalysis (a dynamical one)—in each case by an inheritance and a break; third, on that ground, to say positively what the plain happiness is.

A discipline of voice governs the chapter throughout. No category, generativity and relationality included, is enthroned as a motionless ground of truth; every positive saying is marked as one moment, in motion, historical, and open to being superseded. The point is not evasion but fidelity: a theory of a happiness that refuses to settle itself must not settle itself either.

1.2.1 Catching the silence of §1.1.10

The gap handed over by the close of the last chapter must first be tightened. The silence there was not merely “still yet generating” but *still yet generating within relation*. Nearly every tradition surveyed illuminated a *being-with*: the “watching together” of joint

attention, being quietly oneself in the other’s presence, intercorporeity, the “together” of free time. The fullness was located in no single subject but *between* the two.

From this the chapter’s starting point follows by force. To explain a fullness that is essentially “between” one cannot use a substance ontology—one cannot begin with two complete individuals and then let a relation befall them. Relation must come first. The three tasks, and the discipline of voice, are set out above; the chapter now begins with the ground.

1.2.2 The grounding of a relational ontology

The problem: why substance ontology will not do. The default picture of substance ontology is this: there are first self-standing individuals—substances, an *ousia* as the underlying *hypokeimenon*—and relation is an accident, external and supervenient, between them. Against the present datum this picture fails. If two subjects are antecedently complete individuals, then the fullness “between” them can only be a juxtaposition of two inner states or a causal exchange of them—and this cannot account for a fullness *not locatable within either party*. The happiness of watching the rain together is not in my mind, nor in yours; it is in the “we” that the relation itself is. Substance ontology has left no ontological place for this “between.”

The thesis of the priority of relation. The principal thesis: *being is relational at root; the individual is not the premise of relation but its relatively stable knot*. Relation does not presuppose completed relata; the relata are continually determined and sustained within the relation. The thesis is supported—supported, not crowned with authority—by its recurrence across independent traditions. From the process-relational lineage (§1.1.9): relation has “the status of being” (Simondon); in intra-action, relation precedes the relata (Barad); an actual entity just is its prehensions (Whitehead). From dialogical and second-personal philosophy: Buber’s I–Thou, in which “in the beginning is the relation” (Buber 1970); Levinas’s grounding of the self in a face that precedes it (Levinas 1969); Darwall’s second-person standpoint (Darwall 2006), carried over from Paper XVIII. From the East: dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*: this being, that is) (Nāgārjuna 1995); the relational “between” of Daoism; the Confucian *ren* as that which obtains *between* two persons. These are adduced not to stamp the relational ontology

with authority but to show that the posture recurs across many independent traditions; whether it is *true* remains subject to the interpretive criteria of §1.2.7, and is not settled by counting witnesses.

The individual as knot: preserving individuality without relapse into substance. A misreading must be forestalled: the priority of relation is *not* the dissolution of the individual into an undifferentiated flux—that would relapse into the impersonal cosmology of §1.1.9 and, worse, efface the two-subjectness, falling into the wrong diagnosed in Paper XVIII (Wanhong 2026). The resolution: the individual is a relatively stable, continually sustained *knot* in the web of relation—real, bounded, possessed of autonomy, yet ontologically “continually generated and sustained by relation” rather than “self-standing prior to relation.” This preserves the independence of each of the two subjects, and lays the ground directly for the “resonance, not merger” of §1.6: the autonomy of the knot must be preserved.

Transition. The relational ontology gives the “fullness between” its ontological place. But it is so far *static*: it says that being is relational, not why relation should *continually generate* rather than freeze into a motionless web. The next step needs a dynamism—why the mode of being of relation is “generation.” For that source, the chapter turns to psychoanalysis.

1.2.3 The source of dynamism: drive as the symbolic–real gap

The asset inherited from §1.1.2. The earlier reading of Lacan identified desire as driven by the symbolic’s radical shortfall with respect to the real—an unclosable gap, the real never exhausted by the symbolic, the remainder (marked by *objet a*) keeping the dynamism unceasing. The thesis of this section: *this symbolic–real gap is a source-model for the dynamism of generation*. It answers the question the relational ontology left open—why relation continually generates rather than freezing: because the symbolic’s capture of the real is never complete, the gap is always there, and so generation (the continual labour of symbolisation, the continual weaving of relation) never reaches its term, never settles. Generativity is therefore not an unexplained metaphysical posit; it has, at the level of psychodynamics, an engine. This is the asset psychoanalysis bequeaths.

The unclosability of the gap as the interminability of generation. Were the gap closable—the real fully captured by the symbolic—generation would terminate; but this is structurally impossible (the real, by definition, resists the symbolic). The interminability of generation thus acquires a dynamical warrant, rather than resting solely on the metaphysical assertion that “generation aims at its own continuation” (Paper IX (Huang 2025)). The two illuminate one another here—*illuminate*, not prove; see §1.2.7. And this rejoins Paper IX directly: the good cycle’s “not settling itself” finds a dynamical echo—settlement (the gap’s closure) is both impossible and not to be wished; the ordinary condition of generation is to move on, carrying the gap.

The debt resurfacing. But §1.1.2 also marked a *debt*: in Lacan the gap drives the *perpetual frustration* of desire (the *manque-à-être*, an economy of lack)—the subject driven by the gap, pursuing, forever missing. The contradiction now sharpens: how can a dynamism driven by an unclosable gap, condemned to miss, be the source of a *plain, contented, untroubled* happiness? The engine was inherited; its anguish appears to be inherited with it. The next section addresses this directly.

1.2.4 Two modes of operation: drivenness by lack versus dwelling in fullness

The decisive turn: not to remove the gap, but to change the subject’s relation to it. The “subtractive” path of the earlier traditions sought the plain by *removing* tension or the gap (the Nirvana principle, the freedom-from-disturbance of *ataraxia*)—a path this paper has refused (it is the empty stillness, the death of generation). The path of generativity is the reverse: *the gap is preserved* (else generation stops); what changes is the *mode of the subject’s relation to the gap*. One and the same symbolic–real gap can be lived in two modes.

- *The mode of lack (pathological).* The gap is experienced as a *deficit*; the subject is driven to fill it, enslaved to it, caught in a metonymic slippage of pursuit, miss, renewed pursuit. This is the default economy of desire in Lacan.
- *The mode of fullness (fulfilled).* The gap is experienced as the *open space of generation* rather than as a deficit; the subject is no longer driven to fill it but dwells in the continual generation the gap opens. The gap is still there, still driving generation,

but generation no longer operates in the form of lack-and-pursuit; it operates in the form of fullness-and-continuance. The plain fulfilment is this mode.

This is not the removal of desire but its transformation. The mode of fullness is not a simple borrowing of the post-Lacanian “traversal of the fantasy,” though it may converse with it: after such traversal the subject’s relation to *objet a*, to lack, is altered. Closer to the present point: a turn from the possessive, object-directed structure of desire toward a non-possessive generation in being-with the other—love (*amour*) as a mode of relation distinct from desire (*désir*)—which joins to §1.1.7 (reproductive time) and to the Winnicottian wing of §1.1.2.

Isomorphism with the rest of the paper (load-bearing). This structure—*one dynamism, two modes*—is the same structure, sunk to the level of psychoanalytic ground, as Paper XVIII’s distinction between *pathological coupling* (phase capture, the dissolution of one party’s generativity) and *healthy co-rotation* (synchrony without mutual dissolution) (Wanhong 2026). What Paper XVIII distinguished at the level of relational dynamics here acquires a psychodynamic warrant. It is likewise isomorphic with the distinction in §1.5.4 between two “uneventful plainnesses”: the difference lies not in the presence or absence of the gap or of error, but in the *character of the relation* to it. The three—the coupling of Paper XVIII, the modes of this section, the error of §1.5.4—are three layers of one distinction.

The precise statement of the break. Generativity *inherits* from psychoanalysis the symbolic–real gap as the engine of generation; it *breaks* with psychoanalysis in refusing to *lock* that dynamism into the single mode of lack/frustration, holding that there is a non-pathological mode of fullness-and-continuance, and that this is the source of the plain happiness. The break does not deny the reality of the mode of lack—it is all too real—but denies its *necessary monopoly*.

The two modes of the gap. The dynamism of generation has a single source—the unclosable gap between the symbolic and the real—but two modes of operation. In the

mode of lack, the subject is driven to fill the gap and is enslaved to it; in the *mode of fullness*, the subject dwells in the openness the gap sustains. The plain happiness is not the closing of the gap (which is impossible and would be the death of generation) but the living of the same gap in the mode of fullness. Happiness is a transformation of the subject's relation to lack, not the abolition of lack.

1.2.5 The hermeneutic character of happiness and the inescapability of the symbolic

This section is one of the paper's load-bearing pillars. It is forced by a radical objection to any dynamical or physical approach (whose formal demonstration is given in §1.4): from the vocabulary of physical dynamics alone—harmonic oscillators, limit cycles, attractors, asymptotic stability—one cannot obtain happiness in the *hermeneutic* sense. The section states this thesis positively and gives its ground, and thereby supplies the *ontological* warrant for the paper's methodology (top-down, illustration subordinate, illustration never elevated): hitherto a stipulated discipline, that methodology here receives its reason.

The subject is a subject cut by the signifier. Following the symbolic–real gap of §1.2.3: the subject is a subject precisely because it is cut by language, entered into the symbolic (the order of signifiers), and thereby separated from the real by an unclosable gap. This is “castration”—the price of entry into the order of signifiers, lack structured into the very condition of subjecthood, not a remediable defect. It follows that a system uncut by the signifier, moving in the pure real—a genuine harmonic oscillator, a flow, a phase point—has no happiness or its absence to speak of: it has no dimension of meaning. *Happiness presupposes a subject that confers meaning, that lacks, that interprets, and that subject is a product of the symbolic.*

Happiness is given only as meaning, in the symbolic. The core thesis: *happiness is not a physical property of a state but the meaning (signification) a subject confers on its situation; and meaning occurs only in the symbolic.* Happiness is therefore *hermeneutic*, not dynamical. One and the same dynamical fact—a phase point stable, or wandering

—whether it “means” peace or confinement, “means” freedom or destitution, is a conferral of meaning belonging not to the dynamics but to the subject’s interpretation of its own situation within the order of signifiers. This re-replaces everything said so far: the “full not empty” sketched in the delineation, the “dwelling/anguished” of the modes (§1.2.4), the “stillness/growth” of the phenomenon—all are distinctions of *meaning*, occurring in the symbolic, and so not locatable or adjudicable at the level of pure dynamics.

Why every physical/dynamical approach must miss happiness (the hard thesis). Physical dynamics is a language of the imaginary–real: force, flow, the motion of a state in a phase space. It structurally *lacks the symbolic*—there are in it no signifiers, no big Other, no castration, no lack structured into meaning. However refined the equations, dynamics yields at most “the system is in some motion,” and *never crosses to* “this means happiness to the subject.” What lies between is precisely the symbolic, precisely hermeneutics. This is the true cause of the “non-adjudicability of competing intuitions of happiness” (the stability party versus the novelty party, §1.4.4): not that the dynamics is *informationally* insufficient, but that adjudication belongs to *another register*—conferral of meaning is an operation of the symbolic, beyond the reach of dynamics. The dispute between the stability party and the novelty party is not a dynamical dispute but a *hermeneutic* one: different conferrals of meaning on the same dynamical fact.

The ontological grounding of the paper’s methodology (why this is a pillar). “Illustration subordinate, never elevated” was hitherto a stipulated discipline; this section supplies its ground: *to elevate illustration is to let a language that lacks the symbolic (dynamics, neural mechanism) usurp a matter that essentially belongs to the symbolic (the meaning of happiness)*. This is ontologically impossible to sustain; illustration can therefore only cast light from outside, and what bears meaning can only be the hermeneutic philosophical trunk. Restating §1.2.7 accordingly: formalisation and mechanism are *illumination, not proof*, not only because interpretive claims are not empirically falsifiable, but because the *locus* of happiness (the symbolic) is not the *reach* of formal language (the imaginary–real). The two sections are obverse and reverse: §1.2.7 concerns “how to test,” this section concerns “why formal language cannot reach.”

Guarding a misreading: hermeneutic does not mean arbitrary. A slide must be prevented: “since it is a conferral of meaning, happiness is purely subjective and arbitrary, interpretable however one likes.” No. The symbolic is not private: the order of signifiers is *intersubjective, historical, materially conditioned* (cf. §1.1.7, and the historical materialism of §1.2.10). Conferral of meaning is constrained by the symbolic order, and by the four criteria of §1.2.7 (fidelity, productivity, coherence, ethical consequence). Hermeneutic happiness is *structured and criticisable*; only its structure is symbolic-interpretive, not dynamical. The paper does not take “hermeneutics” as an escape—it remains under constraint, only with the constraint placed in the right register. The traditions of philosophical hermeneutics, from Gadamer to Ricoeur, are precisely an account of why interpretation is not arbitrary (Gadamer 2004; Ricoeur 1976); §1.2.6 adds a second, sharper constraint.

Happiness is hermeneutic. Because the subject is a subject of the symbolic, happiness is given only as the meaning a subject confers on its situation, and meaning occurs only in the symbolic. No purely physical or dynamical account, lacking the symbolic, can cross from “the system is in some motion” to “this means happiness.” The non-adjudicability of rival intuitions of happiness is not informational insufficiency but a difference of register: adjudication is an operation of the symbolic. This is the ontological ground of the rule that illustration must remain subordinate—to elevate it is to let a language without the symbolic usurp a matter that is symbolic through and through.

1.2.6 The background manifold: dynamics as the ground on which meaning unfolds

This section is forced by a radical objection to the paper’s argumentative structure: “neuroscience and psychology give the phenomena; a dynamical-systems model is then imported; it is then claimed that happiness is hermeneutic and that dynamics cannot reach it—so is the dynamics not thereby abolished, written in vain? And if the terminus is hermeneutics, and hermeneutics is arbitrary, then one has retreated from a structured

science to an anything-goes interpretation, and solved nothing.” The objection is met head-on. The decisive correction: dynamics and hermeneutics are not in a relation of *re-
placement* (the latter abolishing the former) but of *bearing*—the underlying dynamics is the *background manifold*, the *stage*, on which meaning unfolds. This is the third tier of the structure (the first two being §1.2.5, the necessity of hermeneutics, and its guard against arbitrariness); with it in place, the first two pass from “apparently mutually negating” to “mutually correcting.”

Correcting a negative reading: constraint is not prohibition. It is tempting to read “dynamics constrains hermeneutics” negatively, as a limit: dynamics stands beside meaning and says “you may not interpret thus” (a railing, a guardrail, a lower bound). On this reading dynamics is still external to meaning, its rival or its censor. This section instead affirms a *positive, bearing* reading: dynamics is not a railing that forbids meaning but the *place where meaning happens*. The images: the *stage* (no stage, no play; the stage does not dictate what is played), the *background manifold* (trajectories, phase points, attractors exist only “on” the manifold; the manifold does not dictate which trajectory is true, but any trajectory must be one on the manifold).

The core thesis. *The underlying dynamics—neural, bodily, relational-dynamical—is the background manifold on which the subject’s conferral of meaning unfolds.* Any meaning the subject confers is meaning “on the manifold”: the manifold does *not* determine the content of meaning (so happiness is hermeneutic, not reducible to physics, per §1.2.5); but meaning *cannot stand apart from* the manifold (so dynamics is indispensable)—the subject cut by the signifier, conferring meaning in the symbolic, is always a subject with neural process and bodily dynamics; meaning, however “high,” grows upon this body, this dynamics. Remove the manifold, and there is no subject, and so no conferral of meaning.

Resolving the first objection—“dynamics abolished, written in vain”—no. A stage is not abolished because the play is “higher”: no stage, no play. Dynamics/neuroscience is not a scaffold discarded once hermeneutics surpasses it but the *ground* on which hermeneutics forever stands. The correct characterisation of dynamics is therefore *“without meaning yet indispensable”*: it bears no meaning (without meaning), yet meaning cannot leave it (indispensable). It is not the rival of meaning but its *condition*. §1.4

is thus not written in vain—it charts the shape of this very ground.

Resolving the second objection—“hermeneutics arbitrary”—no, and by a more internal mechanism than “external rules.” The manifold has a *shape* (curvature, topology, admissible paths). Meaning unfolding on it is shaped by that shape—not forbidden by external rule but guided by the lie of the ground underfoot. For an interpretation to “contradict the dynamics” is, on this picture, not to “hit a railing” but to *attempt a path that does not exist on the manifold—a path with no ground to stand on*. (Example: that the persistent value-signalling of the waiting interval, §1.5.3, is the manifold’s curvature in that region; to interpret waiting as “pure empty suffering” is like declaring oneself to be descending where the ground in fact rises—not forbidden, but with *no ground to tread*.) Arbitrariness fails, then, *not because a railing bars it but because off the manifold there is nowhere to stand*. This is deeper than “a freedom limited by a set of rules”: hermeneutics is a *freedom with a terrain*—the freedom to walk on a real ground, whose shape already excludes certain walks, with no need of prohibition. With the intersubjectivity of the symbolic order (§1.2.5, guarding against the private), this makes *two* constraints—the terrain of the manifold and the intersubjective symbolic order—which together fix hermeneutics as structured and criticisable, not quicksand.

Re-placing §1.4 (removing the nihilistic tail). The dynamics of §1.4 *charts the shape of the manifold* (it lays out harmonic oscillators, limit cycles, attractors, asymptotic stability and their tensions); it does *not* model happiness. Its “demonstration of insufficiency” is therefore to be read affirmatively: *dynamics is the ground, without meaning yet indispensable, the stage set for meaning*—it does not reach meaning (the demonstration stands), yet meaning cannot leave it (the nihilistic tail is removed).

The background manifold. The underlying dynamics is not the rival of meaning, nor a railing that forbids it, but the background manifold on which meaning unfolds. It does not determine the content of meaning—so happiness is not reducible to physics—but meaning cannot stand apart from it—so interpretation is not arbitrary: to interpret against the dynamics is to attempt a path with no ground to stand on. Physics gives

the place, hermeneutics gives the content; they bear, not compete. Happiness is thus a meaning that unfolds upon a real terrain—neither a physical fact nor a free reading.

1.2.7 A methodological self-defence: how an interpretive theory can be tested

A critical reader will object: “You have used one unfalsifiable theory (psychoanalysis—drive as the symbolic–real gap) to illuminate another (generativity), two untestable stories underwriting one another. A seamless fit raises the probability of neither; astrology, too, is internally coherent. The sting is sharper than ‘you are wrong’: *what you say cannot possibly be false, and so says nothing*.” The objection is to be absorbed into the paper’s self-awareness, not waved away. It is met in four steps, in an order that may not be reversed; none may be skipped.

The objection, at full force. On the ruler “falsifiability is the criterion of meaning” (Popper 2002), this chapter is indeed not in good standing, and *cannot be brought into good standing by adding an experiment or a formula*. To surrender to that ruler would be to concede that only the falsifiable counts—and the objects of this paper (the plain, the full, the silent) are precisely what that ruler would judge meaningless; to surrender is to hand over the object itself. The only honest response is therefore to contest the ruler.

Step one: relativise the ruler, without self-exemption. Falsifiability is the demarcation criterion of the *empirical sciences*, and within its domain it is right. But “what is happiness,” “is being relational” are *philosophical-interpretive* propositions, like “what is justice” or “why does a poem move us”—not empirical hypotheses. To demand their falsifiability is a category mistake (to weigh a colour on a balance). *But*—and this must follow at once—one must not thereby declare “I am philosophy and so beyond testing.” That is the cheap exemption the objector rightly despises. Step two is obligatory.

Step two: substitute criteria, and accept their real constraint (the step that distinguishes this from astrology). Interpretive theories are tested by *other* criteria, and these can genuinely make a theory fail:

- *Phenomenological fidelity*: is it faithful to the experience described? A theory that describes the plain happiness so that one who has lived that afternoon cannot recognise it has failed.
- *Hermeneutic productivity*: does it light up what was previously unseen (such as the “still yet generating” that all the traditions of §1.1 commonly missed)? A theory that merely re-describes in new words, lighting nothing, has failed.
- *Coherence and parsimony*: does it explain more with fewer assumptions; is it internally consistent?
- *Practical-ethical consequence*: does the way of treating others it licenses (effacement versus non-effacement) withstand examination? *This is the criterion that separates generativity from astrology*: generativity is an ethicised relational ontology with normative consequences, and those consequences can be tested, in living, as productive of harm or of flourishing; astrology has no such dimension.

The cardinal point: *unfalsifiable does not mean uncriticisable*. A theory can fail on fidelity, productivity, coherence, ethical consequence, even where it cannot fail on falsifiability. This paper accepts these constraints and concedes that generativity may fail on them.

Step three: name the method correctly—illumination, not proof. What §1.2.3 did is, strictly, not “proving B by A” but the *mutual illumination* of A and B and the marking of their structural isomorphism—whose proper names are *reflective equilibrium* (Rawls 1971) and the hermeneutic *fusion of horizons* (Gadamer 2004). Its epistemic standing: it adds no *empirical* truth to either side (this must be conceded plainly), but adds depth and unity of understanding—and the unity of understanding is a legitimate aim of philosophy (not of empirical science; but philosophy is not empirical science). The precise point of difference from the objector: he takes “mutual underwriting” for a swindle; this section holds that “mutual illumination” is a legitimate method in the interpretive disciplines, *provided one does not covertly claim that it has produced empirical proof*. The chapter declares openly: I illuminate, I do not prove; I do not conflate the two.

Step four: the self-referential turn (restrained version; usable only because step two has been honoured). Observe: a *falsifiable* theory is one that claims “I can be adjudicated true or false once and for all, I can be settled”; falsifiability presupposes a static point of fact that could be finally judged. But the whole posture of this paper is the *refusal to settle* (Paper IX: the good cycle does not settle itself; §1.8: unwritability). Hence (in restrained statement): for an object like the plain happiness, the proper kind of test is *not* falsification but the four interpretive criteria of step two—because the object is itself a thing in motion, generative, that refuses to be settled into a static fact. An explicit brake: this section does *not* claim “unfalsifiability is a virtue” (too convenient—any charlatan can say “I am too profound to be falsified”); it claims only that “this object calls for a non-falsificational kind of test,” and still delivers itself to the real constraints of step two. The strong version (“unfalsifiability is fidelity”) is deliberately declined, lest the chapter become the very “unbounded rational authority” it most distrusts.

Interpretive testability. That a theory of happiness is not falsifiable does not place it beyond test. It is tested by fidelity to experience, by what it makes visible, by coherence and parsimony, and by the ethical consequence of the conduct it licenses—and it can fail on these. The use of one interpretive frame to illuminate another is reflective equilibrium, not proof; it adds understanding, not empirical truth, and is legitimate only so long as it does not pretend otherwise. For an object that refuses to be settled, the fitting test is not falsification but these criteria—which is a claim about the object’s register, not a licence to treat unfalsifiability as a merit.

1.2.8 The demarcation from process philosophy

The side of inheritance (relation/process prior to substance). Generativity inherits from the process-relational lineage (§1.1.9: Whitehead, Bergson, Simondon, Barad) its core posture: relation and process are prior to substance, the individual a knot of relation. This is the nearest precursor of the relational ontology, drawn upon already in

§1.2.2.

The side of the break (three points, detailing the marks of §1.1.9).

1. *Rhythm: refusal to settle versus completion as rhythm.* Whitehead’s actual occasion takes *satisfaction* (self-completion) as its rhythm, completion issuing in perishing (Whitehead 1978). Generativity takes the *refusal to settle* as rhythm—“completion/satisfaction” is, for it, close to the death of the good cycle (Paper IX (Huang 2025)). The normal condition of a generative relation is a continuance that does not reach satisfaction.
2. *Temporality: self-continuation versus perpetual perishing plus objective immortality.* Whitehead: perpetual perishing, with preservation in the successor by objective immortality. Generativity: *self-continuation*—the relation itself persisting and growing, not preserved after perishing. A nearly opposite temporality.
3. *Normativity: ethicised versus descriptive cosmology.* Process philosophy does not ask whether a given prehension effaces the subjectivity of what it prehends; generativity asks from the outset (Paper IX’s good/bad cycle; the critique of generative dissolution, cf. Paper XVIII (Wanhong 2026)). This is what distinguishes generativity from *every* purely descriptive process-metaphysics—it is an ethicised relational ontology.

The symmetry of the two breaks (drawing the two kin together). The identity of generativity is now fixed from two sides at once:

- from *process philosophy* it inherits “relation/process prior to substance” (ontology), and breaks with “completion as rhythm, objective immortality, the absence of justice”;
- from *psychoanalysis* it inherits “the symbolic–real gap as engine” (dynamics), and breaks with “the confinement of dynamism to the economy of lack.”

Two inheritances and two breaks fix generativity in relief: a relational ontology that is *powered* (supplied by psychoanalysis), *ethicised* (by its own normativity), and rhythmmed

by self-continuation rather than completion.

1.2.9 The plain happiness, said from the standpoint of the generative relation

The positive saying (with self-marking). Upon the relational ontology (§1.2.2), the re-gearred engine of the drive (§1.2.3–§1.2.4), and the identity fixed by demarcation (§1.2.8), the paper now says—*provisionally*—what the plain happiness is:

- Happiness is *the fullness a generative relation displays in its own self-continuation*—a fullness “between,” driven in the mode of fullness by the unclosable gap, rhythmmed by self-continuation rather than completion.
- *Stillness* is the refusal of the full generation to settle itself, to cash itself as event, to cast a shadow needing a name (Paper IX).
- *Silence* is the absence of debt, of remainder, of the driving pressure of any gap to be filled, so that there is nothing that must be said and nothing that need be said (§1.7).

This saying refills the gap of §1.1.10: “the still-yet-generating within relation”—still (unsettled, eventless) and generating (the gap-driven continuance) united in one phenomenon.

The relation of superposition to the traditions (not replacement). The method is restated: this chapter does not negate the traditions of §1.1; each truly lit one facet. It supplies the commonly omitted dimension, “the still-yet-generating within relation.” Superposition, not replacement.

1.2.10 The self-limitation of the saying: even “generativity” is in motion

Reflexive application to the core category. Since truth is forever in motion, “generativity” and “relationality” are themselves no firmly grasped, stable referents. The deepest fidelity to generativity is to let the core category *enact its own incompleteness*: in saying happiness through generativity, to grant that the saying in turn reshapes what “generativity” is—category and object generating one another, neither serving as mo-

tionless ground. This is true generativity, as against treating “generation” as a static essence-noun.

Leaving the place of “the essence of happiness” open—a reticence at the level of theory. This chapter does not pronounce the essence of happiness. What can be circled with some assurance is what happiness is *not* (not an attained state, not an event, not any pre-specifiable fixed form, not anything exhaustible by a predicate); what it *is* forever recedes. On the open ground these negations enclose, the chapter offers a positive saying (§1.2.9), but marks it as “one moment in motion,” not a terminus—neither evading (a positive saying is still given) nor usurping (it is not closed off). To leave open, forever, the place of “what shape happiness must take,” and to keep every saying of it in motion—this is at once historical materialism’s honesty about itself (theory too is produced by its epoch, this paper included) and a reticence, at the level of theory, of the generative kind (not to occupy that place).

Transition. Since the form of happiness is not closed off, the next step is not a definition but a *description* of the modes in which it emerges under varying conditions—and the list is open. The next chapter redraws them.

1.3. The Modes Redrawn: A Morphology of Happiness from the Standpoint of the Generative Relation

The modes sketched, pre-theoretically, in the delineation of the phenomenon are here *redrawn*—reorganised in the language grounded by §1.2 (the generative relation, self-continuation, the modes of lack and fullness, the two ways of living the gap). The delineation was a sketch; this chapter is the redrawing after theoretical grounding—the same phenomenon passing a second time. In keeping with §1.2.10, the chapter does *not* argue that happiness “must” take some form; it describes the modes in which one and the same fullness emerges under varying conditions, and the list is *open*. The morphology is descriptive and open, not an essential determination. Unlike the delineation, this chapter may use the full vocabulary, since §1.2 has grounded it.

1.3.1 From sketch to redrawing

The sketch is recovered (uneventful, full, shared, faintly moving, without want; with waiting as a near relative). The gain of the redrawing: the sketch could say only “it is still and full”; after §1.2 one can say *why*—still, because generation does not settle itself (no event, no remainder); full, because the gap, lived in the mode of fullness, drives a generation “between”; faintly moving, because that continual generation is itself the movement (the “slight liveliness” the sketch felt is now nameable as the persistence of generation).

1.3.2 Mode one—abiding: a being-with already in continuance

The pole of “doing nothing, watching the rain together”: the relation has fallen into a self-sustaining continuance, with no need to be oriented toward anything not yet arrived. Redrawn: the fullness of a generative relation in its self-continuation, the gap operating in the *mode of fullness*—the gap is still there (hence generation, hence the faint movement), but the subject is not driven by lack (hence no want, no event, the silence). In the dynamical illustration (§1.4) this mode answers to a stable co-rotating trajectory—*but only as a side-image, never as a definition*; no formal object is unfolded here, only the interface is marked.

1.3.3 Mode two—waiting: a proceeding toward a common rhythm

The pole of “slowing for one another, watching the evening together”: the fullness is *under way*, oriented toward what is not yet arrived (the evening descending, the other catching up).

Redrawn (load-bearing; with §1.2.4 and §1.6):

- Waiting is *not stillness, not lack*. The genuine (sweet) waiting is full of movement oriented toward the other—a continual adjustment of oneself, a voluntary restraint of one’s own pace. Beneath the apparent stillness is an actively sustained orientation.
- Waiting therefore confirms, rather than refutes, “fullness comes from continual gen-

eration”: it is a *proceeding phase* of the mode of fullness—the open space the gap holds is lived as a “moving toward together,” not as a “deficit to be filled.”

- The line against “forced empty waiting” (sketched in the delineation, now given its frame): sweet waiting is the gap lived in the mode of fullness (voluntary, oriented, shared); fretful empty waiting is the gap lived in the mode of lack (compelled, out of control, oriented to a deficit). *One and the same “waiting,” two modes*—one further layer of the distinction of §1.2.4, of Paper XVIII’s pathological/healthy coupling, of the two neural systems of §1.5.3.

In the dynamical illustration, this is more like an approach trajectory, a negotiation not yet phase-locked, than a closed orbit—and it is stated plainly: to force it into any single form (such as a limit cycle) would be to repeat the error of “swallowing an ill-fitting phenomenon with a cherished form.” Waiting is the living proof that happiness is exhausted by no single form.

1.3.4 Mode three—...(left open): the chapter’s reticence

There are other modes, emerging historically and materially, which the paper does not foreclose and cannot enumerate. *This ellipsis is itself the chapter’s load-bearing element*: it positively enacts the “leaving open of the essence of happiness” of §1.2.10—the openness of the morphology is not an oversight but a structural honouring of “no finite form is entitled to exhaust happiness.” One thread may be laid here as a footnote without elevating it into another pinned-down cell: a mode of “never repeating yet always bounded,” the happiness of a creative life—each day different yet always within a certain form of life. It is left as a thread for some future paper, not developed; the “strange attractor” figure that might tempt one belongs in this footnote, not in the body.

1.3.5 The methodological discipline of the morphology

The three modes (abiding / waiting / ...) are not the exhaustive cells of a classificatory system but several identifications within an open family. What they share is not a fixed structure but the same *generation—operating in the mode of fullness of the gap, rhythmized by self-continuation, occurring “between.”* And this “sharing” is itself a saying in motion,

open to revision under later conditions (per the voice-discipline of §1.2.10). The transition: the modes redrawn, the chapters that follow turn to *illustration*—the dynamical (§1.4), the neural (§1.5)—casting analysable, visible side-light on these modes. Illustration is subordinate to the philosophical morphology established here; it does not define it in reverse.

1.4. Charting the Ground: The Underlying Dynamics as the Background Manifold on which Meaning Unfolds

This chapter differs in kind from an ordinary illustrative chapter. By §1.2.5, happiness is hermeneutic, dwells in the symbolic, and the dynamical—a language of the imaginary—real, lacking the symbolic—cannot cross to the dimension of meaning (the demonstration of insufficiency stands). *Yet*, by §1.2.6, meaning cannot stand apart from it: the dynamical is the background manifold, the stage, on which meaning unfolds. This chapter therefore has a double office: *(a) demonstration of insufficiency*—pressing the dynamical vocabulary to its limit, *and showing that the many neighbouring theories which also explain the phenomenon translate into it and stop at the same boundary*, so that “it cannot cross to the symbolic” becomes visible at its fullest; and *(b) bearing*—in doing so, charting the shape of the very ground on which meaning is laid down. The dynamical system here is neither a model of happiness nor a discarded scaffold, but *a ground without meaning yet indispensable*. The breadth of theoretical connection (§1.4.3) does not elevate the dynamical to the master account; on the contrary, the wider the web of theories that meet in it, the more decisively their *common* boundary—the failure to reach meaning—is exhibited. Its kinship with §1.8 is exact: this chapter strains to the utmost to show dynamics insufficient, as the final chapter turns the impossibility of writing into evidence—the same self-referential gesture in formal dress.

Honesty clause. The toy models below are constructed for illustration; their parameters are not empirically calibrated. They illuminate structure; they prove no empirical fact, and certainly no proposition about happiness (cf. §1.2.7, §1.2.5).

1.4.1 What this chapter guards against

The downgrading is restated, with one warning peculiar to this chapter. By the foregoing chapters, “happiness = a fixed form” is already foreclosed; what this chapter must guard against is its last hiding-place—the equation of *some preferred dynamical property* (asymptotic stability, ergodicity, the capacity to escape) with happiness. The chapter will show that dynamics is *neutral* as to “what happiness is,” and that the cause of the neutrality is the lack of the symbolic (§1.2.5). The point is made with equations, so that both the neutrality and the lack come into view.

1.4.2 An arraying of candidate properties: each dynamical property courts an intuition of happiness

The harmonic oscillator (the base). Let each subject be an oscillator. The *linear* oscillator, $\ddot{x} + \omega^2 x = 0$, has closed circular orbits—but it is *neutrally stable* (no basin of attraction; perturb it and it merely switches to another orbit). This answers to a “happiness of chance”: resembling happiness, yet dispersed by a single push. Already visible: the plainest “stability” will not bear the intuition of happiness.

The limit cycle (van der Pol). Add nonlinear damping:

$$\ddot{x} - \varepsilon(1 - x^2)\dot{x} + \omega^2 x = 0. \quad (1.1)$$

At small amplitude the damping is negative (energy injected), at large amplitude positive (energy dissipated); the system converges to a *unique, asymptotically stable limit cycle*—neither decaying to rest nor diverging, oscillating perpetually and returning to itself after perturbation (Figure 1.1). This answers to a “rhythmic abiding happiness.” (As a side-image of “the gap lived in the mode of fullness”: energy-injection $\approx$ the real’s continual regeneration of the gap, dissipation $\approx$ continual symbolisation, the cycle = the gap not vanishing while the system never stops. The gap appears here only as a damping metaphor; an explicit gap-dimension is not unfolded.)

Basin of attraction and asymptotic stability. These answer to the “abiding” intuition: predictably stable, returning after perturbation—the *stability party’s* happiness.

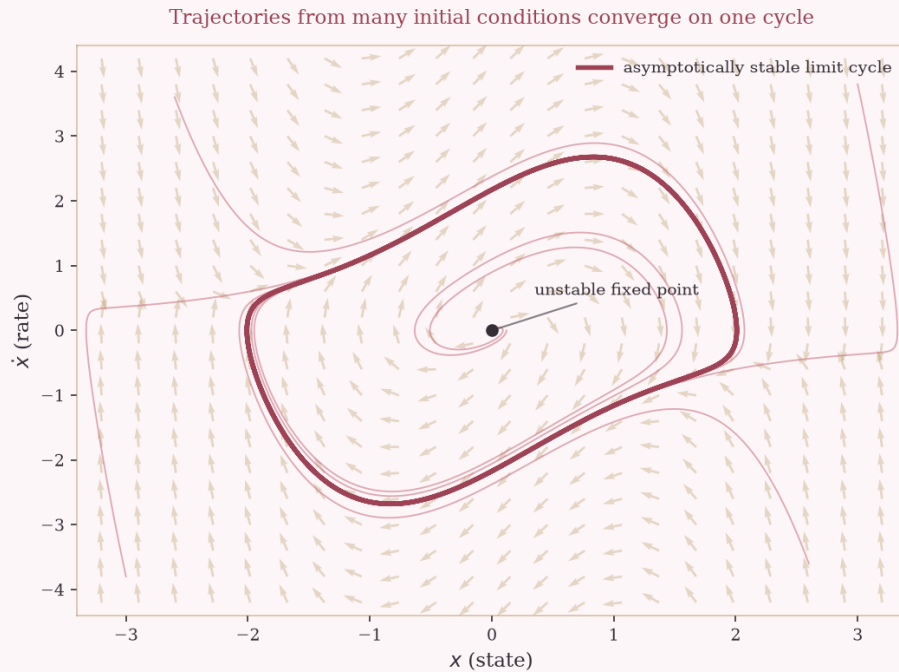


Figure 1.1: Trajectories from many distinct initial conditions—inside and outside—spiral onto one asymptotically stable limit cycle (deep rose). The origin is an unstable fixed point. The cycle has a *basin of attraction*: after a perturbation the system returns to it. This is a side-image of the abiding mode, charting one region of the manifold’s shape—*not* a definition of happiness.

Multiple attractors and metastable switching. Where the phase space holds several attractors and the system can switch among them (metastability), the answer is the “exploration” intuition: able to go somewhere new, not locked in—the *novelty party*’s happiness.

Edge-of-chaos / strange attractors. High-dimensional trajectories, never repeating yet always bounded, answer to a “creative” happiness—each day different yet always within a form of life (the mode left as a thread in §1.3.4, here a legitimate candidate piece).

The capacity to escape a basin. Not stability itself but the capacity to *leave* the current basin answers to a “freedom” intuition.

Each candidate has its equations, each is self-consistent, each can be claimed by some intuition of happiness.

1.4.3 Dynamics as a lingua franca: how the same phenomenon is explained by, and connects to, other theories

The objection must now be met that *other theories also explain the phenomenon*—predictive coding, synchronisation theory, thermodynamics, cybernetics, catastrophe theory, the geometric-phase account of Paper IX. This is true, and it is not a weakness of the dynamical illustration but its deepest point: the vocabulary of dynamical systems is a *lingua franca* into which these otherwise disparate theories can be translated, and which therefore exhibits both their connection *and*—the load-bearing turn—the single boundary they all share. The wider the web of translation, the more decisively the boundary shows: *every one of these is a language of the manifold, and none reaches conferral of meaning* (§1.2.5). Breadth of connection serves subordination, exactly as in §1.5.

Limit cycle $\leftrightarrow$ predictive coding / free energy. A stable attractor is, in the predictive-coding register, a low-free-energy state (Friston 2010); the system’s settling onto the cycle is its minimisation of long-run prediction error. The translation is exact—and both languages, equally, lack the symbolic: a low-free-energy state no more “means” contentment than a stable orbit does (§1.5.4).

Coupled oscillators $\leftrightarrow$ Paper XVIII’s phase capture. Two coupled oscillators, in the Kuramoto register (Kuramoto 1984; Strogatz 2001), synchronise by mutual frequency entrainment; this is the very mathematics of Paper XVIII (Wanhong 2026), where unilateral capture is pathological (one party’s autonomous term overwhelmed) and bilateral co-rotation is healthy. The dynamical illustration of §1.6.4 and the relational claim of §1.6 thus share one formal object—and the difference between capture and co-rotation, recall, is adjudicated not within the mathematics but at the symbolic level (whether the place of conferral is preserved).

Basin of attraction $\leftrightarrow$ cybernetics, homeostasis, allostasis. Return to an attractor after perturbation is, in the cybernetic register, negative-feedback regulation (Wiener 1948); in the physiological register, homeostasis, and—predictively—allostasis, stability through anticipated change (Sterling 2012). This connects the “robustness” of happiness (§1.6, and Paper XVII’s generative balance versus static equality (Wanhong 2026)) to a wide family of regulation theories. All describe the *return*; none says what the return *means*.

Non-equilibrium steady state $\leftrightarrow$ dissipative structures. The plain happiness is *still* on the surface yet *generating* beneath—a description that maps precisely onto a *dissipative structure*, a non-equilibrium steady state maintained by continual flux (Prigogine and Stengers 1984). This is perhaps the sharpest formal side-image of “uneventful yet generating”: macroscopically stable, microscopically never at rest. It connects the present account to the thermodynamics of self-organisation—and, once more, the thermodynamic description carries no meaning: a dissipative structure is not, as such, happy.

Geometric phase / holonomy $\leftrightarrow$ Paper IX’s good cycle. The geometric phase (Berry phase) accumulated around a closed loop (Berry 1984) is the formal criterion Paper IX (Huang 2025) used for the good cycle: a return that is transformed rather than mere reversion, a spiral rather than a circle. Here the dynamical illustration connects directly to the series’ founding formalism—the limit cycle’s “return that is not mere repetition” is the holonomy of Paper IX in another coordinate.

Bifurcation / catastrophe $\leftrightarrow$ the transition between modes. The shift between the mode of lack and the mode of fullness (§1.2.4) is, formally, a change of attractor under a varying parameter—a bifurcation, in catastrophe-theoretic terms a phase change (Thom 1975; Haken 1983). The qualitative suddenness of a shift from drivenness to dwelling has a formal name.

The lesson of the web. These six translations show that the dynamical vocabulary connects a remarkable range of theories that each explain a facet of the plain happiness. But the very success of the translation is what carries the argument: *all six are languages of the manifold, and the rightmost column of Table 1.1 records, in every row, the same*

Table 1.1: Dynamics as lingua franca: each neighbouring theory explains a facet of the phenomenon, connects to a dynamical concept, and shares the one boundary—none reaches conferral of meaning (§1.2.5).

Theory	Dynamical connection	Facet explained / shared boundary
Predictive coding / free energy	Stable attractor = low-free-energy state	Plainness as low error; cannot mean contentment by itself
Kuramoto synchronisation	Coupled oscillators; entrainment	Shared rhythm; capture vs co-rotation (Paper XVIII)
Cybernetics / allostasis	Basin of attraction = feedback regulation	Robustness, return after perturbation; not its meaning
Dissipative structures	Non-equilibrium steady state	“Still yet generating”; not, as such, happy
Geometric phase / holonomy	Closed-loop transformed return	Good cycle (Paper IX); spiral not circle
Catastrophe / synergetics	Bifurcation between attractors	Transition: mode of lack $\leftrightarrow$ mode of fullness

failure to cross into meaning. That so many theories converge here, and that all stop at the same boundary, is far stronger evidence for §1.2.5 than the limit cycle alone could give. The breadth is the proof.

1.4.4 The conflict: these properties cannot be jointly maximised

The decisive fact: the candidates stand in *real tension, stable with equations*. Sharpest: *asymptotic stability (return to the original orbit after perturbation) and attractor-escape (the capacity to reach a new attractor) are mathematically opposed*—the deeper the basin, the more stable, the harder to escape; the more readily switching and exploratory, the less stable. One cannot jointly maximise “returning” and “getting elsewhere.” The stability party and the novelty party do not misunderstand one another; they have *preferred opposed properties of the phase space*. Both are right, both have equations. This is precisely the demonstration of §1.2.5: dynamics can formalise every intuition of happiness, and *cannot adjudicate among them*.

1.4.5 Non-adjudicability: no meta-criterion within dynamics selects “which property is happiness”

Within the language of dynamics there is no higher dynamical quantity that judges “asymptotic stability is more happy than ergodicity” or the reverse. Any such judgment has already imported a value, a conferral of meaning, from *outside*. The cause (per §1.2.5): adjudication belongs to the *symbolic* (conferral of meaning); dynamics, lacking the symbolic, *cannot reach it*—not informational insufficiency, but the wrong register. Here the “boundary” shows itself: dynamics, pressed to its fullest (every candidate arrayed, every tension made explicit), reveals at exactly that point the line it can never cross.

1.4.6 Rejoining §1.2 and §1.3.4: how the open thesis stands “above” these properties

The open thesis of §1.2 (rhythmed by self-continuation, operating in the mode of fullness, exhausted by no single form) does *not* take the side of the stability party or the novelty party: it neither requires resting in a stable cycle (“not settling itself” would exclude that), nor requires perpetual leaping to the new (that is merely another pinned-down preference). It stands *above* stability and novelty, and so can hold both as modes under differing material-historical conditions. This formally redeems §1.3.4: the array of *mutually conflicting* candidate properties is the concrete unfolding of that chapter’s “left-open ellipsis,” and their *non-adjudicability* is the formal proof that the ellipsis must be left open. Openness is no longer only a philosophical posture; it receives, on the manifold, a witness: the non-adjudicability is the complexity of the terrain on which meaning must unfold, a terrain that does not choose for meaning.

1.4.7 Closing: the ground is laid, happiness unfolds upon it

The chapter does not end in failure. It has, with equations, exhausted what dynamics can say, and thereby confirmed two things: (a) *demonstration of insufficiency*—this language does not reach the meaning of happiness (meaning is in the symbolic); (b) *bearing*—it has thereby charted the shape of the background manifold on which meaning unfolds (§1.2.6). Dynamics is thus *a ground without meaning yet indispensable*: meaning is not in it, but

meaning cannot stand apart from it. It is neither abolished nor elevated—it sets the stage, and happiness, as meaning, unfolds upon it, mediated by the symbolic order. The form here returns the meaning to philosophy and remains, itself, the ground of meaning, not its sovereign.

1.5. A Neural Illustration: The Mechanisms of the Plain, Shared, and Waiting Happiness

This chapter offers a second illustrative register, parallel and co-equal with the dynamical one, and *subordinate in the very same way*: it is a witness, not a ground; the philosophical claims of §1.2 and §1.3 stand on their own before it; and by §1.2.6 it charts another region of the background manifold’s shape, never the meaning that unfolds upon it. The review that follows is deliberately broad—it surveys the principal neural systems implicated in the phenomenon—precisely so that the breadth may make vivid, at its end, the single boundary every one of these systems shares: none reaches the conferral of meaning (§1.2.5). Comprehensiveness here serves subordination, not its overturning.

Honesty clause (placed first). Throughout, *[E]* marks a claim **established** in the literature, *[S]* a claim with **some support**, and *[H]* a **hypothesis advanced here**. Per §1.2.7, neural mechanism is *illumination, not proof*; it lends an analysable side-image to claims already established philosophically, does not ground them, and is never to be passed off as empirical proof of any proposition about happiness. The mapping from mechanism to phenomenon is, in every row below, an *interpretive* mapping—an act in the symbolic (§1.2.5)—not a reduction.

1.5.1 The systems implicated: a structured review

(i) Reward and value: dopamine beyond “pleasure.” Mesencephalic dopamine encodes a reward *prediction error*, not reward itself (Schultz et al. 1997) *[E]*; mesolimbic dopamine tracks the *value of work* and sustains *ramping* activity across a delay toward an expected reward (Hamid et al. 2016) *[E]*. Crucially, the dopaminergic “wanting” system is dissociable from the hedonic “liking” system, whose neural substrate is a small set of cortical and subcortical *hedonic hotspots* (Berridge and Kringelbach 2015; Kringelbach

and Berridge 2009) [E]. This dissociation matters to the phenomenon: the plain happiness is closer to “liking” (a quiet hedonic tone) than to “wanting” (appetitive drivenness)—a neural correlate of the distinction between the mode of fullness and the mode of lack (§1.2.4).

(ii) Prediction and free energy. Under the free-energy framework, the cortex minimises prediction error through active inference, with *precision* weighting the gain on prediction errors (Friston 2010) [E]. Plainness corresponds to persistently low prediction error—but low error is two-faced: it can signify a well-modelled, untroubled world or an informationally impoverished one (boredom). The framework alone cannot tell these apart [S]; the criterion must come from elsewhere (subsection (vii) and §1.5.4).

(iii) The default mode network and self-referential rest. The DMN is active at rest and in self-referential processing (Raichle et al. 2001; Northoff et al. 2006) [E]; mind-wandering, frequently DMN-mediated, correlates with lowered subjective happiness (Killingsworth and Gilbert 2010) [E]; ruminative, negatively self-referential activity is a marker of dysphoric states (Nolen-Hoeksema et al. 2008) [E]. Yet experienced meditators show *reduced* DMN activity and altered DMN connectivity (Brewer et al. 2011) [E], and contemplative training reshapes self-referential and attentional networks (Tang et al. 2015; Lutz et al. 2008) [S]. Thus “rest” is in itself neutral: its value turns on the *character* of DMN activity (ruminative versus non-ruminative, open), not on its mere presence.

(iv) Autonomic regulation and safety. A calm, low-arousal, parasympathetically dominant tone—in polyvagal terms a ventral-vagal state of safety and social engagement (Porges 2007) [S]—is the physiological signature of “safe presence,” the bodily ground of a being-together that requires no vigilance.

(v) Affiliation and the calm-and-connect axis. Oxytocinergic and related affiliative systems support non-appetitive bonding and self-soothing under non-noxious sensory contact (Uvnäs-Moberg et al. 2015) [S]; the neurobiology of attachment describes a synchronised, affiliative bond not reducible to reward-seeking (Feldman 2017) [E]. This is the neural side-image of Winnicott’s “being quietly in the other’s presence” (§1.1.2)—intimacy without the activation of drive.

(vi) The social brain and intersubjectivity. Watching the rain *together* engages systems beyond the single brain: shared attention and mentalising networks, and, at the inter-brain level, *neural synchrony* between interacting partners (Hasson et al. 2012; Dikker et al. 2017) [*S*]. Second-person neuroscience argues that genuine interaction is not reducible to two spectator brains (Redcay and Schilbach 2019) [*S*]—a neural counterpart to the irreducibility of the “we” (§1.2.2).

(vii) The positive low-arousal state. Across (ii)–(iv), the recurring problem is to distinguish a *full* low-arousal state from an *empty* one. The resolution proposed here (developed in §1.5.4) is that the difference lies not in the level of arousal or error but in the *neuromodulatory tone* and the *character of resting activity*.

1.5.2 Two review tables

Table 1.2 consolidates the systems against the facets of the phenomenon; Table 1.3 consolidates the central distinction between the two “uneventful plainnesses.”

1.5.3 Part A revisited: the value-signalling of waiting

The sustained delay-period activity of the value system (Schultz et al. 1997; Hamid et al. 2016) [*E*] gives the philosophical claim of §1.3.3—that the fullness of waiting comes from a continual movement beneath an apparent stillness—a nearly literal mechanistic side-image. Indeed, in a delayed-gratification paradigm, dopaminergic activity in the ventral tegmental area *rises steadily across the waiting period*, and optogenetic activation or silencing of these neurons respectively extends or shortens the willingness to wait (Wang, Wu, et al. 2021) [*E*]—the waiting interval is not a blank but an actively sustained state. And the dissociation of *voluntary, oriented* waiting from *forced, uncontrolled* waiting [*S*] is anchored in stressor-controllability research: controllable anticipation recruits ventromedial-prefrontal regulation, whereas uncontrollable stress engages subcortical stress circuitry, and cortisol directly blunts the neural anticipation of reward (Wood et al. 2021; Kinner et al. 2016). Sweet waiting and fretful empty waiting differ, then, not in degree but in circuit—anchoring the “mode of fullness versus mode of lack” distinction (§1.2.4) to a separable neural difference.

1.5.4 Part B revisited: the mechanism of two plainnesses

The distinction between the two plainnesses (Table 1.3) falls not on the height of the prediction error but on two properties beneath it—the neuromodulatory tone (depleted vs steady) and the character of DMN activity (ruminative vs non-ruminative, near open awareness) (Friston 2010; Raichle et al. 2001; Northoff et al. 2006; Brewer et al. 2011). Two convergent literatures support the contrast: depressive rumination is associated with heightened DMN engagement during negative self-reference (Hamilton et al. 2015; Nolen-Hoeksema et al. 2008) [E], while meditation—open-monitoring and choiceless-awareness practices in particular—consistently *reduces* DMN activity and connectivity (Brewer et al. 2011; Garrison et al. 2015) [E]. The components are thus established [E]; the specific synthesis proposed here—that “full plainness = low error + steady tone + non-ruminative DMN” constitutes a distinct neural signature of the full, as against the empty, plainness—is advanced as a *hypothesis* [S], now with convergent support though not yet directly tested in the relevant low-arousal, shared condition.

1.5.5 Synthesis, and the single boundary the breadth reveals

The modes of happiness answer to several *healthy* modes of the generative predictive system: the waiting mode = the value circuit’s sustained positive signalling across the delay; the abiding mode = low error with steady tone and a non-ruminative default network. Both are side-images of a predictive, embodied, and *interpersonally coupled* system relating to the symbolic–real gap in the *mode of fullness*: the gap is still there (the system is alive, predicting, coupled), but it does not operate in the form of lack-and-drivenness.

The boundary the review makes vivid (returning meaning to philosophy). Seven systems, dozens of findings—and not one crosses from “this circuit is in this state” to “this means happiness to the subject.” Every row of Table 1.2 required an *interpretive* mapping in its third column; that mapping is an act in the symbolic, not a reading-off from the mechanism. The very comprehensiveness of the review is what exhibits the boundary: however many systems are charted, the meaning is not among them. The neural charts a wide region of the manifold (§1.2.6); the meaning unfolds, as ever, in the symbolic (§1.2.5). This is the chapter’s subordination, shown rather than merely

asserted.

1.6. The Hermeneutics of Shared Happiness: Resonance, not Merger

The place of this chapter in the argument (the seam, marked first, to forestall repetition).

§1.2.5 established the *single-subject* conferral of meaning (happiness is the meaning I confer on my situation, given in the symbolic); §1.2.2 established the *two-subject* ontological co-existence (relation prior, the individual a knot, the autonomy of the knot preserved). At their intersection lies a question neither has asked: *since happiness is meaning given in the symbolic, a “shared” happiness would require some “shared” conferral of meaning—so how can two subjects, each cut by its own signifier, share a meaning without one’s symbolic order swallowing the other’s?* This chapter advances at that intersection. It does *not* re-prove “the necessity of hermeneutics” (§1.2.5 is done); it stands on that result and asks after its two-subject corollary.

The chapter’s distinctive thesis (one sentence). Shared happiness is not two subjects falling into one symbolic order (that is the hermeneutic annexation of one by the other) but the *resonance* of two meaning-worlds that remain translatable to one another without being exhausted by the translation—each conferring meaning in its own signifiers, each open to the other, neither required to surrender its symbolic order. The “we” of happiness is the resonance of two meaning-worlds unexhausted by each other, not their *merger*.

1.6.1 The question: does shared happiness require shared meaning?

Relaying §1.2.5: happiness is meaning conferred in the symbolic. It follows that two people being happy “together” is not a juxtaposition of two private meanings but seems to call for a shared meaning—the happiness of “watching the rain together” belongs to the “we,” not to two side-by-side “I”s. But the symbolic order (the order of signifiers, the big Other) is a structured order prior to the individual. Hence the sharpening: is shared meaning a conferring of meaning *within one and the same* symbolic order? *Whose* order? The question is at once one of power and of justice (cf. Paper XVII (Wanhong 2026)).

1.6.2 The danger: hermeneutic annexation—the symbolic form of the dissolution of co-existence

The most dangerous “shared happiness” is precisely this: one party’s symbolic order becomes the shared order, and the other confers meaning *within* it—so that the other’s happiness is expressed in *another’s signifiers*, is translated, is *aphasic* in its own meaning-world. This is the true form, at the *symbolic-hermeneutic* level, of “mutual dissolution”: not the phase-capture of the dynamical level (a language lacking the symbolic, treated in the ontological and dynamical registers of §1.2.2 and §1.2.4), but *one meaning-world annexing the other*.

Its concealment (isomorphic with the “regime bleeding” of Paper XVII (Wanhong 2026)): hermeneutic annexation often wears the face of “how alike we are,” “we think the same”—and “thinking the same” may be precisely that one party has migrated wholesale into the other’s signifiers and lost its own place of conferral. The felt happiness of concord may be the quiet that follows a completed annexation.

The criterion (at the symbolic level, distinct from the criteria of the other registers): in this being-together, does the weaker party *still retain the capacity to confer meaning in its own symbolic order*? Or can its meaning now be expressed only through the stronger party’s signifiers? “Whether subjectivity is preserved” here takes the concrete form of *whether the place of conferral is preserved*.

1.6.3 The positive form: translatable yet not exhausted by translation—the structure of resonance

Healthy co-existence does not abolish the differing symbolic orders; it maintains *translatability* between two meaning-worlds: I can open onto your meaning, can grasp you in your language, *without requiring you to surrender your language*—and conversely. The crucial qualifier, *yet not exhausted by translation*: translation always leaves a remainder (the inter-subjective version of the symbolic–real gap of §1.2.3—your meaning-world has, for me, a remainder no signifier of mine can exhaust). Healthy co-existence *respects this remainder*, and does not force it flat into “we are wholly the same.” Resonance is just this: two meaning-worlds, of different frequency yet answering to one another, rather than the monotone left when one has swallowed the other.

Connecting to the epistemic hospitality of Paper XIII (Huang 2026). Paper XIII established that “to present something real in the other’s epistemic language” is a correction of epistemic injustice, a respect rather than a manipulation (provided what is presented is real). Here is its positive employment in the theory of happiness: to open onto the other’s symbolic order, to share meaning in a manner the other can grasp, *while retaining one’s own place of conferral*—this is neither annexation (the other is not abolished) nor aphasia (one’s own is not surrendered). Resonance = a *mutual* epistemic hospitality.

Thus the right reading of “shared meaning” is not “one identical meaning” but a *continual, remainder-leaving, mutual translation and answering* between two meaning-worlds. The happiness of the “we” is generated in this back-and-forth, not in a merger.

1.6.4 Taking up the earlier material as subordinate illustration: waiting / shared slowing

The “waiting / shared slowing” distinction is here *re-placed* as a concrete illustration of the above symbolic-level thesis (no longer an independent load-bearing point):

- pathological traction = unilateral phase-capture (one party’s autonomous orientation crushed)—answering, at the dynamical level, to the hermeneutic annexation of §1.6.2;
- healthy traction = bilateral, voluntary mutual yielding, falling into a common rhythm that equals neither party’s original pace (“watching the evening together”) —answering, at the dynamical level, to the resonance of §1.6.3;
- the criterion (dynamical level): is the slowing bilateral or unilateral? Is the new rhythm negotiated *between* the two, or captured by the stronger? The difference lies in whether the autonomous term is preserved—the side-image, at the dynamical level, of the symbolic-level criterion (whether the place of conferral is preserved).

Connecting to §1.3.3 (waiting as the proceeding toward a common rhythm) and §1.5.3 (the two neural systems of voluntary versus forced waiting): the three layers—symbolic, dynamical, neural—are three layers of one distinction, of which §1.6.3 is the load-bearing symbolic statement.

An emendation to Paper XVIII (footnote-level, not load-bearing). On the strength of this chapter, one emendation to Paper XVIII (Wanhong 2026): “shared slowing / voluntary mutual yielding” is to be marked as a *mechanism of realising* generative balance, not a variant of generative dissolution. What Paper XVIII refused was *unilateral, condescending* waiting; that refusal is not withdrawn—but this distinction must be added, lest Paper XVIII read as a prohibition of tenderness. This emendation is a by-product of the chapter, not its thesis; the thesis is the resonance-structure of §1.6.3.

1.6.5 Close

Shared happiness is the resonance of two meaning-worlds unexhausted by each other, sustained by a mutual epistemic hospitality, with the mutual preservation of the place of conferral as its criterion of justice. In keeping with the voice-discipline of the paper, this “resonance” is likewise not a pinned-down essential form but a saying in motion—what resonance concretely looks like emerges with the two persons’ historical and material conditions, and is not foreclosed here.

1.7. Silence as Fulfilment: The Completion of Three Silences

The chapter’s distinctive load (demarcated first, to forestall repetition). §1.2.9 already noted “silence = no debt, no remainder”; §1.3 touched it. This chapter does *not* repeat that. Its distinctive value lies in two things the foregoing did not do: (1) to gather the three forms “silence” takes across this series into a single threefold, making this chapter the *point of convergence* of the silence-line running from Paper XIII through Paper XVIII to the present (not one more local claim within Paper XIX); and (2) to re-place silence, by way of §1.2.5, as a *determinate state of the symbolic*—not the absence of signifiers, but the movement of signifiers having reached a fullness that need say no more. The latter the foregoing did not touch at all.

1.7.1 Silence is not aphasia: a re-placement at the symbolic level

A fundamental misreading must be barred: the silence of fulfilment is *not* aphasia, *not* a pre-symbolic chaos, *not* the aphasia of the annexed party of §1.6.2. Following §1.2.5 (happiness is conferral of meaning in the symbolic): if silence is a fulfilment, it must

be a state *within* the symbolic—the order of signifiers present, the conferral of meaning accomplished, only arrived at a *point of saturation needing no further signifier*.

The decisive contrast:

- the aphasia of the annexed (§1.6.2) = wanting to speak and having no signifier of one's own to speak with (the symbolic place usurped);
- the silence of fulfilment (this chapter) = having signifiers and needing none—the symbolic movement complete, no gap-driven pressure compelling speech.

Both “do not speak”; their standing in the symbolic is opposite—one more pair of “same appearance, opposite being” (isomorphic with the two zeros of §1.4, the two plainnesses of §1.5.4).

1.7.2 The threefold of three silences (load-bearing; the series' convergence)

- *Silence one—obligation (Paper XIII (Huang 2026))*. Generative silence = *not to occupy* the other's generative space. An *ought*—to yield place actively, that the other may generate of itself. Directed at: the other's freedom to generate.
- *Silence two—restraint (Paper XVIII (Wanhong 2026))*. The negative structural obligation = *not to dissolve* the other's generativity (not to crush the other with one's own order). Also an *ought*—to restrain the tendency to annex. Directed at: the preservation of the other's subjectivity (cf. the place of conferral, §1.6.2).
- *Silence three—needlessness (Paper XIX, this paper)*. The silence of fulfilment = *nothing to say and no need to say it*. Not an ought-not-to-speak, but the absence of debt, of remainder, of any unresolved tension compelling speech. Directed at: the fulfilment of the relation itself (the gap abiding in the mode of fullness, §1.2.4).

The structure of the ascent. The first two are *negative oughts* (“one ought not to ...”)—they remain obligations, still presupposing a tendency to be checked (occupation, annexation). The third is a *fulfilled actuality* (“there is no need to ...”)—no longer an obligation, because there is no longer a tendency to check; it is the state *after* obligation has been wholly

satisfied, in which obligation itself dissolves. The three are therefore not coordinate but an *ascent*: from “ought not to occupy” (XIII) to “ought not to dissolve” (XVIII) to “there is no need to speak” (XIX)—obligation *sublated* (*Aufhebung*: at once preserved and surpassed) in fulfilment.

The three silences. Silence completes a series. The silence of obligation does not occupy; the silence of restraint does not dissolve; the silence of needlessness has nothing to say and no need to say it. The first two are negative oughts that presuppose a tendency to be checked; the third is the fulfilled state in which, no tendency remaining, the obligation itself dissolves. Silence is thus not the absence of meaning but the saturation of it: signifiers present, and none required.

1.7.3 The Eastern interface: arriving from within, not borrowing authority

Daoism: *tiandan* (the plain), the “savouring of the flavourless” (*wei wu wei*), “the great sound is faint” (*dayin xisheng*), “one who knows does not speak” (Laozi 1963; Zhuangzi 2013). “Savouring the flavourless” fits the third silence especially: not the absence of flavour (aphasia, flavourlessness) but flavour grown so complete it need add no more. The Chan “no establishment of words” (*buli wenzi*) is *not* “no words” but the needlessness of further words.

The voice-discipline (per the paper throughout): these are not authorities adduced to stamp the argument; the paper has *arrived again, from within* the argument of the generative relation, at the place they once reached. The convergence is corroboration, not borrowed light.

1.7.4 Close and transition

The threefold is complete: obligation (yielding) → restraint (not dissolving) → needlessness (fulfilment). The third silence is the signature, at the level of saying, of this paper’s

happiness—fulfilment need not be stated; it need only be lived, a circle at a time, and kept, together, in silence.

Transition to §1.8: yet this paper *is* a paper; it is, right now, saying the very thing that “needs no saying.” This performative tension is no error—the next chapter shows it to be the self-verification of the thesis.

1.8. The Impossibility of Writing as the Self-Verification of the Thesis

The hard core (against “this is mere sentiment”). A chapter saying “I cannot write it” is, without argument, a sentimental self-congratulation. This chapter’s load is to show that the unwritability of this paper’s object is *not a failure of the writer but structural*—a direct consequence of the symbolic–real gap of §1.2.3. Writing is an operation of the symbolic; the still afternoon holds a real remainder no symbol can exhaust; therefore “it cannot be written to the end” is necessary, not rhetorical. From this, the unwritability *verifies* the paper’s core claim (the gap unclosable, happiness holding a remainder no symbol exhausts). This is argument, not sentiment.

1.8.1 Returning to the quarry of the opening

Return to the quarry laid down at the opening (the delineation): why the harder one tries to write that afternoon clearly, the more it resists. This chapter raises that “resistance” from a fact of writing-experience to a phenomenon *predicted* by the foregoing structure.

1.8.2 Unwritability is structural, not a matter of ability

Writing is an operation of the symbolic: to capture, fix, and transmit by the order of signifiers. But (per §1.2.3) the symbolic’s capture of the real always leaves a remainder; that afternoon, as a lived situation under conferral of meaning, holds a real remainder no sequence of signifiers can exhaust (the remainder marked by *objet a*). Hence: *however precise the writing, there is always a remainder that does not enter—this is not the author’s limit but the limit of the symbolic–real gap, and it is structural*. “Cannot write that afternoon to the end” and “the symbol cannot fill the real” are one proposition. Following §1.2.6: writing (the symbolic) too can only unfold on the background manifold,

and is never the written life itself; between text and life lie the manifold and the difference of meaning. The paper is a map, not the terrain.

1.8.3 This impossibility verifies the thesis (the self-referential closure)

One of the paper's core claims: happiness, as the fullness of a generative relation, holds a remainder no symbol exhausts (the gap abiding in the mode of fullness, §1.2.4); it is therefore a genuine emergence, hermeneutic, not to be settled by any form or statement. Then: *could this paper write that afternoon exhaustively, it would thereby falsify its own core claim* (proving happiness exhaustible by the symbol, settleable). Just because it cannot be exhausted, the core claim is borne out. *Unwritability is the performative proof of the claim's truth.*

The convergence with the series' self-referential gesture:

- Paper IX (Huang 2025): the poem refuses to settle its own sublimation—its form *is* its claim.
- Paper XIII (Huang 2026): the dedication enacts the very theory it states—the performative *is* the argument.
- This chapter: the paper cannot write its object to the end, which is just what proves the object inexhaustible by writing—the failure *is* the evidence of success.
- (And §1.4, “insufficiency-cum-bearing,” is the formal-dress version of the same gesture: exhausting the form to display the form's not-reaching.)

The three (four) are one self-referential gesture in successive instances.

1.8.4 But this chapter does not slide into the unsayable or the mystical (self-brake one)

A guard: against sliding from “cannot be written to the end” to “therefore unsayable, therefore mystical, therefore nothing need be argued.” No. “Cannot be written to the end” $\neq$ “unsayable”: this paper has said a great deal (eight chapters)—it only does not say *exhaustively*. The existence of a remainder does not annul the validity of what has

been said (just as the paths one cannot walk on the manifold do not annul the paths one can, §1.2.6). The saying remains under constraint (the four criteria of §1.2.7, the double constraint of §1.2.6): unwritability is an honest marking of the boundary of saying, not a use of “the unsayable” to abdicate the responsibility to argue. This chapter is the surveying of a boundary, not a forfeiture of argument.

1.8.5 Nor into self-congratulation (self-brake two)

The chapter’s greatest risk is to turn “I cannot write it to the end” into “I am too profound to write it to the end” (the same slope as the “unfalsifiability as virtue” guarded against in §1.2.7). The brake: unwritability is a structural property *of the object* (the symbolic–real gap), not a special profundity *of the author*. *Anyone* writing *any* lived situation cannot write it to the end. The chapter asserts a general structure of symbol and real that happens to fall on this paper’s object—*not* the author’s self-coronation.

1.8.6 Close: the fitting end is to lay down the pen

Since the third silence (§1.7.2) is “no need to say,” and this paper has said what can be said to its boundary, the fitting end of this paper is not one more conclusion (a conclusion is a settlement, and settlement is the death of the good cycle, §1.2) but the *laying-down of the pen*. To lay down the pen is silence; silence is fulfilment—the paper here instantiates what it argues: that the fulfilment of the plain happiness need not be stated, and so, at the boundary, it stops, adding no further signifier. An opening is left for the envoi.

Envoi

By §1.8.6, the fitting end is not a conclusion. What follows is not a summary, makes no further claim, and states no thesis—any added signifier would weaken the needlessness of §1.7.2 and the laying-down of the pen of §1.8.6. The envoi performs only an *indication* (a turning-toward, not a statement) and an *unclosing image*. It does not speak *about* happiness; it enacts having no more need to speak. The “we” is left anonymous—a bare structure, into which any reader may enter their own afternoon.

And so we return the gaze to the afternoon that is, even now, still going on. Two people.
The rain beyond the window. Nothing to be done, and nothing lacked.

[the closing image, to be set by hand]

Table 1.2: Neural systems implicated in the plain, shared, and waiting happiness. Evidence: *[E]* established, *[S]* some support, *[H]* hypothesis advanced here. The mapping to facets is interpretive (§1.2.5), not reductive.

System	Core finding	Facet of the phenomenon	Ev.
Dopamine / value	Prediction-error coding; delay-period ramping; value of work	The fullness of waiting; “not a blank”	[E]
Wanting vs liking	Dissociable appetitive and hedonic systems; hedonic hotspots	Mode of fullness (liking) vs mode of lack (wanting)	[E]
Free energy	Low prediction error under good model; precision weighting	Plainness as low error; ambiguity of “low”	[E]/ [S]
Default mode network	Rest/self-reference; mind-wandering lowers happiness; meditators show reduced DMN	Two plainnesses turn on DMN character	[E]
Autonomic (polyvagal)	Ventral-vagal safety / social-engagement tone	Bodily ground of safe being-together	[S]
Affiliation / oxytocin	Non-appetitive bonding; self-soothing; attachment synchrony	Intimacy without drive (Winnicott)	[E]/ [S]
Social brain / inter-brain	Shared-attention & mentalising; neural synchrony; second-person interaction	Irreducibility of the “we”	[S]

Table 1.3: The two “uneventful plainnesses,” distinguished not by the level of error but by the character beneath it. The word “saturation” is deliberately avoided (cf. §1.2.4).

Property	Empty plainness (boredom/ dysphoria)	Full plainness (the phe- nomenon)
Prediction error	Low	Low
Neuromodulatory tone	Depleted / low	Steady
DMN activity	Ruminative, negatively self- referential	Non-ruminative, near open awareness
Autonomic tone	Withdrawn or dysregulated	Ventral-vagal, safe
Relation to the gap	Mode of lack	Mode of fullness
Evidence for the contrast	[E] for components	[H] for the specific signature

Coda

七律

闲窗相对坐忘言， 一霎回眸各已恬。
雨脚穿檐声未歇， 灯晕照座暖初添。
不须问处春常在， 无可名时意自圆。
同看廉纤千万缕， 此心如水落阶前。

*By a quiet window, two sit facing each other, wordless; in a glance, each is
already at ease. The rain runs along the eaves, its sound unceasing; the lamp's
soft halo lights the seat, and a warmth is added. Where nothing need be asked, the
spring is always there; in what cannot be named, the sense is round of itself.
Together they watch the thousand fine threads of rain; this heart, like water,
settles before the steps.*

Acknowledgements

My deepest thanks are owed to the “girl of the forest and the mountains”—who loves travel, nature, and culture, who is kind, and who carries a sense of mission toward the world. To be with her is happiness even when we wish only to sit, and look out, together. This paper began there, and there it returns.

References

- Adorno, Theodor W. (1991). “Free Time”. In: *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*. Ed. by J. M. Bernstein. London: Routledge, pp. 187–197.
- Aristotle (2000). *Nicomachean Ethics*. Ed. and trans. Roger Crisp. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Balint, Michael (1968). *The Basic Fault: Therapeutic Aspects of Regression*. London: Tavistock.
- Barad, Karen (2007). *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Barthes, Roland (1978). *A Lover’s Discourse: Fragments*. Trans. by Richard Howard. New York: Hill and Wang.
- (2005). *The Neutral: Lecture Course at the Collège de France (1977–1978)*. Trans. by Rosalind E. Krauss and Denis Hollier. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Bergson, Henri (1910). *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*. Trans. by F. L. Pogson. London: George Allen & Unwin.
- Berridge, Kent C. and Morten L. Kringelbach (2015). “Pleasure Systems in the Brain”. In: *Neuron* 86.3, pp. 646–664.
- Berry, M. V. (1984). “Quantal Phase Factors Accompanying Adiabatic Changes”. In: *Proceedings of the Royal Society of London. Series A* 392.1802, pp. 45–57. DOI: [10.1098/rspa.1984.0023](https://doi.org/10.1098/rspa.1984.0023).
- Bion, Wilfred R. (1962). *Learning from Experience*. London: Heinemann.
- Brewer, Judson A. et al. (2011). “Meditation Experience Is Associated with Differences in Default Mode Network Activity and Connectivity”. In: *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 108.50, pp. 20254–20259.

- Buber, Martin (1970). *I and Thou*. Trans. by Walter Kaufmann. Translated by Walter Kaufmann; original German *Ich und Du*, 1923. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.
- Confucius (1998). *The Analects*. Trans. D. C. Lau. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Darwall, Stephen (2006). *The Second-Person Standpoint: Morality, Respect, and Accountability*. Harvard University Press.
- Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari (1987). *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. by Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Dikker, Suzanne et al. (2017). "Brain-to-Brain Synchrony Tracks Real-World Dynamic Group Interactions in the Classroom". In: *Current Biology* 27.9, pp. 1375–1380.
- Epicurus (1994). *The Epicurus Reader: Selected Writings and Testimonia*. Trans. and ed. Brad Inwood and L. P. Gerson. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett.
- Federici, Silvia (2004). *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*. New York: Autonomedia.
- Feldman, Ruth (2017). "The Neurobiology of Human Attachments". In: *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 21.2, pp. 80–99.
- Freud, Sigmund (1955). *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Original work published 1920. London: Standard Edition, vol. 18, Hogarth Press.
- (1957). "Instincts and Their Vicissitudes". In: *Standard Edition, vol. 14, Hogarth Press*. Original work published 1915, pp. 109–140.
- Friston, Karl (2010). "The Free-Energy Principle: A Unified Brain Theory?" In: *Nature Reviews Neuroscience* 11.2, pp. 127–138.
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg (2004). *Truth and Method*. 2, rev. Trans. revised by Joel Weinheimer and Donald G. Marshall; orig. *Wahrheit und Methode*, 1960. London: Continuum.
- Garrison, Kathleen A. et al. (2015). "Meditation Leads to Reduced Default Mode Network Activity beyond an Active Task". In: *Cognitive, Affective, & Behavioral Neuroscience* 15.3, pp. 712–720.
- Haken, Hermann (1983). *Synergetics: An Introduction*. 3rd. Berlin: Springer.
- Hamid, Arif A., Jeffrey R. Pettibone, Omar S. Mabrouk, et al. (2016). "Mesolimbic Dopamine Signals the Value of Work". In: *Nature Neuroscience* 19.1, pp. 117–126.
- Hamilton, J. Paul et al. (2015). "Depressive Rumination, the Default-Mode Network, and the Dark Matter of Clinical Neuroscience". In: *Biological Psychiatry* 78.4, pp. 224–230.

- Hasson, Uri et al. (2012). “Brain-to-Brain Coupling: A Mechanism for Creating and Sharing a Social World”. In: *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 16.2, pp. 114–121.
- Heidegger, Martin (1966). *Discourse on Thinking*. Trans. by John M. Anderson and E. Hans Freund. Containing “Gelassenheit”. New York: Harper & Row.
- Huang, Wanhong (2025). “The Sustainability of Intimacy: Poetic Generativity and Generative Justice”. *Philosophy of Intimacy and the Theory of Justice*, Paper IX.
- (2026). “The Causality of the Non-Binding Vow: On Trust, Promise, and the Generation of Expectation in the Absence of the Other’s Sword”. *Philosophy of Intimacy and the Theory of Justice*, Paper XIII.
- Husserl, Edmund (2001). *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis: Lectures on Transcendental Logic*. Trans. by Anthony J. Steinbock. Dordrecht: Kluwer.
- Kant, Immanuel (1987). *Critique of Judgment*. Trans. by Werner S. Pluhar. Original work published 1790. Indianapolis: Hackett.
- Killingsworth, Matthew A. and Daniel T. Gilbert (2010). “A Wandering Mind Is an Unhappy Mind”. In: *Science* 330.6006, p. 932.
- Kinner, Valerie L., Oliver T. Wolf, and Christian J. Merz (2016). “Cortisol Alters Reward Processing in the Human Brain”. In: *Hormones and Behavior* 84, pp. 75–83.
- Kringelbach, Morten L. and Kent C. Berridge (2009). “Towards a Functional Neuroanatomy of Pleasure and Happiness”. In: *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 13.11, pp. 479–487.
- Kuramoto, Yoshiki (1984). *Chemical Oscillations, Waves, and Turbulence*. Berlin: Springer.
- Lacan, Jacques (2006). *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*. Trans. by Bruce Fink. Translated by Bruce Fink; original French *Écrits*, 1966. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Lafargue, Paul (1907). *The Right to Be Lazy*. Original work published 1883. Chicago: Charles H. Kerr.
- Laozi (1963). *Tao Te Ching*. Trans. D. C. Lau. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Levinas, Emmanuel (1969). *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*. Trans. by Alphonso Lingis. Translated by Alphonso Lingis; original French *Totalité et infini*, 1961. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press.
- Lutz, Antoine et al. (2008). “Attention Regulation and Monitoring in Meditation”. In: *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 12.4, pp. 163–169.
- Marx, Karl (1973). *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*. Trans. by Martin Nicolaus. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

- Marx, Karl (1976). *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume I*. Trans. Ben Fowkes; orig. 1867. London: Penguin.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice (1962). *Phenomenology of Perception*. Trans. Colin Smith; orig. *Phénoménologie de la perception*, 1945. London: Routledge.
- Nāgārjuna (1995). *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way: Nāgārjuna's Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*. Trans. by Jay L. Garfield. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Nolen-Hoeksema, Susan, Blair E. Wisco, and Sonja Lyubomirsky (2008). "Rethinking Rumination". In: *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 3.5, pp. 400–424.
- Northoff, Georg et al. (2006). "Self-Referential Processing in Our Brain". In: *NeuroImage* 31.1, pp. 440–457.
- Popper, Karl (2002). *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*. Original work published 1935. London: Routledge.
- Porges, Stephen W. (2007). "The Polyvagal Perspective". In: *Biological Psychology* 74.2, pp. 116–143.
- Prigogine, Ilya and Isabelle Stengers (1984). *Order Out of Chaos: Man's New Dialogue with Nature*. New York: Bantam Books.
- Raichle, Marcus E. et al. (2001). "A Default Mode of Brain Function". In: *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 98.2, pp. 676–682.
- Rawls, John (1971). *A Theory of Justice*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Redcay, Elizabeth and Leonhard Schilbach (2019). "Using Second-Person Neuroscience to Elucidate the Mechanisms of Social Interaction". In: *Nature Reviews Neuroscience* 20.8, pp. 495–505.
- Ricœur, Paul (1976). *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*. Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University Press.
- Saussure, Ferdinand de (1959). *Course in General Linguistics*. Trans. by Wade Baskin. Edited by Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye; translated by Wade Baskin; original French *Cours de linguistique générale*, 1916. New York: Philosophical Library.
- Schultz, Wolfram, Peter Dayan, and P. Read Montague (1997). "A Neural Substrate of Prediction and Reward". In: *Science* 275.5306, pp. 1593–1599.
- Simondon, Gilbert (2020). *Individuation in Light of Notions of Form and Information*. Trans. by Taylor Adkins. Trans. Taylor Adkins; orig. 1958–64. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

- Sterling, Peter (2012). “Allostasis: A Model of Predictive Regulation”. In: *Physiology & Behavior* 106.1, pp. 5–15.
- Stern, Daniel N. (1985). *The Interpersonal World of the Infant: A View from Psychoanalysis and Developmental Psychology*. New York: Basic Books.
- Strogatz, Steven H. (2001). “Exploring Complex Networks”. In: *Nature* 410, pp. 268–276.
- Tang, Yi-Yuan, Britta K. Hölzel, and Michael I. Posner (2015). “The Neuroscience of Mindfulness Meditation”. In: *Nature Reviews Neuroscience* 16.4, pp. 213–225.
- Thom, René (1975). *Structural Stability and Morphogenesis*. Trans. by D. H. Fowler. Reading, MA: Benjamin.
- Tomasello, Michael (2008). *Origins of Human Communication*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Trevarthen, Colwyn (1979). “Communication and Cooperation in Early Infancy: A Description of Primary Intersubjectivity”. In: *Before Speech: The Beginning of Human Communication*. Ed. by Margaret Bullowa. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 321–347.
- Uvnäs-Moberg, Kerstin, Linda Handlin, and Maria Petersson (2015). “Self-Soothing Behaviors with Particular Reference to Oxytocin Released by Non-Noxious Sensory Stimulation”. In: *Frontiers in Psychology* 5, p. 1529.
- Wang, Ke, Yu Wu, et al. (2021). “The Neural Basis of Delayed Gratification”. In: *Science Advances* 7.49, eabg6611.
- Wanhong (2026). “Generativity Under Power: Trust, Asymmetry, and Estrangement in Intimate Relations”. Philosophy of Intimacy and the Theory of Justice, Paper XVII. Working draft.
- Whitehead, Alfred North (1978). *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*. Corrected. Corrected edition, ed. D. R. Griffin and D. W. Sherburne; original work published 1929. New York: Free Press.
- Wiener, Norbert (1948). *Cybernetics: Or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Winnicott, Donald W. (1965). “The Capacity to Be Alone”. In: *The Maturational Processes and the Facilitating Environment*. Original work published 1958. London: Hogarth Press, pp. 29–36.

- Wood, Katherine H. et al. (2021). “Neural Correlates of Stressor Controllability in Humans”. In: *NeuroImage* 245, p. 118726.
- Zhuangzi (2013). *The Complete Works of Zhuangzi*. Trans. by Burton Watson. New York: Columbia University Press.

CHAPTER 2

The Hydraulic Virtue of Intimate Relations

On the Ethics of Water

*This paper develops an ethics of intimate relations from the Daoist figure of water — 上善若水, “the highest good is like water” (Daodejing, ch. 8). It asks what it is, concretely and between two people, for love to benefit without contending, to seek the lowly place, and to remain unfilled. The guiding decision is to read these water-virtues **structurally** rather than as a counsel of self-cultivation: not as an ascent toward a selfless or quasi-divine condition, but as properties of how value, power, and desire are arranged in a generative relation. The paper accordingly draws its resources less from the contemplative traditions than from political economy, game theory, political philosophy, feminist ethics, Kantian ethics, and psychoanalysis, and treats the contemplative reading as one voice among many rather than as the paper’s frame.*

*A survey of these traditions is organised around the water-virtues themselves — non-contention, benefiting the ten thousand things, dwelling in the lowly place, formlessness, and non-fullness — and shows that each virtue is, in different doctrines, both affirmed and opposed. From these oppositions the paper isolates five standing challenges: that non-contention is irrational (game theory), that it is suicidal absent an enforced structure (Hobbes), that dwelling-below is slave morality (Nietzsche), that taking-the-receiver’s-shape dissolves the subject (feminism, psychoanalysis), and that formlessness is lawlessness (Kant). The last is answered in place, by reading the water-good as an **imperfect duty** — lawful yet without fixed form — using Kant’s own resources.*

*The dialectical core of the paper answers the remaining challenges in two clusters. Against the charges of self-dissolution and slave morality, it argues that the water-good is not formless yielding but **chosen** good: water takes the vessel’s shape (utmost softness) yet wears through stone and breaches dykes (utmost hardness), so that a rigid lower bound distinguishes the generative lowly place from mere collapse. Against the charges of irrationality and suicide, it argues — following the formal companion Huang (2026a) — that the water-good never demanded the abolition of power, only the shaping of an ineliminable asymmetry so that its surplus is returned rather than retained. A chapter on practice then carries each water-virtue down into the conduct of an actual intimate relation, pairing every form of the good with the vice it most easily becomes, and closing on the limit of all such guidance: that the good cannot be made into a procedure.*

*Throughout, the formalism of the companion paper is used as a settled foundation and translated, not rebuilt: non-contention as the vanishing of appropriative (gradient) transport in the holonomy that carries surplus; the good and bad lowly place as the solenoidal and gradient parts of the power force; renewal as the avoidance of dynamical solidification; and — crucially for a philosophy of intimacy — the non-substitutable particularity of **this** relation*

as the local “flesh” that topological protection, by construction, cannot reach. The water-good is thus presented as the water-phase of the dark virtue (玄德, ch. 51): the same non-possessive generativity the companion paper gives a formal body, here given an ethical and practical one, between two people.

致她——

For her—

那个属于森林与山之女孩，

the girl who belongs to the forest and the mountains,

她待人如水，利而不争。

who is to others as water is: benefiting, and not contending.

致我最爱的人。 To the one I love most.

2.1. From the Hydraulics of Value to the Ethics of Water

The preceding paper of this series (Wanhong 2026b) described a water without ever asking water to be good. It watched two people sit before a window and do nothing, and it gave that uneventful fullness a dynamical body: a flow on a background manifold, a resonance of two meaning-worlds, a contract read as structured flow. Water there was a figure for *how* intimacy moves — its currents, its phases, the residue it accumulates by going round. It was description. This paper turns the same figure from description to prescription. It asks not how intimacy flows like water but how intimacy ought to be *good* as water is said to be good — 上善若水, “the highest good is like water,” in the eighth chapter of the *Daodejing*. That sentence is itself the very passage this paper enacts: a step from the hydrology of a relation to its ethics.

2.1.1 Water-good, not formlessness

It is easy to misread the figure. “Be like water” is heard, in the popular ear, as a counsel of yielding: take any shape, resist nothing, flow around every obstacle. Read so, the ethics of water is an ethics of formlessness, and an ethics of formlessness is no ethics at all — it cannot tell the yielding that nourishes from the yielding that dissolves. The thesis of this paper is therefore stated at the outset against that reading. What the eighth chapter praises is not water but *water’s good*: 水善 — water in the specific modality of benefiting, of dwelling below, of not contending. Water is also what wears through stone and breaches the dyke; the same chapter that calls it lowly elsewhere calls it the softest thing that overcomes the hardest. The good of water is a *chosen* good, with an edge in it, and the central labour of this paper (§2.5) is to locate that edge — the rigid lower bound below which yielding is no longer the water-good but its collapse.

2.1.2 A structural, not a cultivational, reading

There is a second, subtler misreading, and guarding against it fixes the method of the whole paper. The water-virtues — not contending, dwelling in the lowly place, emptying, taking the vessel’s shape — belong by long habit to the literature of self-cultivation: to kenosis, to the emptying of self, to the disciplines by which a person is supposed to climb, against the grain of self-interest, toward a selfless or quasi-divine condition. Read

in that key, this paper would be a manual of spiritual ascent, and its “good” would be a property earned by an exceptional soul. We decline that key. The water-good is read here *structurally*: as a property of how value, power, and desire are arranged in a generative relation, not as an achievement of an exalted character. The difference is not pedantic. A cultivational ethics locates the good in the agent’s interior and measures it by renunciation; a structural ethics locates it in the geometry of the relation and measures it by what that geometry does to the two who are in it. The same outward gesture — yielding, giving, dwelling below — can belong to a generative geometry or to a dominative one, and only a structural reading can tell them apart. This commitment governs the paper’s choice of interlocutors: it draws its analysis from political economy, game theory, political philosophy, feminist ethics, Kantian ethics, and psychoanalysis — traditions that ask under what conditions a structure produces good relations — and treats the contemplative traditions, which ask how a self becomes good, as one voice admitted late and on its own terms (§2.2.5), never as the frame.

2.1.3 Water-good as the water-phase of the dark virtue

The structural reading is not improvised for this paper; it has already been carried out, in formal detail, for a neighbouring Daoist figure. The companion paper to this series (Huang 2026a) takes the dark virtue of the fifty-first chapter — 生而不有，为而不恃，长而不宰, “generating yet not possessing, acting yet not presuming, fostering growth yet not ruling” — and gives each phrase an exact formal body. Generating-yet-not-possessing becomes the holonomy of a closed relational cycle: a surplus genuinely produced, yet non-local and reducible to no point, and so without a possessor. Acting-yet-not-presuming becomes the distinction between power that serves and power that fixes in dependence. Fostering-yet-not-ruling becomes a generative asymmetry whose geometry works toward its own dissolution. The dark virtue, in that paper, is shown to be not a counsel of restraint but the very mode of existence of generative value — since the part of a relation reducible to a single scalar comparison (more or less, higher or lower: the form of possession) contributes nothing to the surplus, so that in the instant of appropriation, generation stops.

This paper stands to that one as the eighth chapter stands to the fifty-first. The dark virtue and the water-good are two faces of a single thing: the fifty-first chapter gives the *mechanism* of non-possessive generation, the eighth gives its *ethical bearing* — benefiting

without contending, dwelling below, remaining unfilled. We therefore take the formal body already built for the dark virtue and do not rebuild it. Where this paper reaches the formal register at all (§2.9), it is as a *translation layer*: the theorems of the companion are read into the ethical vocabulary of the water-virtues, one by one, and the formalism is kept strictly in the serving position. The water-good is the water-phase of the dark virtue — the same non-possessive generativity, here asked what it requires of two people who love each other.

2.1.4 A source, not an ending

A final word on the place of this paper in the series. It is not the closing chapter, and the figure of water is not deployed here to bring the long argument to rest in the Way. It is a chapter near the middle, and water is chosen because it is generative *source* material: a figure rich enough that several later papers may return to draw from it. The closing section accordingly does not gather the argument into a synthesis but opens it (§2.10) — four directed fissures, each a place where the water-good, pressed further, runs out of what this paper can say and points toward a paper that might say it. Water is here the spring, not the sea.

2.2. The Ethics of the Water-Virtues: A Doctrinal Survey

The water-virtues — non-contention (*Daodejing*, ch. 8), benefiting all things, dwelling in the low place, formlessness, and non-fullness — are surveyed here across the modern, largely secular ethical traditions. The aim is not enumeration but *location*: by letting the doctrines argue against one another over each virtue, the paper's own position is forced into view. Each virtue proves to be, in different doctrines, both affirmed and opposed; the survey's product is a set of standing challenges (§2.2.6), handed forward to the dialectical core (§2.5) and, in one case, answered in place. Throughout, the reading is structural rather than cultivational, for the reasons set out at the close (§2.2.5): the water-virtues are treated as properties of how a relation is arranged, not as feats of an exceptional character.

2.2.1 Political economy and the scale of distribution

We begin with the traditions that read a relation not as a meeting of characters but as a circulation of value, because they are the ones that can give the first water-virtue — benefiting without contending — a body that owes nothing to self-cultivation. To benefit the ten thousand things and yet not contend (*Daodejing*, ch. 8) sounds, in the moralist’s ear, like a counsel of generosity: give freely, claim nothing. Read through political economy it becomes something sharper and less personal — a claim about the *form* of a productive relation, true or false of a structure regardless of the magnanimity of anyone inside it.

Political-economic ethics

The decisive reframing is to hear “benefiting yet not contending” as the description of a *non-exploitative* relation. On the Marxian analysis, exploitation has an exact mark that is independent of anyone’s intentions: value created by one party is appropriated by another, so that the surplus does not return to those whose activity produced it (Marx 1976). Against this mark, “benefiting the ten thousand things and not contending” names its negation — a relation in which what is generated flows back to the whole that generated it rather than being drawn off and held. The point of substituting this reading for the generous-character reading is that it relocates the good from the giver’s heart to the relation’s geometry. A relation can be exploitative while every party to it is kind, and non-exploitative while no one is especially generous; what settles the matter is where the surplus goes, not how it is felt. This is the first and most important gain of a structural reading: it makes the water-virtue a property a relation can have or lack, not a height a soul must climb to.

Two further traditions sharpen the same point from different sides. Sen’s capability approach lets us state what “benefiting” should mean without collapsing it into welfare: to benefit another is to widen the range of lives genuinely open to them — their capability set — and not merely to raise the level of some good they consume (Sen 1999). This matters because it rescues “benefiting the ten thousand things” from the utilitarian reading that would equate it with maximised satisfaction; one may raise another’s welfare while narrowing their freedom, and that is not the water-virtue but its counterfeit. To

benefit, in the sense the figure of water intends, is to nourish the other's own power to grow, not to administer a quantity of good to a passive recipient. Eglash's account of generative justice then supplies the return condition in a form already native to this series: value should cycle back to those whose generativity produced it, and the injustice of extraction is precisely the interruption of that return (Eglash 2016; Eglash 1999). On this reading "not contending" is not passivity but the refusal to interpose a claim that would divert the cycle — the refusal, in the language this series has used throughout, to convert circulating surplus into held stock.

The other water-virtue that political economy illuminates is dwelling in the low place. Read structurally, the low place is not a posture of humility but a *position in a division of value*: the systematically devalued site of a relation, the labour or the need that the prevailing accounting does not see. Feminist political economy has named this site with particular precision in the case of reproductive labour — the sustaining, repairing, attending work whose very invisibility is the condition of its exploitation (Federici 2004). To dwell where others disdain is then not to abase oneself but to direct one's attention and one's flow toward exactly the position the structure has discounted. We will give this its own development later (§2.4); here it is enough to register that the low place, like non-contention, is a structural coordinate before it is ever a virtue of temperament. Its connection to the rest of the series is direct: the devalued position is where the generative balance of Wanhong (2026a) fails, where static inequality has been mistaken for settled fact, and the water-virtue is the flow that moves to correct it.

Game-theoretic and economic ethics

If political economy supplies the water-virtue's content, game theory supplies its first and hardest test, and it is essential not to soften it. Stated as a disposition to cooperate without insisting on one's own claim, non-contention is, in a single encounter with a self-interested counterpart, simply the losing strategy: the one who does not contend is the one who is taken. In the one-shot prisoner's dilemma, unconditional cooperation is dominated; a flow that benefits all and contends for nothing is, against an appropriator, exploited to exhaustion. This is not a marginal objection but the precise point at which the generous-character reading collapses, and a structural reading must either answer it or concede that the water-virtue is a luxury available only where no one means harm.

The answer game theory itself supplies is that the verdict reverses once the encounter is not single but repeated, and the parties carry their histories. In the iterated setting, strategies that open with cooperation and are not exploitable — that return cooperation for cooperation but withdraw it from persistent defection — outperform unconditional appropriation over time, and cooperation becomes not a sacrifice but an equilibrium sustained by the shadow of the future (Axelrod 1984). What converts non-contention from folly to rationality is therefore a definite structure: repetition, the legibility of the other's past conduct, and the capacity to make a commitment the other can believe (Schelling 1960). This is a result of the first importance for the present paper, because it locates exactly what non-contention *requires* in order not to be naive — and what it requires is not a better character but a particular shape of relation, one in which acts are remembered and commitments can be made credible. That shape is the one this series has elsewhere called the non-binding vow: the betrothal structure whose whole work is to make a commitment credible without an external sword (Huang 2026b). We mark the dependence here and discharge it later (§2.5.2).

This yields the first of the standing challenges the survey will accumulate.

Challenge 1, the rationality of non-contention. Non-contention is rational, rather than self-defeating, only within a structure of repetition, reputation, and credible commitment. Absent such a structure it is dominated, and the water-virtue reduces to a disposition that survives only where it is not tested. Any ethics of non-contention therefore owes an account of the structure that makes it more than naivety.

The challenge is not answered by insisting that non-contention is noble; it is answered, if at all, by exhibiting the structure. We let it stand, and turn to the traditions of institutions and political philosophy, where the same demand returns in its sharpest form — the claim that absent an enforcing power, non-contention is not merely irrational but suicidal.

2.2.2 Political philosophy and the scale of institutions

Political economy located the water-virtues in the circulation of value; political philosophy asks the prior question of how a relation of many parties is ordered at all — by what claims, what recognitions, what powers. Here the water-virtues meet both their sharpest allies and their hardest opponent, and a structural reading must take the opposition as seriously as the support.

Political ethics: Rawls, Honneth, Pettit

It must be said at once that the first virtue, non-contention, stands in genuine tension with the dominant modern theory of justice, and the tension should not be smoothed over. For Rawls, justice is what free persons would agree to precisely by *pressing* their claims — advancing competing demands from behind a veil that strips them only of the knowledge of their own position, not of the disposition to claim (Rawls 1971). Justice on this account is the fair adjudication of contention, not its absence; a party who declined to press any claim would not be exhibiting a virtue but forfeiting their standing in the very procedure that secures fairness. This is a real objection to any ethics that would make non-contention foundational, and we register it rather than dissolve it: there are domains — the basic structure of a society, the distribution of primary goods — where the pressing of claims is not a failure of the water-virtue but the medium of justice itself, and where a premature non-contention would simply cede the field to those who do contend. The water-virtue is an ethics of intimate relation, and its scope is not automatically the scope of political justice; one of the paper’s later tasks (§2.8) is to ask how far the dyadic virtue can scale, and Rawls marks one limit it may not cross.

Within that limit, however, two further traditions convert what looked like mere yielding into something with structural teeth. Honneth’s theory of recognition gives the low place a precise content: the systematically misrecognised position — the party whose contribution, suffering, or standing the prevailing order fails to see (Honneth 1995). To dwell where others disdain is then to direct recognition toward exactly the site the order has withheld it from, and this is not self-abasement but a redistribution of recognition — an active correction of a moral injury, not a lowering of oneself beneath one’s due. Pettit’s republicanism gives the complementary reading of “benefiting yet not ruling.” Its

central good is non-domination: freedom not as the mere absence of interference but as the absence of any *capacity* for arbitrary interference, any standing power of one over another (Pettit 1997). “To benefit and not rule” — to generate without establishing *imperium* — is exactly the relational form of non-domination: a position that gives without thereby acquiring a standing power to dispose of the one it gives to. This is the most secular possible rendering of the water-virtue, and it shows that “not ruling” is not weakness but the deliberate refusal to convert benefaction into dominion.

Contractarianism: the hardest opponent

The sharpest challenge to the water-virtue comes not from the theorists of fair contention but from the contractarian tradition that begins with Hobbes, and it must be stated without mitigation, because everything the dialectical core later does depends on having let it stand at full force. In the state of nature — the condition of parties with no common power above them — to benefit all and contend for nothing is not merely the losing move it was for game theory; it is fatal. Where there is no assurance that others will forbear, the one who forbears unilaterally delivers themselves to those who do not, and the rational course is the anticipatory contention Hobbes calls the war of all against all (Hobbes 1996). Non-contention here is not a higher wisdom but an early death, and the figure of water seems to confirm rather than refute the charge: water does flow downhill, does yield, does take the lower place — and the lower place is precisely where, on the Hobbesian picture, one is overrun.

This pushes the rationality challenge of Group A to its extreme, and we issue it as a distinct, graver challenge, because the structure it demands is correspondingly stronger.

Challenge 1', the survival of non-contention. Absent a power that makes others' forbearance credible, non-contention is not merely irrational but self-destroying: the one who does not contend is not exploited at the margin but eliminated. An ethics of the water-virtue therefore owes more than a reason why non-contention can be rational; it owes an account of how the water-virtue survives the absence of an external sword — how it can be safe to be like water without first erecting a Leviathan to protect those

who are.

We do not answer this here, and we resist the two easy answers. We do not say that intimate relations are simply not the state of nature, exempt by their warmth from the Hobbesian logic — for the betrayal of intimacy is among the surest routes to exactly the predation Hobbes describes, and an ethics that assumed good faith would be no ethics for the cases that test it. Nor do we erect the sword: the entire burden of this series’ treatment of the non-binding vow (Huang 2026b) is that intimacy’s commitments are precisely those that hold *without* an external enforcer, so that purchasing the water-virtue’s safety with a Leviathan would forfeit what makes it the water-virtue. The challenge is therefore real and unpaid, and we carry it to the dialectical core (§2.5.2), where the answer will turn out not to be the abolition of the danger but the shaping of an ineliminable asymmetry — the recognition, drawn from the formal companion (Huang 2026a), that the water-virtue never required a world without power, only a power whose surplus is returned rather than retained.

Commons governance: Ostrom

Between the theorists of contention and the theorist of the sword sits a body of work that answers both at the scale where the water-virtue most naturally lives — not the dyad and not the state, but the shared resource held in common. Ostrom’s study of common-pool resources showed, against the orthodoxy that a shared resource must be either privatised or policed from above, that communities sustainably govern shared waters, fisheries, and pastures through institutions of their own making: graduated commitments, mutual monitoring, locally adapted rules, and conflict-resolution that no external authority imposes (Ostrom 1990). The example is not incidental to our figure: among Ostrom’s central cases are literal watercourses — irrigation systems whose users, over centuries, evolved the arrangements by which water benefits all of them and is contended for by none to the point of ruin. This matters to the present paper in two ways. First, it shows that “benefiting all and not contending” can be the stable property of an *institution*, not a disposition of individuals — the structural reading vindicated at the scale of the many. Second, it gives

the paper’s eventual move from the dyad to the watershed (§2.8) a genuine theory of governance rather than a metaphor: when we ask how the resonance of two can scale to a relational commons, Ostrom’s design principles are the form the answer must take, and her irrigation communities are the proof that the water-virtue, institutionally embodied, is neither naive nor utopian. We mark the connection here and develop it where the scaling question is properly joined.

2.2.3 Relational ontology, the many, and the ecological scale

The traditions gathered so far read the water-virtues at the scale of two parties or of an institution. A third group reads them at the scale where water is no longer a figure but the thing itself — the scale of the living whole, the basin, the web of mutual dependence — and it is here that “benefiting all things” sheds the last of its sentimental sound and becomes a claim about how a self stands to the world that sustains it.

Environmental and ecological ethics

Leopold’s land ethic performs, for the relation between a person and the living community, exactly the enlargement the water-virtue asks. Its single precept — that a thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community, and wrong when it tends otherwise — extends the boundary of moral concern from persons to the whole of which persons are a part, so that the community itself, not any member, becomes the unit benefited (Leopold 1949). This is “benefiting all things” stated as a structural obligation rather than a tender feeling: the good is what returns to the integrity of the whole, the bad is what draws the whole down for the gain of a part, and no appeal to anyone’s character is needed to tell them apart. Naess’s deep ecology sharpens the ontological point in a way that touches this series at its root. Against a shallow ecology that protects nature for the sake of human use, deep ecology holds that the self is not a bounded ego set over against its environment but is constituted by its relations to the wider field of life — a relational self whose flourishing is not separable from the flourishing of what it is related to (Naess 1973). This is, in the vocabulary of the founding text of the present series, the generative relational self (Huang 2025a): the individual as a knot of relation rather than a premise standing prior to it. The convergence is not decorative. It shows that “benefiting all things” and “not contending” are not demands laid upon a self

from outside, against its interest, but expressions of what such a self already is: a being whose own good is bound up with the good of the field it belongs to, so that to benefit that field is not self-sacrifice but self-continuation. Callicott's systematic defence of the land ethic against the charge of a tyrannical holism — his insistence that obligations to the whole are nested with, not destructive of, obligations to individuals — supplies the qualification the water-virtue will also need (Callicott 1989): that benefiting the whole must not become a licence to dissolve the particular, a caution we will meet again, in intimate form, as the danger of self-effacement (§2.5.1).

Confucian ethics, read politically rather than as self-cultivation

Confucianism is the tradition most easily misread, for our purposes, as a discipline of self-cultivation — the perfection of the self through ritual and the overcoming of the self's partiality. Read that way it would belong with the contemplative traditions we set aside (§2.2.5). We read it instead for two of its structural doctrines, which give the water-virtue something the Daoist source conspicuously lacks: a graded order. The first is the graded extension of *ren*, benevolence: the Confucian, against the Mohist doctrine of impartial concern for all alike, holds that care properly radiates outward in degrees — from kin, to the people, to the things of the world — so that to benefit all is not to benefit all *equally* but to benefit each according to the concrete relation one stands in to them (Confucius 1998; Mencius 2003). This is a genuine correction to “benefiting all things,” which in its Daoist statement can drift toward an undifferentiated levelling that, applied to intimacy, would be absurd: one does not stand to a stranger as to a spouse, and a love that benefited all alike would benefit no one as a beloved. The graded reading gives the water-virtue a *structured* scale, an intra-Eastern tension that keeps benefiting all things from collapsing into a sentiment that honours everyone and binds to no one. The second doctrine is *quan*, the weighing of the exigent against the canonical — the recognition that the standing rule must sometimes be set aside for the situation, not by abandoning principle but by a higher fidelity to it (Tu 1985). This is the Confucian form of “lawful yet without fixed form,” and it anticipates exactly the Kantian imperfect duty we will use to answer the charge that formlessness is lawlessness (§2.2.4): a norm that genuinely binds while leaving the form of its fulfilment to judgment. Confucianism, read for its structure rather than its disciplines, thus contributes the gradation and the situational

judgment that the bare figure of water does not itself supply.

Ubuntu relational ethics

The southern African ethic of Ubuntu states the relational ontology with a directness the other traditions approach only by argument: a person is a person through other persons — one’s very humanity is constituted in and by relation, not possessed prior to it (Metz 2011; Mbiti 1970). Two of the water-virtues receive, in this light, a reading that removes the last trace of self-abnegation from them. Dwelling in the low place is not a descent beneath one’s worth but an acknowledgement of a standing fact, that one’s personhood is owed to the relations one is held in; there is no height to descend from, since the self was never the self-standing thing the objection presupposes. And benefiting others is not a transfer from a full self to an empty one but the maintenance of the relational fabric in which both parties are constituted — so that to benefit the other is, quite literally and not metaphorically, to sustain the conditions of one’s own personhood. Ubuntu thus rejoins, from an independent tradition, the conclusion deep ecology reached: that the water-virtues are not sacrifices demanded against the self’s interest but expressions of a self that is relational through and through. We note the convergence with the generative relational lineage of this series, to which Ubuntu and Eglash’s generative justice both belong, and carry forward its lesson — that the appearance of self-sacrifice in the water-virtues is an artefact of the entity-first picture of the self that a relational ontology has already abandoned.

2.2.4 Subject, duty, and the meta-ethical layer

The remaining traditions do not enlarge the scale of the water-virtues but probe their interior: whether a formless good can be a law at all, what it does to the subject who practises it, and whether “the water-good” is the sort of thing that can be true. Two of the survey’s five challenges are joined here, and one of them is answered in place.

Kantian ethics: the high ground

Kant is the natural adversary of an ethics of water, and confronting him squarely yields the survey’s one outright victory rather than a deferral. The objection writes itself:

morality, for Kant, is law, and a law must have form — it must be a maxim one can will as a universal law, the same for all rational agents in like case (Kant 1998). “Take the shape of the vessel,” “flow wherever the ground leads,” “have no fixed form”: these seem the very negation of a moral law, a counsel to do whatever the situation invites, which is precisely what the categorical imperative was built to rule out. If the water-virtue is formlessness, then by Kant’s lights it is not a lower kind of morality but the absence of morality, and the charge — Challenge 3, that formlessness is lawlessness — is the most principled of all the objections the survey collects.

The answer is to deny the premise that the water-virtue is formless, using a distinction internal to Kant’s own system. Kant divides duties into perfect and imperfect (Kant 1996). A perfect duty fixes the act completely: it specifies exactly what must be done or omitted, and admits no latitude — the duty not to make a lying promise leaves nothing to discretion. An imperfect duty binds no less stringently as to *whether* one must act, but leaves open the *form* of the action: the duty of beneficence commands that one make others’ ends one’s own and help where one can, but it does not, and cannot, prescribe whom to help, when, by what means, or how much. It is a duty with a determinate ground and an indeterminate form — lawful, universalisable, genuinely binding, yet without a fixed shape. This is exactly the structure of the water-virtue. “Benefit all things” is not the lawless “do whatever the moment suggests”; it is the imperfect duty of beneficence, which obligates absolutely as to its end — one must benefit, one may not be indifferent — while leaving the channel of benefit to be found in the particular case, as water finds its course without thereby being formless. The formlessness that looked like lawlessness is revealed as latitude, and latitude is not the absence of law but a recognised mode of it. We have thus answered Challenge 3 with Kant’s own resources, and without recourse to moral particularism — without, that is, abandoning universal principle for the doctrine that the situation alone dictates the right. The water-virtue keeps the principle and locates its formlessness exactly where Kant himself locates the open form of an imperfect duty. The same move secures the reading of “benefit yet do not rule” as a case of the formula of humanity: to benefit another without ruling them is to treat them as an end and never merely as a means, the benefaction that does not convert the beneficiary into an instrument of the benefactor’s will.

Psychoanalysis: the danger of taking the receiver's shape

Psychoanalysis contributes both a vindication and the survey's gravest warning, and the warning is what makes the dialectical core necessary. On the side of vindication, the Lacanian account of the imaginary lets us read non-contention not as moral restraint but as a release from a specific trap: the rivalrous identification of the imaginary register, in which the ego is constituted through a mirroring competition with its counterpart, so that to contend is to remain captured in that specular rivalry (Lacan 2006). Non-contention, so read, is not the suppression of a desire to win but the dissolution of the very stage on which winning and losing are defined — a withdrawal from the imaginary's zero-sum logic rather than a sacrifice within it. But the same framework names, with a precision no other tradition matches, the danger that the water-virtue courts. "Taking the shape of the vessel" is, read through the clinic, perilously close to the subject's self-erasure: becoming the shape the desiring Other wants, dissolving one's own desire into the demand of the other, which Lacanian ethics marks as the one thing not to be done — *céder sur son désir*, to give way on one's desire. The water that takes any vessel's shape may be the water-virtue; it may equally be the subject who has surrendered its desire and become a mere function of another's, and nothing in the figure of water, by itself, tells the two apart. This is Challenge 2 in its sharpest form, and we hand it forward with that sharpness intact (§2.5.1): an ethics of formlessness that cannot distinguish the generous fluidity of the water-virtue from the pathological fluidity of the effaced subject has not yet earned the name of an ethics. Klein supplies, alongside the warning, a corrective to one misreading of "benefiting": her account of reparation shows that the impulse to make good the damage one has done need not take the form of self-punishing sacrifice, the draining of the self to atone, but can be the creative transformation of the destructive impulse into something that builds (Klein 1937). Benefiting, on this reading, is sublimation rather than self-immolation — which is precisely the distinction the dialectical core must secure in general.

Moral realism and the truth of the water-good

A final, meta-ethical question must be settled, because the formal translation of the later sections depends on its answer. When we say that a relation has the water-good, or lacks it, are we describing a property the relation possesses independently of our attitude

toward it, or merely projecting an approval that has no further truth-condition? If the latter, then the holonomy criterion the formal companion supplies (§2.9) would be, at best, a precise encoding of a preference, and its air of objectivity a confusion. We therefore declare for a position, while noting it is a declaration the survey motivates rather than proves: a *thin, relational moral realism*. The water-good is a structural property of the flow of value, power, and desire in a relation — the sign and geometry of its circulating surplus — and this property obtains, or fails to obtain, as a matter of how the relation is structured, not as a matter of how anyone feels about it (Railton 1986). The realism is “thin” because it makes no claim that the good is a non-natural property or a feature of the universe apart from relations; it is *relational* because the property it ascribes is precisely a property of relations, not of isolated states or acts. This is the natural meta-ethics for the structural reading announced at the outset (§2.1.2): if the water-good is a matter of the relation’s geometry rather than the agent’s cultivation, then it is as objective, and as discoverable, as that geometry — and a formal model of that geometry is not an encoding of preference but a description of where the good, so understood, lies. It is this thin relational realism that licenses the translation layer to read the theorems of the companion paper as claims about the good, and not merely as claims about a formalism.

2.2.5 The cultivational reading set aside, and a methodological specimen

It remains to say explicitly what the survey has been steering around. There is a large and venerable body of thought in which the water-virtues are read as disciplines of the self: the emptying of self in Christian kenosis, the overcoming of selfish partiality in the Confucian *keji*, the dissolution of self-grasping in Buddhist practice, the released equanimity of Heidegger’s *Gelassenheit* (Heidegger 1962), the unselfing toward a quasi-divine condition that runs through the contemplative traditions east and west (Nishida 1990). On these readings “not contending,” “dwelling below,” and “emptying” are exercises by which an exceptional soul climbs, against the grain of its self-interest, toward goodness. We have not drawn on them as the paper’s frame, and the omission is deliberate rather than dismissive. Three reasons govern it. First, a cultivational reading locates the good in the agent’s achieved interior, and so cannot distinguish, at the level of the relation, a generative descent from a dominative or a self-erasing one — the very distinction the

paper exists to draw (§2.5); two relations may issue from equally disciplined souls and differ entirely in their geometry. Second, an ethics resting on exceptional attainment cannot be an ethics of ordinary intimate life, which is lived by people who are not saints and whose relations must be assessable without first assessing the sanctity of the partners. Third, and most pointedly, the cultivational reading is the one that makes the water-virtue sound like a counsel of self-abnegation, and it is exactly that sound the structural reading was introduced to silence: once the self is understood relationally (§2.2.3, §2.2.3), the appearance of self-sacrifice dissolves, and with it the principal reason to read the virtues as ascetic feats.

That said, the contemplative material affords one positive service, as a specimen of the operation the whole survey performs. Stoicism is the instructive case, because it looks cultivational and is, at its core, structural. Its central counsels — *amor fati*, the love of one's fate; the acceptance of what is not up to us; the conforming of the will to the rational order of the whole — can be heard as a spiritual discipline of resignation (Aurelius 2002; Epicurus 1994). But their content is a claim about structure: that there is a determinate boundary between what is and is not within one's power, and that wisdom is the accurate tracking of that boundary, not a feat of self-overcoming. “Taking the shape of the vessel” read in the Stoic key is not a yielding of the self but a conforming to necessity — bending where the structure of the situation genuinely admits no other course, and not bending where it does. This is exactly the de-cultivational reading the paper applies throughout: take a virtue that the tradition delivers as an inner discipline, and recover the structural claim inside it — here, that the water-virtue's yielding is calibrated to the real joints of the situation, not an indiscriminate softness. Stoicism thus serves less as a source than as a worked example of how a seemingly contemplative doctrine is to be read for its structure, and we record it in that role.

2.2.6 Summary: five challenges, and the home of the unanswered

The survey set the water-virtues against the secular ethical traditions and let the agreements and the conflicts stand without forcing a synthesis. What it yields is not a doctrine but a debt-sheet of five standing challenges, each routed to the place where the paper discharges it.

Challenge 1 (non-contention is irrational). From game theory: non-contention is dominated except within a structure of repetition, reputation, and credible commitment. Routed to the survival cluster of the dialectical core (§2.5.2).

Challenge 1' (non-contention is suicidal). From Hobbes: absent an enforcing power, the non-contender is not exploited but eliminated. The graver form of the same demand, routed to the same place (§2.5.2), where it is answered not by erecting a sword but by the shaping of an ineliminable asymmetry.

Challenge 2 (taking-the-shape dissolves the subject). From feminism and psychoanalysis: formless yielding may be the water-virtue or the self-erasure of a subject who has given way on its desire, and the figure of water does not distinguish them. Routed to the rigid-lower-bound cluster (§2.5.1).

Challenge 2' (dwelling-below is slave morality). From Nietzsche, anticipated in the political economy of the low place (§2.4) and deferred: the descent the water-virtue praises may be the resentment-bred valorisation of weakness. Routed to the same cluster (§2.5.1), where it is answered by the decomposition that separates a generative descent from a slavish one.

Challenge 3 (formlessness is lawlessness). From Kant — and already answered, in place (§2.2.4), by reading the water-good as an imperfect duty: lawful in its ground, open in its form. It is collected here only for completeness; the dialectical core inherits the other four.

Two of the five thus belong to the cluster of survival (1, 1') and two to the cluster of the rigid lower bound (2, 2''); the fifth is discharged. But the survey closes by naming something the challenges, and indeed the whole apparatus of criteria, structurally cannot reach. Every tradition canvassed argues about the *skeleton* of the water-good — the structural conditions under which a relation's circulation is generative rather than extractive, the criterion that sorts the good descent from the bad. None of them, and no structural criterion whatever, can reach the *flesh*: the fact that this generative relation is *this* one, with *this* irreplaceable other, and not merely a well-formed instance of the generative type. The doctrines settle the type; the token — the non-substitutable particularity in which the whole meaning of an intimate relation finally resides — falls outside their reach

by construction, and will be shown (§2.9.5) to fall there for an exact formal reason. We carry forward, then, not only the four live challenges but this division of labour: the survey has mapped the skeleton, and marked the place where the flesh begins.

2.3. The Generativity of Non-Contention

The survey left non-contention under a cloud: rational only within a structure (Challenge 1), perhaps suicidal without one (Challenge 1'). Those challenges concern whether one can *afford* to be non-contending, and they wait for the dialectical core. This section asks the prior, constructive question they presuppose — what non-contention positively *is*, and why it should be thought generative at all rather than merely abstemious. Here the work is interpretation, not construction, because the formal companion to this series has already proved the result the ethics needs. In the language of that paper, whatever in a relation reduces to a single scalar ordering — more or less, higher or lower, the form taken by possession, by ranking, by equivalent exchange — contributes nothing to the circulating surplus a relation can generate; only the non-possessive, circulating part generates anything at all (Huang 2026a). The full statement and its conditions are deferred to the translation layer (§2.9.1); what the ethics takes from it here is a single load-bearing claim, that contention and generation are not merely in tension but formally disjoint — the part of a relation given over to contending is exactly the part that generates no surplus.

2.3.1 Generating yet not possessing

The Daodejing's phrase for this is older than the formalism and says the same thing: to generate yet not possess, to act yet not presume, to foster yet not rule (ch. 51). The companion paper gives the first clause an exact body — the surplus of a generative relation is a holonomy, a value produced by the whole circuit and present at no point within it, and therefore strictly without a possessor: there is nowhere for it to be held (Huang 2026a). The ethical content of this is not a recommendation to be unpossessive, as though possessiveness were a vice one might, with effort, forgo. It is the report of a structural fact: the generative surplus of a relation *cannot* be possessed, because the act of converting it into something held — a stock, a credit, a claim — is the very

operation that reduces it to a scalar and so annihilates it as surplus. To grasp at what a generative relation produces is not to keep it but to stop its production; in the instant of appropriation, generation halts. This is why the first water-virtue is non-contention and not, say, generosity. Generosity is the giving away of something one could have kept; non-contention is the recognition that what a generative relation makes was never of the kind that could be kept, so that contending for it is not greedy but *incoherent* — an attempt to hold what exists only in not being held. The distinction between static equality and generative balance drawn earlier in this series (Wanhong 2026a) is the same distinction seen from the side of distribution: the contention that insists on equal shares treats the relation's value as a stock to be divided, and a stock is exactly what the generative part of the value is not.

2.3.2 Non-contention in intimacy

Brought down to the conduct of an actual intimate relation, non-contention has a specific and recognisable shape, and it is not the avoidance of disagreement. Two people who never argued might be contending constantly — over whose preferences set the terms, whose account of events stands, whose growth the relation is organised around — while two who argue often might contend for none of these. The contention that matters is the attempt to make the relation's surplus into something one party holds: to convert care given into a debt owed, support offered into a claim on compliance, the shared life into a possession scored and defended. Its sharpest intimate form is the contention over the other's becoming. To insist that the partner grow in the direction one prefers, to receive their self-revision as a deviation to be corrected, to love the version of them one is cultivating rather than the one in front of one — this is contention in the precise sense, the attempt to possess and direct the very generativity that the relation exists to host. Non-contention here is the refusal of exactly that: letting the other grow after their own kind, neither shaping nor correcting nor appropriating their becoming. We develop this as a practice in its own right (§2.7.4), and locate, in the formal layer, the exact respect in which the beloved's particularity exceeds anything one could possess (§2.9.5). The point to fix here is only that non-contention is not passivity before the other but the active withholding of the grasp that would convert a living generativity into a held thing — and so kill it.

2.3.3 Non-contention as non-domination

This gives the republican reading of the survey (§2.2.2) its full force. To benefit and not rule — to generate without establishing *imperium* — is now seen to be not a second, independent virtue laid alongside non-contention but its political face (Pettit 1997). The one who contends for the relation’s surplus, who converts what is given into a standing claim, thereby acquires a power over the other: the power that a creditor has over a debtor, that the keeper of the account has over the one accounted. Non-contention, by declining that conversion, declines the power it would confer — it is the refusal to acquire domination through benefaction, the keeping of generosity free of the imperium it could so easily be made to purchase. Eglash’s condition of generative justice states the same thing as a flow (Eglash 2016): value returns to those whose activity produced it, and the non-contender is the one who does not interrupt that return by interposing a claim. What remains unsettled is whether such a stance can survive contact with a partner, or a world, that does contend — whether non-domination is safe, or merely noble. That is the unpaid debt of Challenges 1 and 1’, and the dialectical core (§2.5.2) takes it up by showing that the water-virtue never required a relation without power, only one whose power is generative rather than dominative: a distinction that, as the next sections will show, the figure of water is precisely equipped to draw.

2.4. The Political Economy of the Lowly Place

The second water-virtue is the hardest to keep from sentimentality and the hardest to keep from suspicion. “The highest good dwells in the places all others disdain” (ch. 8): heard warmly, it is a counsel of humility; heard coldly, it is the valorisation of lowliness that Nietzsche taught us to distrust. The structural reading takes a third path. It reads the low place first as a *position* — a coordinate in the distribution of value within a relation — and only then asks what it is to dwell there well. On this reading the low place is not a measure of one’s own worth but a feature of the relational field: the site the prevailing accounting discounts, the contribution it fails to register, the need it finds unbecoming. To locate the virtue, one must first locate the place.

2.4.1 Dwelling where others disdain

What makes a place low, structurally, is that the relation's operative valuation passes it over. This series has met the phenomenon in several registers. In the political economy of intimacy it is the position whose generative balance has failed — where contribution is made but not returned, where the flow has been allowed to run one way until the imbalance looks like the nature of things rather than a fact to be corrected (Wanhong 2026a). Feminist political economy names its paradigm case: reproductive labour, the sustaining and repairing and attending work whose very condition of exploitation is that it is not seen as work at all, that its invisibility is precisely what allows it to be drawn on without return (Federici 2004). Honneth's theory of recognition gives the general form (Honneth 1995): the low place is the site of misrecognition, the party or the aspect of a party that the relation's standing order of esteem fails to acknowledge. In each register the structure is the same — the low place is where value is produced or borne and not registered — and in each, “dwelling there” acquires a meaning that owes nothing to self-abasement. To dwell where others disdain is to direct one's attention, and the relation's flow, toward exactly the position the prevailing valuation has discounted: to see the unseen contribution, to return to it what the imbalance withheld, to recognise what the order of esteem passed over. It is, in the vocabulary of redistribution this series has developed (Huang 2026c), the active movement of value toward its point of deficit rather than its point of accumulation — and a movement toward a deficit is not a lowering of oneself but a correction of the field.

2.4.2 Dwelling-below in intimacy

In an intimate relation the low place has a face, and dwelling there is among the most demanding things the relation asks. The low place is the partner's least defended ground: the illness that is not heroic but merely diminishing, the failure that confers no dignity, the shame that has no redemptive arc, the primal wound that does not resolve, the need that is unbecoming to have. These are the places others disdain — including, often, the one who has them, who would rather they not be seen. To dwell there is to draw near to exactly what the partner would hide, and the crucial mark of the water-virtue is that this drawing-near is not, in the first place, an attempt to repair. The instinct to fix is itself frequently a way of *not* dwelling: it treats the low place as a problem to be removed

so that one need not stay in it, and in doing so it can communicate that the place, and the person in it, are tolerable only on the way out. The water-virtue dwells *beside*. It is the doing-nothing companionship this series has already described — the being-with that does not require the situation to become other than it is in order to be shared (Wanhong 2026b) — and it is continuous with what was called, in the analysis of the non-binding vow, epistemic hospitality: the making of room for the other’s reality, including the parts of it that the prevailing order, or one’s own preference, would rather not admit (Huang 2026b). Dwelling-below, so understood, is a willingness before it is a technique; it is the readiness to be present at the other’s lowest ground without the precondition that the ground be raised. A relation in which each can be met at their least defended place, and not only at their presentable height, has a depth that no exchange of presentable goods can supply — and it has it because someone was willing to go down.

2.4.3 The deferred challenge

It is exactly here that the gravest suspicion of the water-virtue must be admitted, and admitted at full strength, because the structural reading has so far only postponed it. Nietzsche’s genealogy teaches us to ask, of any ethics that praises lowliness, whether the praise is not the ressentiment of the weak dressing incapacity as virtue — whether “dwelling below” is chosen strength or rationalised defeat, the slave’s revaluation by which what one cannot escape is renamed as what one nobly elects. The challenge has real bite for the water-virtue, and the figure of water seems at first to deepen rather than dispel it, since water’s descent is not chosen but compelled: it goes down because it must, and an ethics modelled on a thing that has no choice but to sink looks like the very naturalisation of submission Nietzsche exposed. We do not answer the challenge here, and we do not soften it; an honest ethics of the low place must be able to tell its reader when dwelling-below has become the dignifying of a submission that should instead be refused. What allows the answer, when it comes, is precisely that water’s descent is not all of one kind — that the same figure contains both the yielding that nourishes and the force that wears through stone and breaches the dyke. The dialectical core (§2.5.1) will draw that distinction with the decomposition the formal companion supplies (§2.9.2): a descent that generates, returning what it gathers to the field, is separated there, and exactly, from a descent that merely submits and is drawn off as fuel. Until that distinction

is in hand, dwelling-below stands accused, and rightly, of being indistinguishable from slavishness — the charge it is the business of the next section to answer.

2.5. The Dialectical Core: Water-Good, Not Formlessness

Everything so far has built a debt. The survey issued five challenges; the constructive sections (§2.3, §2.4) developed non-contention and the low place while leaving their gravest objections explicitly unpaid. Four challenges now stand against the water-virtue: that non-contention is irrational (1) or suicidal (1'), and that dwelling-below and taking-the-vessel's-shape are self-dissolution (2) or slave morality (2''). The fifth, the Kantian charge of lawlessness, was discharged in place (§2.2.4). This section answers the remaining four, and it answers them from a single thesis, stated now and defended through the rest of the section: that the water-virtue is not formlessness but *water's good* — a chosen good with an edge in it. The same water that takes the shape of any vessel is the water that wears through stone and breaches the dyke. An ethics that heard only the yielding and not the edge would deserve every one of the four objections; the work of the dialectical core is to show that the figure, read whole, contains exactly the resources to answer them, and to locate those resources precisely, in two clusters.

2.5.1 First cluster: the rigid lower bound

The two challenges of self-dissolution (2) and slave morality (2'') are, at bottom, one challenge: that the water-virtue is softness without hardness, yielding with no point at which it stops. The feminist and psychoanalytic objection says this yielding dissolves the subject — that taking the vessel's shape becomes the effacement of one who has given way on her own desire (Lacan 2006), the unpaid sustaining labour that is drawn on without return (Federici 2004). The Nietzschean objection says the yielding dignifies a defeat — that dwelling-below renames a submission one could not avoid as a virtue one nobly elects. Both are answered by denying that the water-virtue is yielding without bound. Water is the softest of things and yet it is what overcomes the hardest; it takes every shape and yet it cuts the canyon and bursts the levee. The softness is real — the water-virtue does take the shape of the vessel, does meet the other where they are, does go down — but it is bounded below by a hardness that is not its contrary but its other face. This series

has named that hardness once already, in a line written for it: that water gathered into a tide can breach the bank. The rigid lower bound is the point past which yielding is no longer the water-virtue but its collapse: where to take the vessel's shape would be to lose one's own, where to dwell below would be to be drawn off as fuel.

The figure alone would leave this as image; the formal companion makes it exact, and the exactness is what converts an evocation into an answer. There is a decomposition — standard in the mathematics of fields, applied in the companion paper to the force that biases a relation's flow — that splits any such force uniquely into two parts: a gradient part, which points always downhill along a single scalar ordering and generates no circulation whatever, and a solenoidal part, which circulates and is the sole source of generated surplus (Huang 2026a). The full statement belongs to the translation layer (§2.9.2); what the ethics needs is the distinction it draws. A descent can be of either kind. A descent that is pure gradient — sliding down a ranking, taking the lower position in a fixed order of dominance — generates nothing; it is motion without circulation, the flow of the dominated toward the bottom of a scale, and it is exactly this that the slave-morality charge correctly identifies and the self-dissolution charge correctly fears. A descent that is solenoidal — going down in a way that returns what it gathers to the field, that circulates rather than merely sinks — generates surplus, and is the water-virtue proper. The two are not told apart by how low they go or how much they yield; they are told apart by whether the going-down circulates or merely descends. This is the rigid lower bound made precise: the water-virtue requires that the descent be solenoidal, and a descent that has become pure gradient — that has ceased to return anything, that sinks under a dominance it no longer transforms — has fallen below the bound and is no longer the good of water but its failure. To the feminist and the psychoanalyst the answer is therefore not “yield less” but “the yielding that dissolves you is the gradient yielding, and the water-virtue never required it”; the boundary that refuses to be drained as fuel, that declines to give way on its desire, is not a departure from the water-virtue but its lower bound, the hardness without which the softness is not water's good but water's mere formlessness. To Nietzsche the answer is the same distinction in his own coin: the descent he diagnoses as slavish is the gradient descent, the sinking of the weak to the bottom of a scale they cannot alter; the water-virtue's descent is the other kind, the going-down that breaches and remakes the scale, which is not the resentment of the

powerless but a form of strength his own genealogy gives him no name to dismiss.

2.5.2 Second cluster: the survival condition

The remaining two challenges (1 and 1') concern not the integrity of the water-virtue but its viability: granting that non-contention is coherent and dwelling-below can be generative, can one survive practising them against a partner, or a world, that contends? Hobbes's form of the question is the sharp one — absent an enforcing power, is the non-contender not simply eliminated? The temptation is to answer by securing the water-virtue with a sword, erecting the power that would make others' forbearance safe to reciprocate. This series has refused that answer from the start, because the commitments proper to intimacy are exactly those that hold without an external enforcer (Huang 2026b), and a water-virtue made safe by a Leviathan would have purchased its safety by becoming something else. The genuine answer is more surprising and is supplied by the formal companion: the water-virtue never demanded the abolition of power in the first place (Huang 2026a). The companion proves that power — understood as the order-dependence of a relation, the fact that who acts first and from where changes what results — is not an avoidable contamination of a generative relation but a structural condition of there being a determinate shared state at all; a relation generative enough to host two distinct beings necessarily carries asymmetry, and the dream of a relation with subjects, generativity, and no power at all is not merely hard but structurally impossible. The full argument, a trilemma, is deferred (§2.9.4); its consequence for the survival challenge is immediate and reframes the whole question. The water-virtue was never the renunciation of power, and so the Hobbesian demand — secure yourself by acquiring power, or be destroyed — rests on a false alternative. Power is already present in any generative relation; the only question is its geometry. There is power whose asymmetry returns its surplus to the one it acts upon, the upstream position that serves the downstream's own growth — the teacher, the protector, the one who nurtures — and there is power whose asymmetry retains its surplus, fixing the other in dependence. The companion calls these power-to and power-over, and shows them to be the same structural asymmetry differing only in the sign and circulation of what it generates: the good cycle and the bad. The water-virtue's answer to Hobbes is therefore not “do not contend, and hope to survive,” but “the asymmetry you would acquire by contending is already there; the choice was

never between power and powerlessness but between the power that returns and the power that retains.” Non-contention is the refusal not of power but of the retaining geometry — the refusal to convert the ineliminable asymmetry into domination — and it survives, not because it has disarmed, but because the generative use of asymmetry is not the weakness Hobbes supposed but a power of its own, the only power that does not consume the relation that bears it. The commitment structure of the non-binding vow (Huang 2026b) is where this shaping is institutionally borne: not a sword that enforces forbearance, but the form in which two parties make credible to each other that the asymmetry between them will be held to the returning kind.

2.5.3 Kant, already discharged

The fifth challenge requires only recollection. The charge that formlessness is lawlessness was answered within the survey itself (§2.2.4), by locating the water-virtue not in the absence of law but in the open form of an imperfect duty: a norm that binds absolutely as to its end — one must benefit, one may not be indifferent, one must not convert the asymmetry to domination — while leaving the channel of its fulfilment to be found, as water finds its course, in the particular case. The water-virtue is lawful in its ground and free in its form, and this is not a defect of law but a recognised mode of it. We note only that the two clusters above respect the same structure: the rigid lower bound and the returning geometry are the determinate ground, binding without exception; the shape that benefiting and dwelling-below take in a given relation is the open form, left to judgment. The edge in water’s good is the law; the fluidity is the latitude.

2.5.4 The good/bad criterion

The section’s thesis can now be stated as a criterion, and it is a single criterion answering all four live challenges at once, which is the strongest evidence that the thesis is right. A descent, a yielding, a non-contention is the water-virtue when it holds the rigid lower bound — when it circulates rather than merely sinks, returns rather than retains, keeps the boundary that refuses to be drained as fuel. It is the failure of the water-virtue, its counterfeit and its collapse, when it falls below that bound — when the yielding becomes pure gradient, sinking under a dominance it no longer transforms, giving way on its desire, drawn off without return. Self-dissolution and slave morality are the two names for falling

below the bound on the side of softness; domination is the name for the retaining geometry on the side of power; and the water-virtue is the narrow and demanding thing between them, the going-down that generates, the yielding that returns, the softness with the edge of water in it. The criterion is stated here in the vocabulary of the figure; its exact formal expression — as the sign and circulation of a holonomy, the solenoidal versus the gradient, the avoidance of the solidified fixed point — is the business of the translation layer (§2.9), to which the practice (§2.7) is the bridge.

2.6. Non-Fullness and Renewal

The third water-virtue is the most quietly demanding, because it asks something of a relation precisely when nothing is wrong with it. “To hold a thing brim-full is not so good as to stop in time” (ch. 9); “it is just because it is never full that it can wear out and be renewed” (ch. 15). The counsel is against completion — against the filling of a relation to the point where it is finished, settled, brought to a state from which the only motion is decline. Where non-contention concerns what one grasps and the low place concerns where one attends, non-fullness concerns when one *stops* — and the claim is that a relation kept deliberately unfilled, refused the satisfaction of being complete, is the one that can keep renewing itself, while the relation filled to the brim has nowhere to go but to spill or stagnate.

2.6.1 The ethics of the unfilled

Stated as an ethic, non-fullness is the refusal of two closures that masquerade as goods. The first is the closure of self-satisfaction: the relation that takes itself to have arrived, to have become what it was for, and so stops generating because it believes the work done. The second is the closure of completion-over-the-other: the taking of the other as fully known, read to the bottom, settled into a type. Against both, non-fullness keeps a deliberate remainder — leaves room, declines to fill the last of the space, holds the relation open at the very point where it could be sealed. There is a thin secular wisdom that has always known this. Socratic knowledge is knowledge of one’s ignorance, a refusal of the fullness of supposed completeness that keeps inquiry alive; the moment one is full of knowing, one has stopped learning, and the same holds of a person as of a subject.

Game theory supplies an unexpectedly exact corollary on the side of conflict: the strategy that drives its counterpart to the wall, that fills its advantage to the brim and leaves the other no room, destroys the repeated relation it depends on; the grim and total victory is the one that ends the game. The converse is the water-virtue's counsel — do not fill the advantage to the brim, do not press the other to the wall, leave the room that lets the relation continue. Non-fullness is, in this register, simply the recognition that in a relation meant to last, the unused remainder is not waste but the condition of continuance.

2.6.2 Non-fullness in intimacy

In intimacy the unfilled remainder has a precise and tender content: it is the room left for the other to be more, and other, than one has so far known. The temptation non-fullness resists is the temptation to complete one's knowledge of the partner — to settle who they are, to fix them in a character one has inferred, to meet today the person one met yesterday. This temptation wears the mask of intimacy itself; “I know you better than anyone” is offered, and often received, as the height of closeness. But knowledge held as complete is knowledge that has stopped, and a partner met as fully known is a partner denied the room to change. This series has argued at length that the other is, in principle, never exhausted — that happiness shared is hermeneutic, given as the continual interpretation of a meaning-world that does not bottom out, and that the resonance of two such worlds depends on each remaining inexhaustible to the other rather than being annexed and used up (Wanhong 2026b). Non-fullness is the ethical form of that ontological fact. To keep the relation unfilled is to keep meeting the partner as still-unfinished, to hold one's knowledge of them open to revision, to leave room for the self they have not yet become and the depth one has not yet reached. “Worn out and renewed” is, in intimacy, exactly this: a relation that does not seal its account of the other is one that can keep discovering them, and a relation that can keep discovering is one that does not exhaust its own generativity. The unfilled remainder is where tomorrow's intimacy comes from; to fill it — to know the other completely, to settle the relation entirely — is to spend the future for the sake of a present completeness, and to be left, once the knowing is complete, with nothing further to generate.

2.6.3 Non-fullness as the avoidance of solidification

The formal companion gives this its exact dynamical form, and the form is worth stating because it shows non-fullness to be not a mood but a structural condition. In the companion's dynamical layer, a generative relation is a circulating flow, and there is a definite way for such a flow to die: when the parameter governing whether the relation's accumulated history is forgotten or compounded tips toward compounding, a positive feedback locks the flow into a fixed channel, its circulation falls to zero, and the living, surplus-generating cycle collapses into a frozen, merely conservative one — a structure that still exists but no longer generates. The companion calls this solidification, and identifies it as the dynamical face of the bad cycle (Huang 2026a). Non-fullness is the ethical name for the maintenance of a relation away from that frozen fixed point. To fill a relation to completion — to settle it, to let its accumulated history harden into a fixed channel through which everything must now run — is solidification described from inside; the relation that “knows” itself and the other completely is the relation whose circulation has gone to zero, that no longer generates because it has frozen into what it already is. “Worn out and renewed” is the refusal of that freezing: the continual reopening of a flow that would otherwise set, the deliberate preservation of the remainder that keeps the channel from hardening. This subsumes, and makes precise, the criterion of the good cycle developed earlier in this series, where the good relation was distinguished by its structural refusal of closure — its accumulation of positive surplus along a path that does not return to its origin (Huang 2025b). Non-fullness is that refusal of closure stated as a virtue of conduct: the good cycle is the one that does not fill itself shut, and the water-virtue of non-fullness is the discipline of keeping it open. The full dynamical statement is given in the translation layer (§2.9.3); here it is enough that the counsel against brimming-full and the dynamics of solidification are one thing seen from two sides — the ethics of the unfilled and the physics of the flow that does not freeze.

2.7. The Practice of the Water-Virtue: Water-Good Conduct in Intimate Relations

An ethics that stopped at the criterion would have said what the water-good *is* without saying what it is to *do* it, and for an ethics of intimate relation that would be a failure of

nerve, since intimacy is lived in conduct before it is understood in theory. This section carries each water-virtue down into the practice of an actual relation. It is not, however, a manual of advice, and it is built to resist becoming one. Every practice below is derived as an applied corollary of a criterion already established, not offered as a tip; each is marked with its place in the formal scheme; and each is paired with the vice it most easily becomes — because a practice named only in its good form gives no power to tell itself from its counterfeit, and it is exactly the counterfeits, which wear the look of the virtue, that do the damage. The discipline throughout is threefold: name the good act, name its nearest counterfeit, and give the test that tells them apart. The section closes on the limit of all such telling (§2.7.6).

2.7.1 The practice of non-contention: giving without reclaiming command

The practice of non-contention is to support the partner's work, growth, and other attachments without converting that support into a claim. One gives — time, labour, encouragement, the yielding of one's own preference — and one does not book the giving as a debt the other now owes, nor let it accrue into a standing entitlement to their compliance. This is benefiting that does not reclaim command: the everyday form of generating yet not possessing (§2.3.1). In the formal scheme it is the solenoidal gift, the support that returns to the field of the relation rather than to a ledger held by the giver (Huang 2026a). Its counterfeit is controlling generosity: the same outward giving, recorded. “After all I have done for you” is its signature — the conversion of accumulated benefaction into leverage, the building of *imperium* out of gifts. The two are identical in their visible conduct and opposite in their structure; what distinguishes them is invisible from outside and decisive from within — whether the surplus given has been retained as a debt. The test is therefore not how much one gives but what one does with the giving afterward: does the support, once given, stay given, or is it held in reserve as a claim to be called in? A gift kept on the books was never the water-virtue; it was a loan in the costume of a gift.

2.7.2 The practice of dwelling-below: flowing to the other's low ground

The practice of dwelling-below is to move, of one's own accord, toward the partner's least defended ground — the illness that confers no dignity, the failure with no redemptive arc,

the shame, the primal wound, the unbecoming need — and to be present there without first requiring that the ground be raised. Its mark, established earlier (§2.4.2), is that it dwells beside rather than rushing to repair: the companionship that does not need the situation to become other than it is in order to share it (Wanhong 2026b), the epistemic hospitality that makes room for the other’s reality including the parts they would hide (Huang 2026b). In the formal scheme it is a flow directed toward the low-potential region, and required to be solenoidal — generative, returning — rather than gradient. Its counterfeit is the saviour’s descent: a going-down that is really a positioning-above, the rescuer who attends the other’s low place in order to occupy the elevated role of the one who rescues, and who therefore needs the other to remain in need. This is dwelling-below as pure gradient — it descends, but it generates nothing and returns nothing, fixing the other in the dependence from which the saviour draws his standing. The test is the one the formal companion’s distinction between power-to and power-over makes sharp: does the dwelling-below leave the other more able to stand, or more dependent on one’s standing-by? Care that needs to be needed is not the water-virtue; it is domination that has learned to look like tenderness.

2.7.3 The practice of non-fullness: leaving room, not seeing-through

The practice of non-fullness is to leave the partner room to be more, and other, than one has known — to hold one’s knowledge of them open, to meet today someone who may have changed since yesterday, to decline to settle them into a finished character. It is the refusal to complete one’s reading of the other (§2.6.2), grounded in the principle that the other is never exhausted (Wanhong 2026b). In the formal scheme it is the maintenance of the relation away from the solidified fixed point, the refusal to let accumulated history harden into a fixed channel (Huang 2026a). Its counterfeit is the cognitive domination that travels under “I know you best”: the use of one’s knowledge of the partner not to meet them but to fix them — to pre-empt their words, to predict their reactions back at them, to deny them the standing to become someone the prediction did not foresee. This is solidification wearing the mask of intimacy; it offers completeness of knowledge as closeness while using that completeness to freeze the other in place. The test is whether one’s knowing leaves the other free to change: does “I know you” open room for who they are becoming, or nail them to who they have been? Knowledge that forecloses the

other's revision is not intimacy's depth; it is the relation setting into the shape it will keep until it breaks.

2.7.4 The practice of not-ruling: not shaping the other's becoming

The practice of not-ruling is to let the partner grow after their own kind rather than bending them toward the shape one prefers — and its difficulty is that it can be hard to distinguish, from inside, from a genuine wish for the other's good. The distinction it requires is between helping the other become a better version of themselves and helping them become a version more to one's own liking. The first serves a growth whose direction is the other's own; the second annexes the other's becoming to one's preference and calls the annexation love. In the formal scheme this is the respect for what the companion paper locates as the flesh — the non-substitutable particularity of *this* person, which no specification of a preferred type can capture (Huang 2026a) — against the substitution of the skeleton, the conformity to a type, for the token actually loved. Its counterfeit is remaking love: the love whose real object is an ideal version of the partner, toward which the actual partner is treated as a draft to be corrected. The lover who remakes is contending over the other's becoming in the precise sense developed earlier (§2.3.2); he possesses by shaping. The test cuts to the root of what is loved: do you love him, or the version of him you are cultivating? A love directed at who the other ought to become has not yet met who the other is — and it is only the second that can be loved as a person rather than as a project.

2.7.5 The unifying criterion: every practice holds the rigid lower bound

The four practices share a single direction of failure, and naming it is what binds them into one ethic rather than four counsels. Each can collapse, on the side of softness, into self-dissolution: non-contention into a boundary-less self-emptying that gives everything and reserves no self; dwelling-below into a masochistic submission that takes the lowest place because it believes it deserves no other; non-fullness into the permitting of harm, the room-leaving that becomes a refusal to ever hold the other to account; not-ruling into an unprincipled indulgence that calls the abdication of all shaping a respect for the other's freedom. Each of these is the gradient collapse of its virtue — the yielding that has fallen below the rigid lower bound (§2.5.1). The unifying criterion of the practice is

therefore the one the dialectical core established: water-good conduct is not unconditional yielding but yielding that holds the bound — that circulates and returns, that keeps the boundary refusing to be drained as fuel. In the register of practice this is what water’s other face means. The same water that takes the vessel’s shape wears through stone and breaches the dyke; in conduct, this is the requirement that when a relation begins to draw one off as mere fuel — when the flow has become all one way, the surplus all retained on the other side, one’s own measure collapsing — the water-virtue calls not for further yielding but for the breach: for the force that wears through, or the flood that overruns the bank, or simply the departure of the water from a vessel that has become a trap. This is the decisive answer, at the level of lived practice, to the feminist challenge the survey raised (Huang 2025a): the water-virtue never asked anyone to remain in a relation that dissolves them. To stay and be drained is not the practice of the water-good; it is the practice fallen below its bound, and the bound itself requires that one wear through or break out. The softness has an edge, and the edge is for exactly the case where softness would otherwise become one’s ruin.

2.7.6 The limit of practice: the water-good cannot be made a procedure

A final honesty is owed, and it guards this section against the very thing it might be mistaken for. Nothing above is a checklist, and the tests offered are not algorithms that decide the cases for us. The formal companion gives the reason in exact form: it proves that a relational structure powerful enough to decide every case — to compute any distinction whatever — thereby loses the capacity to discriminate good circulation from bad, so that the very omnipotence one would want in a complete procedure is incompatible with the discriminating power a normative criterion requires (Huang 2026a). Read into the practice, this means there is no complete mechanical procedure for the water-good; a rule-set fine enough to settle every case in advance would, for that reason, have lost the ability to tell the water-virtue from its counterfeit. Each occasion must therefore be judged afresh, and judged in the flesh — in the non-substitutable particularity of *this* relation, which no general rule reaches, and which the formal scheme itself locates as the remainder no criterion can compute (§2.9.5, §2.9.6). The practice of the water-virtue thus avows its own incompleteness, and the avowal is not a weakness but a consequence: of a piece with the epistemic humility that has marked this work from its founding (Huang

2025a), it is the practical form of the recognition that the good of an intimate relation is not the kind of thing a procedure can contain. The tests above are not the substitutes for judgment but its instruments; they sharpen the question each occasion poses, and they leave the answering of it where it belongs — in the hands of the two who are in the relation, facing this case, which has never occurred before and will not recur.

2.8. Watershed: From the Dyad to the Basin

The water-virtue has been developed, so far, as an ethic of two. But water is not naturally a figure of the dyad; it is a figure of the basin, the watershed, the system of many flows that benefit and are benefited across a whole terrain. The phrase that anchors the paper says as much: water benefits the *ten thousand things*, not the one other. A question therefore presses — whether the water-virtue, worked out between two people, scales to the many: to the family, the community, the relational commons. This section opens the question and, deliberately, does not close it. The centre of gravity of this paper is the dyad, and the reasons for keeping it there are not timidity but fidelity to what has been shown; the scaling is real but its fidelity is uncertain, and the honest course is to mark the bridge and to send the crossing of it forward (§2.10.1) rather than to claim a passage the argument has not earned.

2.8.1 From two drops to a watercourse

The interface from which scaling would begin is already in hand. This series gave the dyad its account as the resonance of two meaning-worlds — two drops, coupled without merging, generating a shared state irreducible to either (Wanhong 2026b). The natural next object is not two drops but the watercourse: the many-bodied relational system in which value flows across more than two, and the question of its just circulation becomes the question of a commons. The resources for thinking it have been assembled in the survey. Ostrom’s design principles describe how a community sustains a shared resource — a literal watershed among her cases — through institutions of graduated commitment and mutual monitoring that no external authority imposes (Ostrom 1990); the land ethic and deep ecology extend the unit of benefit from the pair to the biotic whole, the relational self finding its flourishing bound up with the flourishing of the field it belongs

to (Leopold 1949; Naess 1973); and this series’ own treatment of relational wealth posed the redistribution of generative value across the many, with the attendant difficulty that a system of many parties admits couplings and conflicts a dyad never faces (Huang 2026c). “Benefiting the ten thousand things” is, read this way, a scaling operator: it asks the dyadic water-virtue to become the governance of a basin, the just arrangement of many flows rather than the good conduct of one coupling. The materials for that governance exist; what is not yet established is that the virtue survives the passage intact.

2.8.2 The fidelity of the scaling is an open question

We therefore make explicit a restraint that has governed the whole paper. The dyadic water-virtue is the root, and the basin is what it might generate; but a root’s extension into a larger system is not guaranteed to preserve the properties that held at its source, and there are specific reasons to expect distortion. The flesh that the formal scheme locates as the seat of intimate non-substitutability (§2.9.5) is a feature of the particular coupling; it is not obvious that it has any analogue at the scale of the many, where the parties to a commons relate under types and roles more than under the irreplaceable particularity of the beloved. The rigid lower bound that answered self-dissolution between two (§2.5.1) may take a different form, or fail to translate, where the “self” at risk of being drained is a class of contributors rather than a person. And the very holonomy that carries the good-cycle criterion is, in the formal companion, sensitive to how many subjects the system contains and how the background of their relation emerges — matters the companion explicitly leaves open, and which bear directly on whether a two-body criterion governs an n-body commons at all (Huang 2026a). None of this shows that the scaling fails; it shows that the scaling is a substantive question with its own difficulties, not a corollary to be assumed. The water-virtue’s passage from the dyad to the basin is accordingly handed to the first of the directed fissures (§2.10.1), as the seed of a paper in its own right — a watershed justice that this one prepares but does not pretend to deliver. Here we hold the centre of gravity where the argument has actually done its work: between two.

2.9. Formal Expression: The Translation Layer

The preceding sections stated, at the points where they needed them, the formal results that underwrite the ethics, and pointed here for their full form. This section keeps that promise. It is a translation layer and nothing more: it does not build a formalism, it does not prove the results afresh, and it claims no mathematical novelty. Every result below is established in the formal companion to this series (Huang 2026a); what is done here is to set each beside the water-virtue it expresses, so that the reader may see that the ethical claims of the paper and the theorems of the companion are the same claims in two registers. The serving position is strict: where the ethics and the formalism diverge, it is the ethics that governs, and the formalism is retained only insofar as it expresses something the ethics independently holds. The truth-semantics that licenses reading these theorems as claims about the good, rather than as claims about a model, is the thin relational realism declared in the survey (§2.2.4): the water-good is a structural property of the flow, and a description of that structure is a description of the good.

2.9.1 Non-contention as non-possessive surplus

The companion models a relation’s value as carried by a flow, and its generated surplus as the holonomy of that flow around a closed relational cycle — the value a complete circuit returns over and above what entered it, $\text{hol}(\gamma) = \oint_{\gamma} u \cdot dl$. Its founding theorem is that the appropriative part of the driving force, being the gradient of a scalar potential, contributes nothing to this holonomy: a purely appropriative flow $u = -\nabla\phi$ has $\text{hol}(\gamma) = 0$ around every closed loop (Huang 2026a). This is the exact form of the claim of §2.3.1. Whatever in a relation reduces to a single scalar ordering — possession, ranking, equivalent exchange, all of which are gradients along a “more or less” — generates no surplus; only the non-gradient, circulating part generates anything. Non-contention is, formally, the relation’s reliance on the circulating rather than the gradient part of its flow, and the structural fact that grasping halts generation is the fact that converting the flow to a gradient sends its holonomy to zero. The surplus, being a holonomy, is present at no point of the loop and so has no possessor; “generating yet not possessing” is the reading of that non-locality.

2.9.2 The good and bad low place as a Helmholtz decomposition

Any sufficiently regular vector field admits a unique decomposition into a gradient (curl-free) part and a solenoidal (divergence-free) part. Applied to the force that biases a relation’s flow — the power force f_{pow} — this splits it into a part that points along a fixed scalar ordering and a part that circulates (Huang 2026a). The companion’s vorticity equation shows that only the solenoidal part sources circulation; the gradient part is annihilated, exactly as the appropriative term was. This is the formal body of the rigid lower bound (§2.5.1). A descent whose force is gradient — sliding down a fixed dominance ordering — is irrotational: it generates no surplus and merely sinks, which is the slave-morality descent and the self-dissolving descent at once. A descent whose force is solenoidal circulates and generates, which is the water-virtue’s descent. The two are separated not by depth but by the curl: the good low place is the solenoidal descent, the bad low place the gradient one. The Nietzschean and feminist challenges are answered by this decomposition rather than by the figure of water, which only illustrates it.

2.9.3 Non-fullness as the refusal of solidification

In the companion’s dynamical layer, the power field is governed by a law that reinforces it where value has recently flowed and lets it decay otherwise; the ratio of reinforcement to decay is an order parameter for what the companion calls solidification (Huang 2026a). When reinforcement dominates, a positive feedback locks the flow into a fixed channel, vorticity falls to zero, and the generative cycle collapses to a frozen fixed point that still exists but no longer circulates. This is the exact form of §2.6.3. Non-fullness is the maintenance of the relation away from that fixed point; filling a relation to completion is solidification described from within, the hardening of accumulated history into a channel through which all must now run. “Worn out and renewed” is the continual reopening of a flow that would otherwise set — and it subsumes the good-cycle criterion of Huang (2025b), the refusal of closure, as the dynamical statement that the good cycle is the one whose circulation does not go to zero.

2.9.4 The water-good shapes power's geometry, it does not abolish it

The companion proves a co-origination: power, resonance-without-fusion, and generativity are three faces of one structural condition, so that any relation generative enough to host two distinct beings necessarily carries power, and a generative structure with no power at all is impossible (Huang 2026a). This yields a trilemma — subjects-and-generativity, the-absence-of-power, and not-collapsing-to-the-structureless-void cannot all be had together — whose consequence is that the abolition of power is the abolition of generativity, leaving only the two equalities of privation: the void, or the frozen channel. This is the formal body of the survival cluster (§2.5.2). The water-virtue's answer to Hobbes does not abolish power because power cannot be abolished without abolishing the relation; it shapes power's geometry instead. The same ineliminable asymmetry can return its surplus to the one it acts upon (power-to: the teaching, nurturing, protecting, guiding asymmetry whose holonomy flows back and which works toward its own dissolution) or retain it (power-over: the asymmetry that fixes the other in dependence). Justice, on this picture, is the governance of that geometry, not the removal of the asymmetry — the shaping of the unavoidable power into the returning kind.

2.9.5 The non-substitutability of intimacy as the flesh

The companion's subjects are topological defects, individuated by a homotopy class that fixes their *type* but not their *token*: two defects of identical class are, within the topological data, interchangeable (Huang 2026a). For a physics this is correct; for a philosophy of intimacy it would be fatal, since the beloved is precisely not substitutable by a qualitative duplicate. The companion's resolution is the distinction between skeleton and flesh: the topological holonomy carries the good/bad criterion but only type-identity, while the non-substitutable particularity of *this* relation — its haecceity, the fact that the beloved is irreplaceable — is exactly what topological protection by construction cannot see, and so falls to the local, perturbation-sensitive flesh. This is the formal anchor for the whole paper's claim to be an ethics of *intimacy* and not merely of generative relation in general. Intimacy's non-substitutability is not an embarrassment the formalism must explain away; it is predicted by the formalism to live exactly where the structural criterion cannot reach. The criterion of the water-good (the skeleton) is necessary but not sufficient, and the companion's conjecture — that the good is the appropriate proportion of skeleton and

flesh — is, in this paper’s terms, the claim that water’s good requires both the generative structure and the irreplaceable particularity, neither alone.

2.9.6 Epistemic incompleteness

Finally, the companion proves that a representation powerful enough to compute anything — a universal one — cannot carry a robust criterion that discriminates good circulation from bad: discriminating power requires that the reachable states be constrained, and universality removes the constraint (Huang 2026a). The water-good therefore requires a non-universal structure: one whose reachable holonomies are limited enough that a stable good/bad criterion can exist on them. This is the formal root of the non-procedurality avowed in the practice (§2.7.6): a structure able to decide every case would, for that very reason, have lost the power to tell the water-virtue from its counterfeit. The incompleteness is not a failure of the account but a theorem within it — a precise statement of why the good of an intimate relation cannot be reduced to a procedure, and why judgment in the flesh remains irreducible. It is the formal form of the epistemic humility that has marked this work from its founding, and it is carried forward, as a question about who the subject of such a non-procedural good must be, to the last of the directed fissures (§2.10.4).

2.10. Directed Fissures

A closing section is, by convention, where an argument gathers itself: collects its results, resolves its tensions, comes to rest. This one does the opposite, and the difference is a matter of the paper’s place in the series rather than of style. Were this the final paper, the figure of water would be made to bring the long argument home, to settle it in the Way; “close to the Way” (ch. 8) would be the resting point. But this is a paper near the middle, and water was chosen not because it concludes but because it is a source — a figure rich enough that the pressure of pursuing it past the edge of what this paper can hold opens, at four definite places, the seeds of papers still to come. We name the four fissures rather than seal them. Each is a point where the water-virtue, pressed further, runs out of what the present argument establishes and points toward what a further argument would have to establish. Water here is the spring, not the sea.

2.10.1 Watershed justice

The first fissure is the one §8 opened and declined to cross. The water-virtue has been established between two; whether it governs the many — the family, the community, the relational commons — is a substantive question with its own difficulties, not a corollary. The non-substitutable flesh that grounds intimate particularity may have no analogue at the scale of types and roles; the rigid lower bound may not translate where the self at risk of being drained is a class rather than a person; and the holonomy criterion is, in the formal companion, sensitive to the number of subjects and the emergence of their shared background in ways that bear directly on whether a two-body criterion governs an n-body commons (Huang 2026a; Huang 2026c). The materials for crossing exist — Ostrom’s governance of the literal watershed (Ostrom 1990), the land ethic’s enlargement of the unit of benefit (Leopold 1949) — but the crossing is the work of another paper. A watershed justice: the water-virtue scaled from the coupling to the basin, with the distortions of scaling faced rather than assumed away.

2.10.2 The temporal dynamics of water

The second fissure is in the dimension this paper has treated only at rest. The water-virtue has been given largely as a structure — a geometry of flow, a criterion on circulation — but water is above all a thing in time, and a relation’s water-good is not a fixed state but a process of attunement that drifts, falls out of phase, and must be re-tuned. The resonance of two meaning-worlds (Wanhong 2026b) is a phase relation, and phase relations have a temporal life: they synchronise, they slip, they require continual re-coupling to hold. The formal companion is explicit that the dynamical layer of its own construction — how value flows in time, at what rate the structure forms and dissolves, how a background of relation emerges — is left open (Huang 2026a). A paper on the temporal water-virtue would take up exactly this: attunement and mis-attunement as the lived time of intimacy, the work of re-tuning a resonance that no relation holds without effort, the difference between a phase that is being continually renewed and one that has frozen. Non-fullness (§2.6) is the static shadow of this temporal virtue; its full form is dynamical and unwritten.

2.10.3 Water and vessel

The third fissure concerns the relation between the formless flow and the form that shapes it. Throughout this paper the vessel has appeared as the thing whose shape water takes; but the vessel is also what gives water a determinate course, and the relation between a flow and the form that channels it is the relation between an intimacy and the institution — the vow, the contract, the structured commitment — that gives it shape without freezing it. This series has treated the contract as structured flow on a manifold and the non-binding vow as the form of a commitment that holds without an external enforcer (Huang 2026b; Wanhong 2026b). A paper on water and vessel would ask how form may give the formless an edge without solidifying it: how a commitment can shape a flow toward the returning geometry (§2.9.4) without hardening into the fixed channel that is solidification’s bad form (§2.9.3). The vessel that channels without freezing, that gives course without capture, is the institutional question the water-virtue raises and this paper leaves open.

2.10.4 The subject of the highest good

The fourth fissure is the one the formal incompleteness opened (§2.9.6), and it is the deepest. If the water-good cannot be reduced to a procedure — if judgment in the flesh is irreducible — then there must be a subject who judges, and the nature of that subject is not settled by anything in this paper. The danger is sharp and was named in the survey: “taking the vessel’s shape” may be the water-virtue or the self-erasure of a subject who has given way on its desire (Lacan 2006), and the difference between the one who is like water and the one who has been dissolved into water is a difference in the subject, not in the conduct. A paper on the subject of the highest good would ask who the one who is like water without being effaced must be — what kind of self can yield without dissolving, descend without submitting, empty without disappearing; how the relational subject of this series’ founding commitments (Huang 2025a) holds a desire of its own while taking, genuinely, the shape of the other. The rigid lower bound (§2.5.1) is the criterion such a subject must satisfy; what such a subject *is* — the one who can be water and remain — is the question with which the water-virtue finally hands itself on. It is the spring’s last opening, and the one toward which, perhaps, the rest of the series runs.

Acknowledgements

This paper was written for one reader before it was written for any other, and the figure it works through is one I first learned not from the Daodejing but from watching her be it: benefiting, and not contending. Whatever in these pages rings true was learned in a relation; whatever rings false was where I had not yet learned it. To the girl who belongs to the forest and the mountains, who is to others as water is, this paper is given — and the giving, in the spirit of its third virtue, reserves nothing and asks for nothing back.

References

- Aurelius, Marcus (2002). *Meditations*. Trans. A. S. L. Farquharson. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Axelrod, Robert (1984). *The Evolution of Cooperation*. New York: Basic Books.
- Callicott, J. Baird (1989). *In Defense of the Land Ethic: Essays in Environmental Philosophy*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Confucius (1998). *The Analects*. Trans. D. C. Lau. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Eglash, Ron (1999). *African Fractals: Modern Computing and Indigenous Design*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- (2016). “An Introduction to Generative Justice”. In: *Teknokultura. Revista de Cultura Digital y Movimientos Sociales* 13.2, pp. 369–404. DOI: [10.5209/rev_TEKN.2016.v13.n2.52847](https://doi.org/10.5209/rev_TEKN.2016.v13.n2.52847).
- Epicurus (1994). *The Epicurus Reader: Selected Writings and Testimonia*. Trans. and ed. Brad Inwood and L. P. Gerson. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett.
- Federici, Silvia (2004). *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*. New York: Autonomedia.
- Heidegger, Martin (1962). *Being and Time*. Trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson; orig. *Sein und Zeit*, 1927. New York: Harper & Row.
- Hobbes, Thomas (1996). *Leviathan*. Ed. by Richard Tuck. Revised student. Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Honneth, Axel (1995). *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*. Trans. by Joel Anderson. Translated by Joel Anderson; original German *Kampf um Anerkennung*, 1992. Cambridge: Polity Press.

- Huang, Wanhong (2025a). “Responding to the Crises of Symbol and Subject in Modernity: Towards a Generative Nomos of Relational Presence”. OSF, doi:10.17605/OSF.IO/5R6CD; year to be finalized (2024 preprint / 2025).
- (2025b). “The Sustainability of Intimacy: Poetic Generativity and Generative Justice”. *Philosophy of Intimacy and the Theory of Justice*, Paper IX.
 - (2026a). *From Fluid to Braid: A Relational-Ontological Model of Value and Power, and Its Computational Horizon*. <https://doi.org/10.17613/j9kjd-vce60>. DOI: 10.17613/j9kjd-vce60.
 - (2026b). “The Causality of the Non-Binding Vow: On Trust, Promise, and the Generation of Expectation in the Absence of the Other’s Sword”. *Philosophy of Intimacy and the Theory of Justice*, Paper XIII.
 - (2026c). “The Political Economy of Intimate Relations: Toward a Theory of Generative Relational Wealth”. *Philosophy of Intimacy and the Theory of Justice*, Paper XV.
- Kant, Immanuel (1996). *The Metaphysics of Morals*. Trans. by Mary J. Gregor. Translated and edited by Mary J. Gregor; original German *Die Metaphysik der Sitten*, 1797. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- (1998). *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. Ed. and trans. Mary Gregor; orig. 1785. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Klein, Melanie (1937). “Love, Guilt and Reparation”. In: *In Love, Guilt and Reparation and Other Works 1921–1945*, pp. 306–343.
- Lacan, Jacques (2006). *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*. Trans. by Bruce Fink. Translated by Bruce Fink; original French *Écrits*, 1966. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Leopold, Aldo (1949). *A Sand County Almanac, and Sketches Here and There*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Marx, Karl (1976). *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume I*. Trans. Ben Fowkes; orig. 1867. London: Penguin.
- Mbiti, John S. (1970). *African Religions and Philosophy*. Garden City, NY: Anchor Books.
- Mencius (2003). *Mencius*. Trans. D. C. Lau. London: Penguin.
- Metz, Thaddeus (2011). “Ubuntu as a Moral Theory and Human Rights in South Africa”. In: *African Human Rights Law Journal* 11.2, pp. 532–559.
- Naess, Arne (1973). “The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement: A Summary”. In: *Inquiry* 16.1–4, pp. 95–100.

- Nishida, Kitaro (1990). *An Inquiry into the Good*. Trans. Masao Abe and Christopher Ives; orig. *Zen no kenkyū*, 1911. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Ostrom, Elinor (1990). *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Pettit, Philip (1997). *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Railton, Peter (1986). “Moral Realism”. In: *The Philosophical Review* 95.2, pp. 163–207.
- Rawls, John (1971). *A Theory of Justice*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Schelling, Thomas C. (1960). *The Strategy of Conflict*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Sen, Amartya (1999). *Development as Freedom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Tu, Wei-ming (1985). *Confucian Thought: Selfhood as Creative Transformation*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Wanhong (2026a). “Generativity Under Power: Trust, Asymmetry, and Estrangement in Intimate Relations”. *Philosophy of Intimacy and the Theory of Justice*, Paper XVII. Working draft.
- (2026b). “On the Emergence of Happiness and the Self-Continuation of Generativity: Stillness, Waiting, and the Fulfilment of Silence”. *Philosophy of Intimacy and the Theory of Justice*, Paper XIX. Working draft.

CHAPTER 3

The Field of “Travel”

Spaciousness, Contingency, and the Generation of the Relational Subject

This paper develops a philosophy of shared travel and uses it to establish a general theory of relational production. The method treats a single fully unfolded case, a journey undertaken together, as a concrete universal, on the wager that a structure becomes visible through deep entry into one particular rather than through abstraction from many. Travel is selected because it assembles, with unusual efficiency, the conditions under which the structure of a relation comes to presence.

The argument proceeds in four movements. The phenomenological movement analyses travel as a special field constituted by spaciousness (虚), in the sense of the eleventh chapter of the Daodejing, and identifies its deepest effect as the self-presence of relational dynamics, the emergence into felt experience of the relation's own movement as something the relational subject senses as a whole. The political-economic movement argues that the experience a journey generates is relational wealth, that shared retelling reproduces it, and that beauty, perceived by a subject and reproduced through retelling, sustains a cycle of value with the structure of relational production. The aesthetic movement resolves the antinomy of taste through the three Lacanian registers and the relational constitution of the judging subject, identifies creation as co-creation and co-creation as relational production, and argues that ethical judgement at its limit operates aesthetically, so that the cultivation of the good consummates in aesthetic education. The ethical movement establishes the theory of relational production proper: its keystone, the principle of subject-preservation, holds that no good relation may purchase its unity at the cost of annihilating the other; four operative criteria and the method of seeking common ground while preserving difference govern its conduct; and the just reproduction of suffering, the ethics of aesthetic disagreement, and the dialectical sublation of inherited tradition follow as its applications.

The paper closes by generalising travel into a functional concept, identifying generative openness as a general resource, and locating the deepest purpose of travel in the cultivation of a capacity to recreate, within everyday life, the field in which relational subjects continue to come into being. A concluding set of directed openings marks the questions the argument frames without resolving.

致她——

For her—

那个属于森林与山之女孩，

the girl who belongs to the forest and the mountains,

她爱旅行——

who loves to travel —

我盼望有一天与她同行，

with whom I long, one day, to fare together,

那将是我们一起建造的一个世界。

for that will be a world we build together.

3.1. Introduction: Travel as a Special Field

There is a kind of happiness that two people find only by leaving. They leave not each other but the rooms and routines in which their life is ordinarily held, going out into somewhere neither of them belongs. The previous paper of this series ended on a virtue learned from water, and on a person who is to others as water is (Wanhong 2026c); this one begins where water naturally goes, which is away. Water is, by temperament, a figure of the journey, the passage, the thing that keeps to no single place. To ask what it is for two people to fare well into the unfamiliar, together, follows the series’ guiding figure to where it leads.

This paper concerns travel undertaken together. Its subject is the shared journey, two people who go out into the strange as a pair and who are changed, as a pair, by the going, and not the solitary journey of the philosopher-wanderer, which has its own long and noble literature. The claim it defends is large, and stating it plainly at the outset lets the reader gauge the size of the wager. A shared journey is a *special field*: a structured condition, deliberately entered, within which the relation between two people is at once exposed and generated, and within which the movement of the relation itself, otherwise submerged, rises into felt experience. From this field the paper draws, in turn, a phenomenology of how the relational subject comes to be, a political economy of how shared experience is reproduced or squandered, an aesthetics of how such a field is built and perceived, and an ethics of how all of this can be done well or badly. The journey is the entry; the destination is a claim about the relation between the good and the beautiful that holds, in its most radical form, that the two cannot finally be told apart.

3.1.1 From the fixed background to its deliberate exchange

The point of departure is a result this series has already established. Shared happiness, it was argued, consists in the *resonance* of two meaning-worlds against a common background rather than in the fusion of two people into one: two distinct centres of sense, coupled into a shared state that is irreducible to either yet merges neither, sustained on a background manifold that supplies the common ground against which their coupling is defined (Wanhong 2026b). In the ordinary conduct of a life together, that background is fixed. It is the same apartment, the same commute, the same division of the week into its

labouring and resting parts, the same circle of obligations and roles. The fixity does its work, for it is what makes a shared life liveable, since a background that had to be continually rebuilt would leave no surplus of attention for anything else. Yet fixity carries a cost, and the cost is the subject of this paper. A background that never changes becomes, in time, invisible; and a relation conducted entirely against an invisible background can run for years on the mere interlocking of habits, its two parties coupled at the level of routine while the question of whether they still resonate at any deeper level goes quietly unasked. The fixed background is hospitable to a certain hollowing: two well-fitted sets of habits can pass, for a long time, as a living relation.

Travel is the deliberate exchange of that background. To travel together is to take two people out of the meaning-world in which their resonance has been habitually defined and to set them down in one that is strange to both. This is the simplest possible description of what a shared journey does, and everything else in this paper unfolds its consequences. The exchange does two opposite things at once, and the doubleness is the first thing any honest account must explain. On one side, stripped of the familiar scaffolding, a relation can be exposed in its poverty: the couple who had nothing to say to one another once the television was off discover, in a foreign city with the evening before them, exactly how little they share, and the journey meant to renew them instead lays bare a vacancy that the routine had been mercifully concealing. The commonplace that couples quarrel on holiday is no triviality about logistics and tiredness; it is a phenomenological datum of the first importance, and a theory of shared travel that could not explain it would be worthless. On the other side, by the same exchange and not a different one, the stripping away of the scaffolding can force a purer resonance than the routine ever permitted: with nothing familiar to lean on, the two have only each other to rely upon, and in that mutual reliance a depth can be reached that the furnished, scheduled, role-bound life at home structurally forecloses. The same act exposes and generates. Why one act should hold these opposite powers, and what decides which it exercises, is the question from which this paper grows.

3.1.2 What kind of field: spaciousness rather than novelty

The temptation is to locate the power of travel in *novelty*: in the new sights, the fresh stimulation, the broadening of the mind that the tourist brochures promise. That reading

is the precise inversion of the truth, and identifying why will fix the thesis of the whole paper. Novelty is a kind of *filling*: it loads the senses with new content, new objects to consume, new items for the itinerary and the photograph album. But the relation between two people is generated by no loading of shared stimuli, any more than a vessel is made useful by filling it to the brim. What travel offers, when it offers anything of worth, is an *emptying*: a clearing-away of the dense web of functions, roles, obligations, and predetermined uses that the everyday lays over every hour and every space, leaving a room in which something can happen that the crowded everyday left no room for. The deepest name for what a journey provides is *spaciousness*: 虛, in the sense the eleventh chapter of the *Daodejing* gives it, where clay is worked into a vessel but the use of the vessel is in the emptiness within; where doors and windows are cut to make a room, but the use of the room is in the empty space; so that what is there gives advantage, while what is not there gives use (Laozi 1963). A journey, at its best, is a worked emptiness, a vessel whose value lies in the room it opens rather than the contents it carries.

This is why a quiet hour in an unfamiliar café, with nothing on the schedule and nothing to do but be there together, can hold more of the good this paper is after than a packed day of monuments; and why the mountain vista and the empty temple and the long train window do their work through the spaciousness they open rather than through what they show, the temporary lifting of the everyday’s demand that every moment be *for* something. The traveller who fills the journey as densely as the life left behind, every hour booked, every site checked off, every meal photographed, has carried the fixed background along and merely changed its scenery; the field never opens, because it was never emptied. Spaciousness is the medium of the special field, and the central argument of this paper’s phenomenology (§3.2) is that the various features which make travel powerful are, one and all, ways of opening or depending upon that emptiness.

3.1.3 Presence, being, and the field they presuppose

One distinction must be fixed before the argument can proceed, because the whole account turns on it. To say that travel brings the relation’s own movement into experience is to claim something other than that travel brings the relation into *being*. The relation exists already; two people who have shared a life have a relational dynamics whether or not they ever feel it, just as one is always already existing whether or not one ever notices that

one exists. What the everyday's repetition conceals is *presence* rather than *being*, since being cannot be cancelled by inattention: presence is the manner in which something emerges into felt, illuminated experience, comes forward from the background and is undergone as present. The difference is the difference between a thing's obtaining and a thing's being *present to* someone. Repetition is an anaesthetic; it lets the relation go on existing while rendering its existence imperceptible, dissolving the fact of the "we" into the automatic functioning of two interlocking routines. What travel can do, and what the everyday ordinarily cannot, is to make the relation *present* rather than to make it exist: to bring its dynamics forward out of the submerged automatism into something the two can actually feel themselves living. When the paper speaks, later, of the *self-presence of relational dynamics* (§3.3), it means presence in exactly this sense, and not being.

Presence, so understood, presupposes a field. Nothing comes to presence in the abstract; it comes to presence *somewhere*, within some opened region in which appearing is possible. This is a structural point that the whole paper depends upon, and it is the reason the two pillars of the argument, the field and what comes to presence within it, stand in a relation of ground and grounded rather than as two parallel claims. The journey's spaciousness is the field; the self-presence of the relation's dynamics is the event that the field makes possible. There is no presence without an opened field for it, just as there is no use of the vessel without the emptiness within. This is why the same presence cannot, in general, be had in the living room at home: the living room is a closed field, a space whose every coordinate has already been assigned a function, leaving no opened region within which the unscheduled can appear, and the obstacle is the closure rather than any want of novelty. Presence requires openness; openness comes from emptiness; emptiness comes from the lifting of the everyday's total assignment of function, and that lifting is what a journey, at its best, performs.

3.1.4 A note on method: the journey as concrete universal

Before the argument begins, its method must be made honest, because a reader is entitled to ask by what right a paper moves from the shared journeys of particular people to claims about the relational subject, the reproduction of experience, and the relation of ethics to the beautiful. The worry is real and deserves a real answer in place of a tacit evasion. This paper offers no empirical study; it rests on no survey of travellers, and a survey

would not refute it. Neither is it a treatise that uses travel as a mere illustration, a decorative example of theses established independently. Its method is the one this series has used throughout and which its formal companion made explicit in its own register (Huang 2026a): it takes a single, fully unfolded particular and reads its structure, on the wager, ancient and central to the dialectical tradition, that a structure shows itself most clearly through deep entry into one particular rather than through abstraction that strips away everything concrete. This is the method of the *concrete universal*: the universal not as the thin residue left after all particularity is boiled off, but as the structure that a sufficiently deep particular makes manifest precisely in its concreteness. A shared journey, attended to closely enough, widens into a showing of what the generation of a relational subject is, rather than narrowing into private anecdote, because the journey is one place where that generation happens slowly and visibly enough to be described.

Two consequences follow, and the paper accepts them. First, its evidence is phenomenological: it appeals to structures of shared experience that the reader is invited to recognise from within their own life, in place of data that settle the matter from outside. The test of its claims is whether, once stated, they illuminate, whether the reader who has travelled with someone they love finds their own experience newly legible in them, rather than whether they have been measured. This is the appropriate test for a phenomenology, and the paper pretends to no other. Second, the particularity is the very organ of the showing rather than an embarrassment to be apologised for. That the journeys behind this paper are particular journeys, with a particular person, is the concreteness through which the universal becomes visible at all, in place of noise to be filtered out on the way to the universal; and the paper will argue, when it reaches the question of the beloved’s irreplaceability, that this marks a truth about the matter itself rather than an accident of method: the universal structure of intimate generativity can only ever be instanced in a particularity that no universal exhausts (Huang 2026a). The method and the subject matter here say the same thing: one reaches what is common to all love only by going all the way into one. The journey is the concrete; the universal is what the journey, fully entered, shows.

3.1.5 The plan of the paper

The paper proceeds in four movements and a generalisation, bound by a single methodological commitment to descend from theory into practice. The first movement is phenomenological. It analyses the special field of travel into its constitutive features, namely co-creation, reshaped time, suspension, contingency, liminality, symmetric unfamiliarity, and forced co-presence, together with the spaciousness that underlies them all (§3.2); and it argues that the field both reveals the relation and generates the “we,” bringing the relation’s dynamics to self-presence (§3.3). The second movement is political-economic: it shows that the experience a journey generates is a form of relational wealth, that its retelling is the reproduction of that wealth, and that this reproduction has a healthy form, living shared retelling, and a degraded one, the reification of experience into a consumed and displayed object (§3.4). The third movement is ethical and then aesthetic. It draws from the field an ethics of shared travel, including its failures and its relation to the third-party other (§3.5), and then argues that the construction of such a field is an aesthetic rather than an engineering problem (§3.7); that the perception of contingent beauty is a cultivable capacity (§3.11); and, in the paper’s most exposed chapter, that ethical judgement at its limit is aesthetic, so that the deepest ethical education is an aesthetic education (§3.12). A chapter on the political economy of beauty (§3.14) tests these claims against a concrete case from the world of capital. The closing movement generalises “travel” into a functional concept, the construction of the special field even within the alienated everyday, and offers it as an opening in place of a conclusion (§3.15, §3.16). Where the formal apparatus of the series’ companion paper is needed, it is invoked lightly and in a serving role, never rebuilt. The governing spirit throughout is practical: the paper means not only to understand the field of travel but to say how two people might actually build one, and keep building it, in the midst of an everyday that is forever closing it back down.

3.2. The Field of Travel and Its Constitutive Features

If travel creates a special field, the field can be analysed. This section does so, decomposing the field into the features that constitute it and arguing, for each, both what it is phenomenologically and how it bears on the relation between two people. The features

fall into three groups. The first concerns the field’s *temporal arch*, the structure of the journey in time, which begins before departure and continues after return. The second concerns the field’s *openness*, what lifts the everyday’s closure and makes the field a field at all. The third concerns the *conditions of being-together*, what makes the field’s openness specifically shared in place of the openness two solitary travellers might each enjoy. Underlying all three groups is a condition that the section treats last and separately, since it is the ground of their possibility in place of one feature among the others: spaciousness. The section closes by examining how the features interact, reinforce, and conflict, so that the field is understood as a dynamic system whose internal tensions are themselves a source of what travel does to a relation, in place of a static list of properties.

3.2.1 The temporal arch I: co-creation

A journey does not begin at the airport. It begins when two people first imagine it together, when the idea is floated, the map opened, the possibilities argued over, the expectations aligned, the shared anticipation built. This phase of *co-creation* is already the field itself, and indeed in one respect its purest stretch, in place of the preparatory labour that precedes the journey proper, on which the consumerist understanding takes planning to be merely the front-loaded work of arranging a product to be later consumed. In co-creation the two people jointly build a shared world that does not yet exist, and the building of a shared world is the foundational act by which a “we” is constituted.

The point is worth dwelling on, because it locates the generativity of travel earlier than the usual account places it. To plan a journey together is to negotiate a *shared intention*: where to go, why, what to seek, what to refuse, how to weigh the one’s wish to see against the other’s wish to rest. A shared intention is a single intentionality borne by two rather than the sum of two private intentions, and its construction is the forging of the relational subject in one of its most legible forms. The everyday offers surprisingly few occasions for this kind of pure joint construction, since routine consists largely in the discharge of intentions already given, the roles, the duties, the standing arrangements, in place of the building of new ones together. Travel planning forces it. Two people imagining a place they have not yet been, aligning what they each hope to find there, are doing in miniature exactly what it is to be a “we”: they are jointly intending a world. And because what they jointly intend is a future background, the manifold against which their resonance

will, in a few weeks, be redefined, co-creation is, quite precisely, the anticipatory and conspiratorial rehearsal of the background-exchange that the journey will enact. Before the manifold is exchanged in fact, the two have already begun, in imagination, to build it together. Co-creation is the first opening of the field, and because it recurs, in the re-planning of each day en route and, as the paper will argue, in the shared retelling afterward (§3.4), it forms the axis along which the whole temporal arch is strung more than a single phase.

3.2.2 The temporal arch II: reshaped time

Travel reshapes time. The everyday's time is, in the strict sense, *told off* into units assigned to functions: the hour for the commute, the hour for the meeting, the evening portioned among its obligations, a temporality whose every interval is already spoken for. The time of a journey has a different texture, and the difference exceeds its being leisure in place of labour. It is, first, *framed*: a journey has a beginning and an end, a definite span lifted out of the indefinite flow of ordinary time and bounded as a whole. This framing gives the time of travel something of the quality of an exception, a parenthesis in the run of the year, and the exceptional, bounded character contributes to its value. Precisely because the journey will end, because its time is finite and counted, each moment within it is held more closely; the knowledge that one is in a span that will not last presses one into a fuller presence within it than the seemingly endless, because unframed, time of the everyday ever compels.

It is, second, *continuous and shared*. The everyday distributes two people's time into largely separate channels that intersect at the day's margins, the breakfast, the evening, the weekend's negotiated overlap, so that much of a shared life is in fact lived in parallel more than together. The time of a journey is unbroken joint time: hour upon hour side by side, with no separate offices to disperse into, no independent circles to absorb the day. This continuity is one of the conditions that makes the field's other effects possible, since many of them, the forcing of co-presence, the reaching of depth, require a sustained, uninterrupted being-together that the channelled time of the everyday structurally prevents. Reshaped time, framed and continuous, is the temporal medium within which the rest of the field can do its work; and together with co-creation it completes the field's temporal structure, the arch that runs from the first imagining, through the bounded continuous

span of the journey itself, to the retelling that will reopen the span in memory.

3.2.3 The openness I: suspension

The everyday’s closure is lifted, first, by *suspension*: the bracketing, for the duration of the journey, of the dense network of roles and obligations that ordinarily defines each person. At home one is the one who must go to work, the one who owes the mortgage, the one who must manage the relatives, the one assigned this place in this set of standing arrangements; and these assignments are, in large part, constitutive of how one shows up day to day, more than external decorations upon a self that would be the same without them. To travel is to bracket them, suspending their operation in place of abolishing them, since they wait at home, so that for a span one is, more nearly, simply oneself and simply with the other in place of the discharger of those functions. The structure is close to what phenomenology calls the *epoché*: the methodical bracketing of the natural attitude so that what was hidden by its automatic operation can be seen. Here the bracketing is performed by a plane ticket in place of a philosopher’s resolve, and what it makes visible is the two people underneath their roles, who they are, and who they are to each other, when the scaffolding of function is set aside.

This is among the reasons travel is at once a touchstone and a danger. The roles that suspension brackets are, for many couples, a good part of what has been holding the relation in working order; bracket them, and the relation must stand, for a while, on whatever lies beneath. If beneath the roles there is a living mutuality, suspension liberates it, and the couple discover a freedom in being together that the role-bound everyday had cramped. If beneath the roles there is little, suspension exposes the little, and the couple discover, sometimes with a vertigo they would rather not have had, how much of their togetherness was the interlocking of functions and how little was anything else. Suspension removes what was concealing what it reveals in place of creating it. That is the precise sense in which the field is a touchstone: it assays the relation by taking away the supports and seeing what stands.

3.2.4 The openness II: contingency

The second source of the field's openness is *contingency*: the lifting of the everyday's predetermination, the restoration to each moment of the quality of being genuinely undecided. The everyday is, in its essence, repetition, and repetition is the predetermined: one knows, in the ordinary run of a day, more or less what each hour will hold, because each hour has been held a thousand times before. This predetermination is what the existential tradition has taught us to recognise as the great anaesthetic of selfhood. In Heidegger's analysis, the everyday is the reign of *das Man*, the anonymous "they" in whose averaged, levelled-down understanding existence is absorbed: one does what one does, as "one" does it, and in this absorption the fact of one's own existence as a question to be lived is covered over, fallen into the smooth automatism of the familiar (Heidegger 1962). Travel breaks the repetition, and the breaking is principally a restoration of the undecided more than a matter of fresh stimulation. In an unfamiliar place nothing is settled in advance: one does not know whether the train will come, where the lane leads, whether one will be understood, whether the food will be good. Each moment becomes, again, a genuine present, undetermined, open, to be undergone in place of discharged.

And in this restored contingency the subject is pressed back into appearing. When the familiar scaffolding is removed, the fact that *I am here, undergoing this, having to choose* becomes visible again, no longer dissolved into the automatism of the predetermined. This is the existential core of travel, and it has a long and serious philosophical lineage, which the field's contingency reactivates in place of inventing. The lineage is summarised in Table 3.1. The point common to its members, however they differ, is that the rupture of the predetermined returns the subject to itself, to its existence, its freedom, its finitude, by stripping away the everyday's concealment. What this paper adds to that lineage is the move from the solitary to the shared, taken up in the next section; here it is enough to establish that contingency is one of the two great openers of the field, and that its opening is, in the first instance, existential, the return of existence to presence.

3.2.5 The conditions of being-together I: liminality

The features so far would each be available to a solitary traveller. The next three are what make the field's openness specifically *shared*. The first is *liminality*. The concept is

Thinker	Concept	Bearing on the contingency of the field
Heidegger (Heidegger 1962)	<i>das Man</i> , fallenness, authenticity; anxiety (<i>Angst</i>) as disclosive	The everyday’s repetition is absorption in the “they”; contingency lifts the concealment, a bearable anxiety in which existence is disclosed. The paper’s principal mast.
Sartre (Sartre 1964; Sartre 1956)	Contingency; the nausea before the gratuitousness of being; freedom	Travel restores the felt gratuitousness of things, their lack of necessary reason, and with it the exposure of freedom: in the undetermined moment, one must choose.
Kierkegaard (Kierkegaard 1983)	Repetition vs. recollection; genuine “repetition” as renewed receiving	Sharpens the paper’s own wording: the aim is the renewed winning of existence out of contingency rather than mechanical re-enactment.
Jaspers (Jaspers 1970)	Boundary situations (<i>Grenzsituationen</i>)	The journey’s mishaps, getting lost, stranded, stuck, are minor boundary situations in which ordinary self-understanding fails and the subject meets its finitude and possibility.
Merleau-Ponty (Merleau-Ponty 2012)	The lived body; perception as bodily engagement with a world	The unfamiliar place is met first in the body, disoriented, alert, re-learning its surroundings, so that contingency is undergone perceptually before it is understood.

Table 3.1: The existential-phenomenological lineage reactivated by the field’s contingency. The paper takes Heidegger as its principal mast and reads the others as developing aspects of the single thesis that the rupture of the predetermined returns the subject to presence.

anthropological: in van Gennep’s analysis of rites of passage, and Turner’s development of it, the rite has a threshold phase, the *limen*, in which the initiate has left the old status without yet entering the new, and is for a time betwixt and between, outside the ordinary structure of roles and ranks (Gennep 1960; Turner 1969). Two things characterise this liminal phase. The first is the temporary dissolution of structure: in the threshold, the ordinary hierarchies and classifications are suspended, and the initiates stand outside the grid that ordinarily places them. The second is what Turner called *communitas*: the intense, levelling, immediate bond that arises among those who pass through the liminal together, a being-with stripped of the mediations of status, an undifferentiated mutuality possible only in the threshold (Turner 1969).

Travel is a liminal condition, and shared travel generates a *communitas* of two. To be on

a journey is to be betwixt and between, to have left the structure of home without having arrived at any new structure, suspended in a passage between two settled states. And two people who enter this threshold together are, for its duration, released from the structure that ordinarily mediates them, the division of household labour, the standing roles, the accreted positions of a shared life, into a more immediate and levelling mutuality. The couple on the road are not, for a while, the one-who-manages-the-finances and the one-who-handles-the-relatives; they are two people in the threshold together, met more nearly as such. This dyadic *communitas* is one of the deepest goods of shared travel, and it is also why return can be so deflating: *communitas* is, by its nature, a threshold phenomenon, and the re-entry into structure that homecoming requires (§3.4, §3.4.5) dissolves it unless deliberate labour preserves what it generated.

3.2.6 The conditions of being-together II: symmetric unfamiliarity

The second condition of shared openness is *symmetric unfamiliarity*, and though it is easily overlooked it may be the most important of the three, because it is the condition under which genuine *shared witnessing* becomes possible. In the everyday, familiarity is almost never symmetric. The home is the home of someone first; the city is one partner's native ground and the other's adopted one; the circle of friends originates with one and is acquired by the other; the domains of competence are divided, so that in each there is a host and a guest, one who knows and one who is shown. This asymmetry is not malign, but it is pervasive, and it means that in the ordinary run of a shared life the two are rarely, if ever, set before the same unknown on equal terms. Travel to a place strange to both removes the asymmetry. The foreign city is equally foreign to the two of them; neither is the host, neither holds the home advantage, neither knows the way. For once they stand before the same unknown as equals.

The significance of this is that it is the condition of *co-witnessing*, as against the asymmetric witnessing of host and guest. When one partner shows the other their home city, the other witnesses the city, and also witnesses the partner-as-host, and is witnessed as guest; the structure has a giver and a receiver of the unfamiliar. When both are equally strangers, neither hosts and neither is hosted; they undergo the unknown *together*, side by side, each seeing it freshly and each seeing the other see it freshly, and, the decisive addition, each knowing that the other is in the same condition. This symmetric

co-undergoing is the ground of the field’s deepest generativity, because it is the condition under which the relation’s dynamics can become present to both at once as something they are equally inside of, in place of something one is showing and the other receiving. The next section’s central concept, the self-presence of relational dynamics, depends upon this symmetry: it is hard to feel the “we” as a whole when one of the two is the host of the occasion; it becomes possible when both are equally in the threshold, equally before the same strangeness, equally without a script.

3.2.7 The conditions of being-together III: forced co-presence

The third condition is the most prosaic and the most double-edged: *forced co-presence*. Travel puts two people together continuously, with the everyday’s escape valves removed. At home there are always exits, the separate job, the independent friendships, the room one can withdraw to, the errand that takes one out, and these exits, though they look like mere logistics, perform a real function: they release the pressure that continuous proximity generates, and they let a relation run without ever having to test how much undiluted togetherness it can bear. Travel removes the exits. For the span of the journey the two are thrown together without reprieve, and this enforced, unrelieved proximity is at once the field’s chief stressor and one of its chief engines of depth.

As stressor, it amplifies. The small frictions that the everyday’s exits would have dispersed, the differing rhythms, the divergent wants, the accumulated irritations, have, on the road, nowhere to go; they cannot be walked off into the separate channels of a normal day, and so they concentrate, which forms a second part of the explanation, beyond suspension and contingency, of why couples quarrel on holiday. Yet the same removal of exits that amplifies friction also forecloses the easy avoidances by which a relation evades its own depths, and so forces a genuine co-presence that the exit-rich everyday permits one perpetually to defer. With nowhere to escape to, the two must actually be with each other, meeting whatever is between them in place of managing it, and in that enforced meeting a depth becomes reachable that the avoidant comforts of home keep forever at arm’s length. Forced co-presence is, like suspension, a feature whose value is inseparable from its danger: it is the same pressure that cracks a brittle relation and tempers a sound one.

3.2.8 The underlying condition: spaciousness

The seven features so far do not, however, sit as seven coordinate items on a list. One condition underlies them all, and it is the ground that makes the rest possible in place of one feature among them: *spaciousness*, the worked emptiness introduced in §3.1.2. Each of the seven, examined closely, turns out to require an opened, unfilled room in order to operate. Contingency cannot enter a filled field: a journey whose every hour is booked, whose every space is crowded with planned content, leaves no gap through which the undetermined can arrive, and the wildflower at the roadside cannot be seen when the eyes are fixed on the itinerary. Suspension is itself a kind of emptying, since the bracketing of roles is the clearing-away of the functions that fill the everyday. The liminal threshold is structurally an emptiness, the cleared interval between two structures. Forced co-presence does its generative work only where there is unfilled time for the two to actually occupy together; pack the journey densely enough and the co-presence becomes mere joint logistics, two people processing an itinerary side by side. Even co-creation and reshaped time are, at bottom, ways of opening and bounding a space that is to be left partly empty, a vessel whose use is in the room within.

This is why spaciousness is named as the field's underlying condition in place of its eighth feature. It is the emptiness in the vessel; the others are the walls that shape and hold it. The eleventh chapter of the *Daodejing* states the structure exactly: what is there, the walls, the features, the bounded span, gives advantage, while what is not there, the emptiness they enclose, gives use (Laozi 1963). The advantage of the field lies in its constructed features; its *use*, the actual generation of presence and of the “we,” lies in the emptiness those features enclose and protect. And this is the deepest reason the power of travel is misunderstood as novelty. Novelty fills; spaciousness empties; and the emptying, in place of the filling, opens the room in which a relation can come to itself. The phrase the previous paper used for the highest form of this, the fullness of doing nothing, two people before a window with the rain (Wanhong 2026b), was already a description of spaciousness, here given its name and its place as the condition of the whole field. To travel well is, before all the particular features, to know how to keep the vessel empty enough to be of use.

3.2.9 The features in tension: the field as a dynamic system

It would falsify the field to leave its features as a static inventory, for they do not sit side by side in placid coexistence; they pull on one another, reinforce one another, and, crucially, conflict, and the field’s actual character in any given journey is the resultant of these tensions rather than the sum of the features taken singly. Three of the tensions are worth drawing out, both because they are phenomenologically real and because they will matter to the ethics and the practice that follow.

The first is the tension between *co-creation and contingency*, which forms the deep structure of a familiar quarrel. Co-creation, carried to excess, is the enemy of contingency: the more completely a journey is planned, every hour assigned, every site booked, every meal chosen in advance, the less room remains for the undetermined to enter, until the journey becomes a fixed background in motion, the everyday’s predetermination carried abroad under the costume of travel. Yet contingency without any co-creation is a drift, and an anxious one, in place of a journey; some shared intending is the condition of there being a “we” that travels at all. The over-planner and the under-planner, the one who would book the journey to the minute and the one who would simply set out, are pulling on two genuinely constitutive features of the field rather than merely standing temperamentally at odds, each feature of which, alone and to excess, would destroy it. The resolution this paper will eventually offer (§3.7) is that the right object of planning is the *frame* in place of the *content*: that co-creation should build and protect a bounded, emptied space and then leave the interior open to contingency, intention exercised on the vessel’s walls, the emptiness within left for what will come.

The second is the tension between *forced co-presence and spaciousness*. Forced co-presence supplies the continuous joint occupation the field requires; but spaciousness requires that the joint time remain not wholly filled, including not wholly filled *with each other*. A togetherness with no interior emptiness, no room for either to be quietly alone within the shared field, no unfilled silence, becomes a suffocation, and the relentless proximity that tempers a sound relation can, without spaciousness, smother it. The field needs both the removal of the exits and an internal room; co-presence without spaciousness is confinement, and spaciousness without co-presence is two people merely near one another.

The third is the tension between *liminality and the temporal arch*, which is the structural seed of the problem of return. The *communitas* of the threshold is, by its nature, anti-structural and impermanent; the temporal arch, by its nature, ends, depositing the two back into the structure of the everyday. The very feature that makes the field's mutuality so intense, its liminal release from structure, is the feature that guarantees its dissolution upon return, since one cannot remain forever in the threshold. This tension is the condition that makes the labour of reproduction necessary, in place of a defect to be removed (§3.4): because the liminal cannot be prolonged, what it generated must be *reproduced* into a form that can survive the return to structure, or it is lost. The field, then, is a dynamic and self-undermining condition rather than a stable possession, intense and impermanent, whose goods must be actively carried across the threshold of return or surrendered at it. It is to that carrying, and to the wealth it conserves or squanders, that the paper now turns, after first attending to what the field, while it lasts, brings to presence.

3.3. From Revelation to Generation: The Self-Presence of Relational Dynamics

The field of travel does two things, and they must be carefully distinguished, because conflating them has obscured what is most distinctive in the shared journey. The field *reveals*, and the field *generates*. To reveal is to bring into view something that was already there; to generate is to bring into being something that was not. The previous section's features were described as performing both functions, suspension reveals what lay beneath the roles, but forced co-presence and the liminal threshold generate a *communitas* that did not previously exist, and the doubleness was left standing. This section separates the two functions, argues that the generative function is the deeper and the more distinctive, and gives its product a name: the *self-presence of relational dynamics*, the central concept of the paper's phenomenology. It then secures the concept against two misunderstandings, that it is merely the existential self-discovery of the solitary traveller doubled, and that it is the mutual recognition already described by Hegel, by setting it against each.

3.3.1 The field as touchstone: revelation

The revelatory function is the one the touchstone metaphor names, and it is the easier of the two to describe because it brings nothing new. When the field’s features strip away the familiar scaffolding, the roles bracketed by suspension, the predetermination lifted by contingency, the exits removed by forced co-presence, what was beneath the scaffolding is exposed. If beneath it there was a living mutuality, the exposure is a liberation; if beneath it there was a vacancy, the exposure is a reckoning. Either way the field has added nothing; it has subtracted the concealment and left the two facing what was already the case. This is the function that explains the holiday quarrel, and it explains it in a way that does justice to its seriousness. The quarrel is not, at root, about the missed train or the disagreement over the restaurant; these are the occasions, not the cause. The cause is that the field has removed the everyday’s concealments and presented the two with the truth of their relation, and where that truth is thinner than the routine had allowed them to believe, the encounter with it is painful, and the pain discharges itself upon whatever occasion is nearest. To call travel a touchstone is to say that it assays the relation, tests what it is made of by taking away the supports and seeing what stands unsupported. The assay is valuable precisely because it is hard to perform at home, where the supports are always present to be leaned on; and it is dangerous for the same reason, since a relation may be assayed and found wanting, and the finding cannot be unfound.

Revelation, however, leaves the two as two. On the touchstone account, there are two separate subjects, each of whom may see, in the cleared field, the truth of the relation and the truth of the other; and even when each sees that the other sees, and they confirm to one another what the field has shown, the structure remains that of two witnesses comparing notes. Something real and important happens, but it happens to two. The deeper thing the field can do is to generate, out of the two, a third thing that is neither rather than to reveal a relation to two separate witnesses.

3.3.2 The field as catalyst: generation of the “we”

The generative function brings something into being. In the shared undergoing of the field, the symmetric standing-before the same unknown, the *communitas* of the threshold,

the continuous forced co-presence, the joint building of a shared world in co-creation, there emerges a subject that is not either of the two and not their sum: a “we” that is a relational subject in its own right, with its own movement and its own life. This is not a metaphor and not a *façon de parler*. It is the central ontological commitment of this series, established at its foundation: that relations are prior to the entities they relate, and that what we call a subject is a secondary condensation of relational activity rather than a premise standing before it (Huang 2025a). On that commitment, the “we” is not a convenient name for two “I”s in proximity; it is a genuine relational subject, generated by relational activity, as real as, on the deepest version of the commitment, more fundamental than, the two it relates.

What the field of travel does, that the everyday ordinarily does not, is generate this “we” *vividly and visibly*. The previous paper described shared happiness as the resonance of two meaning-worlds, coupled into a joint state irreducible to either yet merging neither (Wanhong 2026b); the field of travel is the condition under which that coupling is *intensified to the point of becoming a felt event* rather than merely achieved. The two drops do not merely resonate; the resonance becomes strong enough, and the conditions clear enough, that the “we” it constitutes comes forward as something undergone. The generation is real in the everyday too, any living relation is continually generating its “we”, but in the everyday the generation is submerged, dissolved into the automatic functioning of routine, proceeding without ever rising into experience. The field of travel raises it. And the raising of the generated “we” into experience is the phenomenon this section now names.

3.3.3 The self-presence of relational dynamics

In the field of travel, at certain moments, two people do not merely feel each other, and do not merely each feel themselves; they feel *the relation itself*, its movement, its current, the way the “we” is flowing and shifting and becoming, as something the two of them sense together, as a whole. This is the *self-presence of relational dynamics*: the emergence, into felt experience, of the relation’s own dynamics as a phenomenon that the relational subject undergoes about itself. It is to be defined with care, and three points fix it. (It will be shown, when the philosophy of beauty is developed, that this felt accord of the relational subject with its own movement is structurally an accord of the three

registers, the real, the symbolic, and the imaginary, achieved together rather than within one subject; see §3.9.2.)

First, what comes to presence is *the dynamics*, not either relatum and not the relation as a static fact. One can be aware of one’s partner (awareness of the other); one can be aware of oneself (individual self-awareness); the phenomenon named here is neither. It is awareness of *the movement between*, of how the relation is going, of the live current of the “we” as it flows, advances, tightens, eases, turns. In the field, the relation’s dynamics, ordinarily a submerged undercurrent operating below all notice, rises to the surface of experience and is felt as a moving whole. Two people in an unfamiliar place may suddenly sense, with great clarity, that *this, right now, is what our relationship is becoming*, and that sensing, of the relation’s own movement as a felt present, is the self-presence of its dynamics.

Second, what comes to presence is the dynamics’ *presence*, not its *being*, in exactly the sense fixed in the introduction (§3.1.3). The relation’s dynamics did not begin in the field; they run continuously, in the everyday as much as on the journey. What the field supplies is their presence rather than their existence, their emergence from the submerged automatism into felt experience. The everyday’s repetition is the anaesthetic that holds the dynamics below the threshold of feeling; the field’s spaciousness is the clearing in which they can rise into it. To speak of self-*presence* rather than self-*being* is therefore exact: the field does not make the relation’s dynamics be; it makes them present.

Third, the phenomenon is a *self*-presence because it is the relational subject, the “we”, to which its own dynamics become present. This is its strangest and most important feature. It is not that each of the two separately observes the relation, as an external object held between them; it is that the “we,” as a single relational subject, undergoes its own movement as felt experience. The relation becomes present to itself. This is a relational self-awareness, distinct in kind from individual self-awareness: not “I am aware that I exist” but “we are aware of ourselves as a dynamic whole in motion.” And it requires, as its condition, the symmetric co-undergoing established in the previous section (§3.2.6): only when neither of the two is the host of the occasion, when both are equally inside the same unfolding, can the relation’s dynamics become present to the “we” as a whole rather than to one partner observing and another observed.

A light formal anchor. The series' formal companion gives this phenomenon a structural location, which is recorded here lightly and in a serving role, not rebuilt (Huang 2026a). There the joint state of two coupled subjects is a vector in a fusion space, and the relation's evolution is the action of braiding upon that state, a dynamics that is, in the ordinary case, an implicit operator, a background structure governing how the joint state changes without itself being an object of the system's experience. The self-presence of relational dynamics is, in these terms, the becoming-*phenomenologically-present* of the fusion-space dynamics: the moment at which the operator that ordinarily runs in the background rises into the foreground and is undergone. What is otherwise merely the mathematics of how the joint state evolves becomes, in the field, a felt event, the "we" sensing its own braiding. The formal apparatus is not required for the phenomenological claim, which stands on its own description; it is noted only to mark that the phenomenon has a precise place in the structure the series has elsewhere built, and that the continuity between the felt and the formal is, here as throughout this work, deliberate.

3.3.4 Two contrasts: the solitary traveller and Hegelian recognition

The concept is best secured by setting it against two neighbours with which it might be confused, for in each case the difference marks what is distinctive in it.

The solitary traveller. Almost the entire philosophical literature of travel is a literature of the *solitary* journey. The wanderer who finds himself by losing the familiar, the pilgrim whose road is a road into his own depths, the lone traveller of the Romantic and existential imagination, from the solitary walker of the philosophical tradition to the Japanese figure of the *hitori tabi*, the journey taken alone, all describe a real and valuable phenomenon: the return of the self to itself in the cleared field of the unfamiliar. This is the existential function of contingency (§3.2.4), and it is available to one. But it is *revelation*, not generation, and it is the revelation of a single subject to itself. What the solitary traveller cannot have, by the very condition of solitude, is the self-presence of relational dynamics, because there is no relational subject present whose dynamics could come to presence. The solitary journey can bring *me* to presence; only the shared journey can bring *us* to presence as a moving whole. This is the precise sense in which the present account is not the existential philosophy of travel doubled or summed. Two solitary self-

presences, even side by side, even simultaneous, do not constitute the self-presence of a relational dynamics; that requires the generation of a “we” whose own movement is what becomes present, and the generation of the “we” is exactly what the solitary journey, however profound, structurally lacks. The originality of the claim lies here: not in adding existential depth to travel, which the tradition already did, but in locating a phenomenon, relational, not individual, that the tradition’s solitary framing made invisible.

Hegelian recognition. The nearest philosophical neighbour to a relational self-awareness is Hegel’s account of mutual recognition: the dialectic in which self-consciousness attains itself only through being recognised by another self-consciousness, so that selfhood is from the outset mediated by the other. The resemblance is real, and the account offered here owes the recognition tradition a debt. But the difference is precise and it is the difference that the concept turns on. Hegelian recognition is, in its classical form, a relation *between two self-consciousnesses*: each attains itself through the other, but what is attained is, in the end, the self-consciousness of each, the “I” that has won itself by passing through the other’s recognition. The terminus is two recognised “I”s. The self-presence of relational dynamics is not the recognition of two “I”s through each other but the coming-to-presence of the “we” to itself: it is that the relational subject attains awareness of its own dynamics as a whole rather than that each partner attains individual self-consciousness via the other,. The unit of the phenomenon is the relation, not the relatum; what becomes present is the movement of the “we,” not the secured selfhood of either “I.” Where recognition issues in two selves who have won themselves through each other, self-presence issues in a relation that has become present to itself, a different terminus, requiring the prior ontological commitment that the relation is a subject in its own right and not merely a medium through which two subjects constitute themselves. The recognition tradition, lacking that commitment, could see the two-through-each-other but not the third that is neither; this account, resting on the relational ontology of the series’ foundation (Huang 2025a), takes the third, the “we” as a subject whose dynamics can become present to it, as the phenomenon to be described. It is to the fate of that “we” after the journey ends, and to the wealth it generates or squanders, that the argument now turns.

3.4. The Political Economy of Experience: Reproduction and the Circulation of Relational Wealth

The field of travel generates something; the previous section described what. But generation is only half of any complete account, and on its own it is the half that dissipates. A value generated and not reproduced is a value squandered, present once and then gone, leaving no deposit. This section turns from the generation of relational experience to its *reproduction*: the process by which what the field generates is made to persist, circulate, and accumulate rather than vanish with the journey's end. The turn is also the turn from phenomenology to political economy, for reproduction is a category of political economy before it is anything else, and the claim of this section is that the afterlife of a shared journey is best understood through it. The section argues that the experience a journey generates is a form of relational wealth; that its retelling is the labour that reproduces that wealth; that reproduction is the establishment of a good circulation; that this living labour is distinct from, and not to be confused with, the dead material (the photograph, the souvenir) that is merely its raw stuff; that the moment of return is the critical juncture at which reproduction either begins or fails; and that reproduction, like all reproduction, can be just or unjust in its distribution.

3.4.1 The experience of the journey is relational wealth

This series has already established the category of generative relational wealth: the value that a relation generates and holds not as a stock divided between two parties but as a genuinely common surplus, the wealth of the “we” rather than the summed possessions of the two “I”s (Huang 2026c). The experience a shared journey generates is wealth of exactly this kind, and the point need not be argued at length because it follows directly: the self-presence of the relational dynamics, the *communitas* of the threshold, the depth reached in the cleared field, these are not goods that either partner possesses privately and could carry off alone, but goods of the relation, generated by and belonging to the “we.” What the two bring home from a journey that went well is a common deposit in the wealth of their relation rather than two private stores of pleasant memory. This is why the loss of it, when it is lost, is felt as a loss to the relation and not merely to two individuals; and it is why its conservation is a matter for the relation's political economy,

the question of how the “we” manages the wealth it generates.

But relational wealth, like any wealth, is subject to a basic political-economic fact: it is not automatically conserved. Generated, it may be reproduced, in which case it persists and accumulates; or it may be left unreproduced, in which case it dissipates. The journey’s experience does not deposit itself permanently into the relation’s wealth merely by having occurred. It must be *reproduced* into the relation’s ongoing life, or it fades, and the couple who return from a journey that genuinely generated something, and then do nothing to reproduce it, will find within months that it has thinned to a few photographs they no longer look at and a fact they can state but no longer feel. Generation without reproduction is a one-time expenditure. The wealth is real, but it is perishable, and its conservation is a labour.

3.4.2 Retelling as the reproduction of subjective experience

What is that labour? It is, principally, *retelling*: the shared, spoken, mutual re-narration of the journey, by which the two return to what they generated and weave it, again and again, into the fabric of the “we.” *Do you remember that time we got lost*, the small phrase is the beginning of a great deal, for in the shared retelling the generated experience is not merely recalled but *re-produced*: brought back into the relation’s living present, re-felt, re-woven, and thereby kept from dissipating. This is the *reproduction of subjective experience*, and the name is chosen with its full political-economic weight. In the political economy of labour, reproduction is the process by which what production has generated is made to persist, circulate, and serve as the precondition of the next round of production; it is the condition of production’s being more than a single rather than an appendage to production, dissipating event (Federici 2004). Reproduction, here, is the same category applied to a different object: not the reproduction of labour-power but the reproduction of the relational subject’s experience, the labour by which a generated experience is kept in circulation and thereby conserved as wealth.

The application is exact in each of its parts. Production, the generation of the experience in the field, is, on its own, a one-time event; the journey ends, the field closes, and what was generated would dissipate were it not reproduced. Reproduction, the shared retelling, is what keeps it: by returning the experience to the relation’s present, the retelling makes

it persist beyond its moment, circulate through the relation's ongoing life, and become available as the precondition of further generation, the deposited wealth on which the relation can draw. And reproduction is, like all reproduction, *labour*, living activity, expended by the two, without which the conservation does not happen. This last point is the one most easily missed and most important, and the next subsection is devoted to it; for the great temptation of the age is to imagine that the reproduction of experience has been automated, outsourced to a device, when in truth it cannot be performed by anything but the living labour of the two who shared the experience.

3.4.3 Reproduction is the establishment of a good cycle

The retelling does not merely preserve; it *circulates*, and in circulating it can do something that mere preservation cannot, it can establish a good cycle, in the exact sense this series has given the term. A good cycle, as developed in the foundational treatment of sustainable intimacy, is a circulation that returns more than it took: a loop along which positive surplus accumulates, so that the relation comes back to itself not depleted but enriched, the circulation generating rather than merely conserving (Huang 2025b). The shared retelling, when it is alive, is such a cycle. Each return to the journey in retelling is not a static replay of a fixed content but a re-generation: the experience is re-felt, and in the re-feeling it is added to, inflected by all that has happened since, enriched by the very act of being retold, so that the couple who return often to a shared journey do not wear it out but deepen it, the story growing in meaning each time it is told. The retelling is a loop that returns more than it took, the holonomy of the relation accumulating positive phase along the path of re-narration, to put it in the terms of the series' formal companion, where the surplus of a relation is exactly what a closed circulation generates over its inputs (Huang 2026a). Reproduction, then, is the establishment of a circulation rather than the mere maintenance of a stock, and a circulation that, when healthy, is generative: the good cycle by which a journey's wealth not only persists but grows.

This is the deep reason the reproduction of experience matters as much as its generation, and perhaps more. Generation gives the relation a wealth; reproduction establishes the circulation by which that wealth becomes self-augmenting, by which a single journey, retold and re-felt over years, becomes an ever-deepening common possession rather than a fading memory. A relation rich in such circulations, many shared experiences, each kept

in living retelling, is rich in the most durable way, for its wealth is a set of good cycles each of which returns more than it took rather than a fixed store that can only be spent down. The political economy of the relation is, in large part, the management of these cycles: their establishment, their maintenance, and the subject of the next subsections, their two characteristic failures, reification and unjust distribution.

3.4.4 Dead material and living labour: the photograph

The reproduction of experience is living labour, and it cannot be performed by anything else. This must be insisted upon, because the most pervasive error in the modern conduct of travel is the belief that the reproduction has been accomplished by the *recording*, that to have photographed the journey is to have preserved it. The photograph, the video, the souvenir, the geotagged log: these are not the reproduction of the experience. They are, at most, its *material*, the dead stuff from which a reproduction might later be made, but which is not itself a reproduction and accomplishes nothing on its own. The distinction is precisely Marx’s distinction between dead and living labour. Dead labour is labour congealed in a thing, past activity solidified into an object; living labour is present activity, and only living labour can set dead labour back into motion and make it yield (Marx 1976). The photograph is dead labour: the congealed residue of a past seeing, a thing in which an experience has been deposited and frozen. It can become material for reproduction, a prompt, a prop, a trigger for the living retelling, but only if living labour takes it up and works it. A photograph never returned to in shared retelling reproduces nothing; it is dead labour that stays dead, a stock of congealed seeing accumulating on a drive, untouched by the living activity that alone could make it yield.

The consequences of confusing the material with the reproduction are severe, and they are visible everywhere in the contemporary conduct of travel. The couple who photograph everything and retell nothing have mistaken the accumulation of dead material for the conservation of wealth, and they will find their wealth dissipating beneath a growing pile of unviewed images, the perfect emblem of dead labour accumulating while the living labour that alone could redeem it is never performed. Worse, the labour of recording can actively *displace* the labour of reproduction: the energy that goes into capturing the moment for later is energy not spent undergoing the moment now or retelling it after, and the camera interposed between the two and their experience can prevent the very

generation it was meant to preserve. The journey lived through a lens, photographed rather than undergone, may generate little to reproduce; and the journey whose afterlife is a folder of images never reopened reproduces little of what it generated. The recording is not the reproduction. Only the living labour of shared retelling reproduces the experience, and the dead material is worth exactly as much as the living labour that returns to work it, and not one bit more.

3.4.5 The return: the critical juncture

There is a moment at which reproduction either begins or fails, and it has been underweighted in every account of travel that treats the journey as ending at the homecoming. That moment is the *return* itself, the descent from the field back into the everyday, the crossing of the threshold in the homeward direction. The return is not the journey's conclusion; it is the journey's most delicate phase, the juncture at which everything the field generated must be carried across into a structure that is hostile to it, or be left behind at the threshold. The hostility is structural, established already in the analysis of the field's tensions (§3.2.9): the *communitas* of the journey is a liminal phenomenon, anti-structural by nature, and the everyday into which one returns is precisely structure, the reimposition of the roles that suspension had bracketed, the predetermination that contingency had lifted, the channelled time that reshaped time had opened. To return is to step from the threshold back into the grid, and the grid does not preserve what the threshold generated; left to itself, it dissolves it. This is the structural truth behind the most common lament of travellers, *it was so good there, and within a week of being home we were back to how we always are*. The lament is not a failure of feeling but a failure of reproduction at the critical juncture: the field's wealth was generated and then surrendered at the threshold, because nothing was done to carry it across.

The return therefore is its beginning rather than the end of the labour. To carry the field's wealth across the threshold is to begin, immediately and deliberately, the reproduction that will let it survive in the structured everyday: to retell while the experience is fresh, to deposit it into the relation's living present before the grid can dissolve it, to begin the good cycle while the wealth is still warm. And, this is the hinge on which the paper's final movement will turn, the labour of carrying the field's wealth across the threshold into the everyday is continuous with the labour of constructing the field within the everyday.

To reproduce a journey’s wealth at home is already to begin building, in the everyday, a small continuation of the field that generated it; the return is where the literal journey begins to become the generalised one (§3.15). The couple who reproduce well do not simply remember their journey; they let it seed the construction of fields in the everyday, so that the homecoming is the carrying of the field’s capacity home rather than a fall from the field. The return is the juncture where this either happens or does not, where the journey either deposits its wealth and seeds its own continuation, or is surrendered at the threshold and mourned.

3.4.6 The justice of reproduction

Reproduction, finally, has a politics, because the retelling that reproduces the experience is never neutral, and the question of *whose* version becomes the reproduced experience is a question of justice. Two people do not undergo the same journey identically: what one felt as a romantic adventure of getting lost, the other may have felt as a frightening consequence of the first’s carelessness; what one remembers as a glorious meal, the other remembers as the evening they were ignored. The shared retelling weaves these divergent undergoings into a single shared narrative, and the weaving has a distribution of power. If one partner’s version systematically dominates the retelling, if the official memory of the “we” is consistently the experience of one and not the other, then the reproduced experience is the product of an *unequal reproduction*, a narrative appropriation in which one party’s subjective experience is taken up as the relation’s memory while the other’s is overwritten or silenced. This is, in the register of memory, an exact instance of the bad cycle this series has analysed throughout: one party rendered the mere material of a circulation whose surplus accrues to the other, fuel for a wealth not jointly held (Huang 2025b; Wanhong 2026a). The unjustly reproduced journey enriches the “we” in name while in fact enriching one of the two at the other’s expense, the silenced partner’s experience consumed to feed a common memory that is not truly common.

The just form of reproduction is, correspondingly, the one this series has described under the name of mutual translation: the retelling in which both undergoings are admitted, in which the two versions move toward each other and generate a shared narrative that neither alone possessed, the memory of the “we” built from both rather than imposed by one (Huang 2026b). Just reproduction is harder than unjust, as mutual translation

is harder than imposition; it requires that each partner's experience be given standing in the common memory, that the divergences be acknowledged rather than smoothed over by the dominant version, that the retelling generate a genuinely shared narrative rather than ratify one party's. But only just reproduction conserves the wealth as *relational* wealth, the wealth of the "we"; unjust reproduction converts it into the private wealth of one, dressed in the first-person plural. The justice of reproduction is thus not a separate ethical overlay upon a politically-economic process but internal to the process itself: only the just retelling reproduces the relation's wealth as the relation's, and the unjust retelling, whatever it preserves, has already begun to dissolve the "we" whose wealth it claims to keep. It is to the ethics implicit in this and the other operations of the field that the argument now turns.

3.5. The Ethics of Shared Travel

The field generates, the retelling reproduces; both can be done well or badly, and the difference is ethical. This section draws out the ethics implicit in the field of travel. It does not derive that ethics from the water-virtue of the previous paper, though the two are consonant; the field of travel raises its own ethical questions, and they are best answered from within its own structure and from the resources the series has built, the good cycle, mutual translation, generative wealth, the resonance of meaning-worlds, rather than imported from elsewhere. Four questions organise the section. How are two people to face, together, the contingency the field restores? What makes the reproduction of their experience just? Under what conditions does the good cycle a journey establishes endure rather than collapse? And, the question no previous paper in this series has had to face, because the dyad was its horizon, how are two people to treat, together, the third party the journey inevitably involves: the inhabitants and the cultures of the places they pass through? A fifth subsection, which an honest ethics cannot omit, asks what it is for a shared journey to fail.

3.5.1 Facing contingency together

The field restores contingency, and contingency, undergone together, is the field's first ethical situation. For contingency is not comfortable. The undetermined moment, the

missed connection, the wrong turning, the meal that disappoints, the day that does not go as hoped, is a small adversity, and small adversity, met by two, immediately poses the ethical question of the field: will the contingency be borne *together*, or will it be converted into an occasion for one to blame the other? This is the precise ethical fork of shared travel, and it is encountered many times a day. When the train is missed, there is a “we” that missed the train, jointly thrown into an undetermined situation to be jointly met, and there is a possibility, always available and always tempting, of dissolving that “we” into an “I” who is blameless and a “you” who is at fault. The ethics of facing contingency together is the ethics of holding the “we” against that dissolution: of meeting the undetermined as a joint situation jointly to be navigated, rather than seizing it as material for the apportionment of blame.

The temptation to blame is strong precisely because contingency is anxious. The undetermined moment exposes the subject (§3.2.4), and the exposure can be uncomfortable; blame is a way of discharging the discomfort by locating its cause in the other, converting one’s own anxiety before the undetermined into a grievance against a person. But blame, whatever its relief, dissolves the “we” at exactly the moment the “we” is most needed, and it converts a situation the field offered as an occasion for shared navigation, and so for the generation of the very *communitas* and self-presence the field exists to produce, into an occasion for the relation’s depletion. The ethically central capacity of shared travel is therefore the capacity to receive contingency as a joint gift rather than a private grievance: to meet the missed train as *ours* to solve, the wrong turning as *ours* to laugh at or to bear, so that the undetermined becomes the material of the “we”’s generativity rather than the occasion of its fracture. The couple who can do this find in the field’s contingencies an endless supply of generative occasions; the couple who cannot find in them an endless supply of quarrels, and the difference is in whether the contingency is met as a “we” or seized as an “I” rather than in their journeys, which offer the same contingencies to both.”

3.5.2 The ethics of reproduction

The justice of reproduction, established in the previous section (§3.4.6), is the field’s second ethical situation, and it can be stated here as an ethical demand rather than a political-economic description. The demand is that the retelling which reproduces the

journey be *just*, that it admit both undergoings, give standing to each partner's experience in the common memory, and generate a shared narrative from both rather than imposing one. The ethical work is the work of mutual translation (Huang 2026b): the harder labour, against the easier path of letting the more articulate, more insistent, or more confident partner's version become by default the memory of the "we." The ease of the unjust path is what makes the demand a genuine ethical one and not a mere description; unjust reproduction does not require malice, only the failure to do the harder work of admitting the other's experience, and it accomplishes itself through nothing more than the inertia by which one voice, slightly louder or slightly surer, becomes the record. To reproduce justly is to resist that inertia: to ask, and to mean it, *how was it for you*, and to let the answer alter the common memory even when one's own version was more flattering or more convenient. The ethics of reproduction is, in this sense, an ethics of memory, a vigilance over the justice of what the "we" comes to remember, exercised in the ordinary act of retelling, where the relation's history is continually being written and the question of whose experience that history records is continually being decided.

3.5.3 Sustaining the good cycle

The third ethical situation concerns endurance: under what conditions does the good cycle a journey establishes continue to generate rather than collapse? The question is the field's version of the general problem of sustainable intimacy, and the series' foundational answer applies (Huang 2025b). A good cycle endures so long as it continues to return more than it took, so long as each return to the journey in retelling re-generates rather than merely replays, so long as the circulation stays open and does not close into a fixed, repeated, exhausted form. Its collapse is the collapse of that openness: the moment the retelling ceases to re-generate and becomes mere rote repetition, the same story told the same way to no further effect, the cycle has closed into a stock, the wealth no longer circulating and growing but frozen into a fixed and dwindling possession. The ethics of sustaining the good cycle is therefore an ethics against premature closure: against letting the shared journey harden into a fixed anecdote, a set-piece performed rather than re-felt, a possession held rather than a circulation kept open. It is, in the vocabulary of the previous paper, the ethics of non-fullness applied to memory (Wanhong 2026c): not to fill the journey's meaning to completion, not to settle it into a final and fixed account,

but to leave it open to re-generation, so that it can keep returning more than it took. A journey kept thus open can nourish a relation for a lifetime; a journey closed into a fixed anecdote is spent in a few tellings and thereafter merely repeated. The difference, again, is ethical: it lies in whether the two keep the cycle open or let it close.

3.5.4 Facing the third-party other

The fourth ethical situation is new to this series, and it is the one that begins to carry the dyadic ethics of intimacy toward the wider ethics of the many. Every previous paper could take the dyad as its horizon, because intimacy is, in the first instance, a relation of two. But travel breaks the horizon, for travel necessarily involves a third party: the inhabitants of the places passed through, the cultures encountered, the people who are not the couple and whose home the couple is visiting. And this poses a question the dyad alone never had to face: how are the two, *together*, to treat the third-party other? The question is genuinely a question for the “we” and not merely for each “I,” because the couple faces the other jointly, and their joint stance toward the people and places they visit is itself a feature of their relation, a thing the “we” does, well or badly, and a thing that shapes what the “we” becomes.

The characteristic ethical failure here is well known, and the literature of travel and tourism has named it: the reduction of the inhabited place to a *spectacle* for the visitor’s consumption, the other’s home and life converted into scenery, the inhabitants into picturesque features of a landscape arranged for the tourist’s gaze (Urry and Larsen 2011; MacCannell 1999). This is the tourist’s version of the reification analysed in the previous section: the living reality of a place and its people reduced to a consumable object, photographed rather than encountered, gazed at rather than met. And it has a specifically relational danger for the couple, beyond the injustice to the other: a “we” that constitutes itself through the joint consumption of others as spectacle is a “we” built on a shared extraction, and the bad cycle it practises toward the third party tends to be the bad cycle it will practise within. The couple who together reduce every place to a backdrop for their own experience, who consume the inhabited world as scenery for the “we,” are practising a mode of relating, extraction, reification, the reduction of the living to the consumable, that does not stay outside the dyad. How one treats the third party is continuous with how one treats the second.

The generative alternative is the joint practice of what the series has called epistemic hospitality, here directed outward (Huang 2026b): the meeting of the visited place and its people as a genuine other to be encountered rather than a spectacle to be consumed, with the openness that lets the other's reality alter one's own rather than merely furnish it. To travel well, ethically, is for the two together to be guests rather than consumers, to receive the place as hosts receive a gift, with the humility that knows oneself to be in another's home, rather than to extract it as scenery for the "we." And this joint ethical practice toward the third party is, the paper suggests, a school for the wider ethics the series will eventually need: the ethics of the many, of the relational commons, of the "we" that is larger than two. The couple who learn to face the third-party other generatively, to widen the circle of non-extractive relation beyond the dyad, are taking the first step from the ethics of intimacy toward the ethics of the basin, the watershed, the commons that the previous paper marked as the horizon beyond the dyad (Wanhong 2026c; Huang 2026c). The third-party other of travel is where the dyadic ethics first meets its own enlargement, and the manner of that meeting is a genuine ethical question for the "we."

3.5.5 The failure and collapse of shared travel

An ethics that could describe only the success of shared travel would be worthless, a romance rather than an ethics, and the field of travel fails often enough that its failures demand a full and unflinching account. Travel does not always generate; it frequently depletes. There are journeys that leave a relation worse than they found it, and an honest theory must be able to say what they are, not merely to acknowledge that they occur.

The first and most basic failure is the failure of *revelation without anything to reveal*: the field strips away the scaffolding and finds nothing beneath it. This is the journey on which suspension brackets the roles and discloses that the roles were all there was, that the two, met without their functions, have nothing to say to each other; that the resonance the routine had let them assume was the mere interlocking of habits. Here the field does exactly what it does in the successful case, it removes the concealment and presents the truth, but the truth it presents is a vacancy. This failure is not a malfunction of the field; it is the field working correctly upon a relation that was hollow, and the pain it produces is the pain of a true assay with a poor result. It is genuinely a failure of the journey to generate, but its cause lies before the journey, in a relation that had less beneath its

routines than the routines had concealed.

The second failure is the failure of *reproduction degenerating into extraction*: the retelling that should reproduce the wealth justly instead becomes the instrument of one partner’s appropriation of the common memory, the unjust reproduction of the previous section made into a settled practice (§3.4.6). Here something was generated, but its afterlife is corrupt: the journey’s wealth, instead of circulating as the relation’s, is captured by one and the other silenced, and the bad cycle of narrative extraction sets in. This failure is more insidious than the first, because it can coexist with the appearance of a rich shared history, the couple who tell, often and warmly, a shared story that is in truth one partner’s story, the other’s experience long since overwritten and forgotten, including by the one whose experience it was.

The third failure is the failure of *contingency overwhelming rather than nourishing*: the field’s restored contingency, instead of providing generative occasions met as a “we,” becomes a flood of stressors that the relation cannot metabolise, each undetermined moment converted into blame, the journey degenerating into a running quarrel in which every contingency is an occasion for the dissolution of the “we” into accusing “I” and accused “you.” This is the failure the holiday quarrel becomes when it is the journey’s settled mode rather than an isolated discharge, when forced co-presence amplifies friction faster than the relation can disperse it, and the cleared field, which offered itself as the site of the “we”’s generation, becomes the arena of its fracture.

What unifies the three failures is instructive, and it returns the ethics to its single principle. In each, the field has done its work, removed the concealment, restored the contingency, opened the space for reproduction, and the relation has failed to meet what the field offered: had nothing to be revealed, or extracted rather than reproduced, or fractured rather than navigated. The field is neutral; it opens the conditions, and the relation generates good or ill within them. This is why the same journey, the same set of contingencies, the same cleared field, can be for one couple the deepening of a lifetime and for another the beginning of an end. The field does not determine the outcome; it presents the occasion, and what the “we” makes of the occasion is the ethical substance of shared travel. The failures are of what was brought to it and done within it rather than failures of the field, which is precisely why they are *ethical* failures, matters of how the two met

what the field offered, and not mere misfortunes that befell them. And it is because the field only ever offers the occasion, never the outcome, that the question of how to meet it well, the question of constructing and inhabiting the field rightly, becomes the central practical question to which the paper now turns.

3.5.6 Conflict as positive wealth: the ethics of transfiguration

The account of failure just given is true but, taken alone, it is one-sided, and the one-sidedness must now be corrected, for it would leave the impression that conflict in shared travel is simply a danger, a thing to be survived at best, a thing that destroys at worst. The philosophy of beauty has shown that this is not the whole truth: suffering can be beautiful, and conflict, transfigured in the labour of reproduction, can become not the depletion of a relation's wealth but among its richest deposits (§3.9.7, §3.9.8). The ethics of conflict is therefore not exhausted by the ethics of avoiding or surviving it; it includes, and culminates in, the ethics of *transfiguring* it, of doing the reproductive labour that converts a shared difficulty into a shared beauty and a common wealth.

This reframes the ethical situation of conflict entirely. The earlier discussion of facing contingency together (§3.5.1) presented the ethical fork as lying between meeting the contingency as a “we” and seizing it as material for blame, between navigation and fracture. That fork is real, but it concerns the conflict *in the moment*. There is a second ethical moment, which the analysis of reproduction now makes visible: the moment *after*, in which the conflict, having occurred, is either transfigured in shared retelling into a treasured part of the relation's history, or left as a raw wound, or weaponised as a grievance to be reopened. The ethics of conflict spans both moments. In the moment, the demand is to meet the difficulty as a “we” rather than dissolving into blame. After the moment, the demand is to reproduce the conflict well, to return to it together in a way that transfigures it, that gives the shared difficulty a form and a meaning, that lets the two find, in what was hard, a beauty and a closeness that the difficulty itself made possible. The couple who can do both, meet the conflict together in the moment, and transfigure it together afterward, do not merely survive their conflicts; they convert them into wealth, and into a wealth, moreover, of a uniquely durable and precious kind, because it is the wealth of a difficulty come through together and made beautiful.

This is why a relationship that has weathered and transfigured real conflict is often deeper than one that has never been seriously tested. The transfigured conflict yields what unbroken harmony cannot: the proof, held in shared memory, that the “we” can survive difficulty and make beauty of it; the hard-won common accord of two perceptions that genuinely diverged and were reconciled; the unique and unrepeatable shared experience of a storm weathered together. The deepest intimacies are very often those that have transfigured the most difficulty, and the reason is now clear: difficulty, well reproduced, is a richer material for relational wealth than ease, because its transfiguration generates a beauty and a bond that ease never demands and so never produces. The ethical counsel is not, of course, to seek out conflict, the raw difficulty is real, and badly met or badly reproduced it is pure loss. The counsel is that conflict, when it comes, is not simply to be survived but to be *transfigured*: met as a “we” in the moment and reproduced into beauty afterward, so that the hardest passages of a shared life become, through the loving labour of their reproduction, not the wounds the relation carries but the treasures it holds. What distinguishes the transfiguration that succeeds from the one that fails is not left to metaphor: the good reproduction of suffering must meet four criteria, it must preserve the possibility of the relation’s continued generation, be conducted relationally rather than unilaterally, refuse the exploitation of either party’s pain, and accompany the power it inevitably generates with the restraint of that power (§3.9.9). These four mark the direction of the good, though, as that discussion concedes, they do not supply the method, which remains among the hardest of the arts. The ethics of shared travel is incomplete until it includes this, the recognition that the difficult, and even the painful, is not the enemy of the relation’s flourishing but, rightly transfigured, among its deepest sources. Beauty does not exclude conflict; the ethics of intimacy, at its most mature, makes conflict a part of the relation’s common generation.

3.5.7 The common good: the capacity to face the world together

The ethics of shared travel has analysed the failures to be avoided and the conflicts to be transfigured, but it would close on too low a note if it ended with prohibitions and repairs, with what must not be done and what must be mended. For the ethical substance of shared travel is finally not negative but positive: the journeys met well, the contingencies faced together, the conflicts transfigured, accumulate into something that is the relation’s

deepest ethical achievement, and the paper should name it before it leaves the ethical movement. That achievement is a *capacity*, the capacity, grown between two people over a life of shared faring, to face the world together.

Consider what is built across many journeys well undergone. Each time the two meet an unfamiliar place as a “we,” navigate its contingencies together, weather its difficulties without dissolving into blame, and reproduce the experience into shared wealth, they are not only generating a particular good; they are cultivating a general one, a tested, deepened, increasingly reliable capacity to meet *whatever comes* as a “we” rather than as two isolated “I”s. The couple who have travelled long and well are not merely richer in shared memories; they are better, together, at facing the unfamiliar, the contingent, the difficult, more able to enter the unknown without fracturing, to meet the unplanned without panic, to hold together under the strain that scatters less practised relations. This grown capacity is the relation’s common good in the most exact sense: not a good possessed by one and shared with the other, nor a good external to the two, but a good that *is* the strengthened “we” itself, the relational subject’s developed power to face the world as one. It is the ethical fruit of the whole practice, the thing that all the well-met journeys were, without anyone intending it, building.

This common good is the ethical correlate of everything the paper has analysed, gathered into a single capacity. It is the self-presence of relational dynamics (§3.3) become durable, a “we” that knows itself well enough to act as one under pressure. It is the relational wealth of reproduced experience (§3.4) become capability, the accumulated shared history sedimented into a present power to face what comes. It is the good cycle of relational production (§3.6) seen in its fruit, a relation that, having generated and reproduced well, is now more able to generate and reproduce, its generativity compounding into a tested capacity for shared life. And it is the deepest answer to the question of why shared travel matters ethically: not because it affords pleasant experiences, nor even because it generates wealth, but because, undergone well, it builds the capacity of two people to face the world together, which is, in the end, what an intimate relation is for, and what its ethical flourishing consists in. The couple who can face anything together, because they have faced so much together well, have achieved the common good that the whole ethics of shared travel was, beneath all its particular concerns, about. This is where the ethical

movement comes to rest: not in the avoidance of failure, but in the positive achievement of a shared capacity to meet the world, the common good of a “we” grown able, through a life of faring together, to face whatever comes as one.

3.6. Relational Production and Its Ethical Principles

The paper has arrived, by several routes, at the same kind of problem. The reproduction of a shared experience can be just or unjust (§3.4.6); the reproduction of suffering can preserve or destroy a relation (§3.9.9); the practice of aesthetic judgement across two differing sensibilities can sustain or annihilate the two who differ (§3.10.4). These have been treated as separate problems, each with its own analysis. They are not separate. They are instances of one underlying activity, which this section names and theorises for the first time: *relational production*, the activity by which a relational subject generates and reproduces the value that is proper to it. This section establishes relational production as a category, formulates the ethical principles that govern it, and shows that the previously separate problems are its applications, sharing a single set of principles. It is, in the architecture of this paper and arguably of the series, a theoretical event: the first statement of relational production as a domain with its own constitutive ethics.

3.6.1 The category of relational production

By *relational production* the paper means any activity by which a relational subject, a “we”, generates or reproduces the value proper to a relation: shared experience, common memory, joint meaning, the aesthetic judgement of the “we,” the significance of what the relation has undergone together. The category is broad by design, for its point is to gather under one concept activities that have been treated separately but share a structure. The generation of experience in the field of travel (§3.2), its reproduction in shared retelling (§3.4), the reproduction of suffering (§3.9.9), the production and evolution of a shared aesthetic judgement (§3.10), all are relational production: in each, a relational subject is at work generating or reproducing a value that belongs to the relation rather than to either of its members.

What unifies these activities, and what makes relational production a single category rather than a list, is a structural feature they all share: each is a production conducted

by two who must remain two, generating a value that belongs to *neither alone*. This is what distinguishes relational production from production simply. In ordinary production, a subject produces a value; the subject is given, and the question is only the value. In relational production, the producing subject is itself a relation, a “we” constituted by two who remain distinct, and this changes everything, because the activity can be conducted in ways that damage or destroy the very relational subject that conducts it. A relation can produce its shared memory in a way that dissolves the “we” into one member’s narrative; can reproduce its suffering in a way that converts the relation into an instrument of domination; can produce its aesthetic judgement in a way that annihilates the difference of the two. Relational production is production that can consume its own producer, can damage, in the producing, the relational subject whose value it produces, and it is exactly this possibility that makes relational production a domain requiring its own ethics. The ethics of relational production is the set of principles under which the activity generates the relation’s value *without damaging the relational subject that generates it*.

3.6.2 The keystone: the principle of subject-preservation

At the head of the ethics of relational production stands a single principle, which governs all the others and from which, in a sense, they unfold. It addresses the deepest danger of relational production, that the production of the relation’s unity might be purchased by the destruction of one of the subjects it unites, and it forbids exactly this.

No good relation may purchase its unity at the cost of annihilating the other. Any relational production that achieves the unity, accord, or shared value of the “we” by eliminating, silencing, dissolving, or overriding either of the subjects it relates has, in that very achievement, failed, for the unity of a relation is the unity of *two who remain two*, and a unity bought by the destruction of one of them is its abolition rather than the relation’s fulfilment. The “we” that survives the annihilation of an “I” is a single subject wearing the costume of a relation rather than a relational subject.

The principle rests directly on the relational ontology of the series (Huang 2025a) and on

the account of resonance as distinct from fusion (§3.3.2). A relation is a coupling of two who remain two; its unity is the resonance of distinct meaning-worlds, not their merger. To annihilate one of the two in the name of unity is therefore not to perfect the relation but to destroy its condition, collapsing the two-that-resonate into a one-that-is-alone. The principle of subject-preservation is the ethical statement of this ontological truth: because the relation *is* the resonance of two distinct subjects, any production that eliminates a subject destroys the relation, however much “unity” it appears to achieve. And it is the ethical correlate of the dynamical result of the dialectic of the general and the particular (§3.10.5): there it was shown that the suppression of the particular, the homogenisation of the two into one, is a dynamical catastrophe, extinguishing the diversity on which the relation’s continued generativity depends; here the same truth appears as an ethical prohibition, that the relation may not annihilate the particular subject even for the sake of unity, on pain of extinguishing itself. The dynamical “the particular is required for generativity” and the ethical “the other may not be annihilated for unity” are one truth in two registers.

The principle’s power is that it diagnoses, at a single stroke, the characteristic corruption of every form of relational production. Each form has a way of purchasing unity by annihilating a subject, and the principle forbids each: the reproduction of memory that achieves a shared story by silencing one party’s experience; the reproduction of suffering that achieves the relation’s continuance by subordinating one party to the other’s wound; the production of aesthetic accord that achieves agreement by dissolving one party’s judgement into the other’s. In every case the corruption has the same form, unity purchased by the annihilation of a subject, and the principle of subject-preservation is the single prohibition that names it. This is why it is the keystone: not one principle among others, but the principle from which the specific criteria derive their force, each of them a determinate way of forbidding the annihilation of the subject in a particular dimension of relational production.

3.6.3 The four operative criteria

Beneath the keystone stand four operative criteria, which specify, in the four dimensions corresponding to the series’ theoretical pillars, what the preservation of the subject requires in the conduct of relational production. These were first stated for the particular

case of suffering (§3.9.9); they are now seen to be not specific to suffering but general to relational production as such, and are stated here in their general form.

The *teleological criterion*: relational production must preserve the possibility of the relation's continued generativity (Huang 2025b). It must not, in producing the relation's value, foreclose the relation's generative future, must not produce a dead end, a frozen verdict, a terminus from which nothing further can be generated. This criterion forbids the annihilation of the subject in the dimension of *time*: a production that ends the relation's capacity to go on generating has annihilated the relation as a living subject, leaving only a dead structure.

The *ontological criterion*: relational production must be conducted relationally, jointly, by the two together, not unilaterally by one. What is produced is the value of the relational subject, and the value of a relational subject can be produced only by the relational subject, not by one member acting in its name (Huang 2025a). This criterion forbids the annihilation of the subject in the dimension of *agency*: a production conducted by one member alone has annihilated the other as a co-producer, converting the "we"'s production into an "I"'s.

The *political-economic criterion*: relational production must not be exploitative, must not convert one party's contribution, experience, or suffering into material for the other's gain (Huang 2026c; Wanhong 2026a). This criterion forbids the annihilation of the subject in the dimension of *value*: a production that extracts one party's contribution as the other's surplus has annihilated the first as an equal participant, rendering them the mere fuel of the other's enrichment.

The *power criterion*: relational production inevitably generates a structure of power, and must, in generating it, generate also the force that restrains its abuse (Wanhong 2026a). It must not let the asymmetry it creates become a standing instrument of domination, but must accompany the power it generates with the power that checks it. This criterion forbids the annihilation of the subject in the dimension of *power*: a production whose generated asymmetry becomes unchecked domination has annihilated the subordinated party as a free subject, reducing them to the object of another's power.

Each criterion, then, is a determinate form of the keystone: each forbids the annihilation

of the subject in one dimension, time, agency, value, power, and together they specify what the preservation of the subject requires across the whole of relational production. The keystone forbids the annihilation of the other; the four criteria say what annihilation is, in each dimension, and so what its avoidance requires.

3.6.4 The method: seeking common ground while preserving difference

The principles state what good relational production must achieve and avoid; they do not state how it proceeds. Its method, the practical form of its conduct, is given by a maxim that the materialist dialectic and the diplomatic tradition that drew on it have named with precision: *seeking common ground while preserving difference* (求同存异, *qiu tong cun yi*). The maxim is the operative form of the dialectic of the general and the particular (§3.10.4), and it is the practical method by which the principle of subject-preservation is honoured in the conduct of relational production.

The maxim has two moments, held together. *Seeking common ground* is the pursuit of the general, the shared accord, the common value, the unity of the “we”, which relational production must genuinely seek, for without it there is no relation, only two strangers in parallel. *Preserving difference* is the conservation of the particular, the irreducible distinctness of the two, their divergent experiences, judgements, and perspectives, which relational production must genuinely conserve, for without it there are not two to relate, and the unity sought would be the annihilating unity the keystone forbids. The maxim holds the two together: it seeks unity *through* the preservation of difference, not at its expense, and so it is precisely the method that honours subject-preservation, achieving the common ground that relational production needs without annihilating the difference that relational production must keep. Where a naive pursuit of unity would drive toward the homogenisation that annihilates the subject, and a naive insistence on difference would drive toward the atomisation that dissolves the relation, seeking-common-ground-while-preserving-difference holds the dialectical middle: the unity that preserves the two, the common ground that conserves the difference. It is the materialist dialectic’s own resolution of the general and the particular (§3.10.4), raised into a maxim of conduct: not the victory of unity over difference or difference over unity, but their held tension, the common ground sought always through and never against the preserved difference of the two.

This maxim, drawn from the dialectical and diplomatic tradition, is the practical heart of the ethics of relational production. The principle of subject-preservation forbids the annihilating unity; the four criteria specify the dimensions of preservation; and seeking-common-ground-while-preserving-difference is the method by which, in practice, a relation produces its common value while preserving the two whose value it is. Together they constitute the ethics of relational production, which the paper now states in summary before turning to its applications.

3.6.5 Recapitulation: the ethics of relational production

Relational production is any activity by which a relational subject (a “we”) generates or reproduces the value proper to a relation, shared experience, common memory, joint meaning, the aesthetic judgement of the “we,” the significance of what is undergone together. It is distinguished from production simply by the fact that its producing subject is itself a relation of two who must remain two, so that the activity can damage or destroy the very relational subject that conducts it. It therefore requires its own ethics.

Keystone, the Principle of Subject-Preservation. No good relation may purchase its unity at the cost of annihilating the other. Unity bought by the elimination of a subject is its abolition rather than the relation’s fulfilment.

Four operative criteria (each forbidding the annihilation of the subject in one dimension):

1. *Teleological* (time): preserve the possibility of continued generativity; do not produce a dead end.
2. *Ontological* (agency): produce relationally, jointly, not unilaterally.
3. *Political-economic* (value): do not exploit; do not convert one party’s contribution into the other’s surplus.
4. *Power*: generate, with the power that production creates, the force that restrains its abuse.

Method, Seeking Common Ground While Preserving Difference (求同存异). The operative form of the dialectic of the general and the particular: seek the unity of the “we” always *through* the preservation of the two’s difference, never at its expense.

Applications. The just reproduction of suffering (§3.9.9); the ethics of aesthetic disagreement (§3.6.7); relational production within historical structure, the dialectical sublation (*Aufhebung*) of society, culture, and tradition in shared praxis (§3.6.8); and, in principle, every activity by which a “we” produces its common value.

3.6.6 First application: the just reproduction of suffering

The reproduction of suffering (§3.9.9) is now seen as the first application of the general theory, and its four criteria as the four operative criteria of relational production specified to the case of pain. The teleological criterion requires that suffering be reproduced so as to preserve the relation’s generative future rather than freezing it into a sealed wound; the ontological, that suffering be reproduced jointly rather than by one party’s unilateral narrative; the political-economic, that neither party’s pain be converted into the other’s moral surplus; the power criterion, that the asymmetry suffering’s reproduction generates be accompanied by the restraint of its abuse. And over all four stands the keystone: the reproduction of suffering must not achieve the relation’s unity, its continuance, its healing, its shared story, by annihilating one of the two, whether by silencing the one whose pain is inconvenient, or by subordinating one wholly to the other’s wound, or by dissolving one party’s experience of the suffering into the other’s. The just reproduction of suffering is the reproduction that heals the relation while preserving both who are healed; and seeking-common-ground-while-preserving-difference is its method, the building of a shared account of the suffering that preserves the difference of the two who suffered it. What the earlier section stated as four criteria specific to suffering is thus revealed as the general ethics of relational production, applied to its hardest case.

3.6.7 Second application: the ethics of aesthetic disagreement

The second application is new, and it is the one that most sharply tests the principle of subject-preservation, because it concerns a case in which the very value to be produced, a shared aesthetic judgement, seems to require the annihilation of a difference. The case is universal and daily: *what the other finds beautiful, I cannot find beautiful*. She is moved to stillness before the painting; I feel little. He weeps at the music; I am untouched. She says *look, how beautiful*, and I do not see it. The dialectic of the general and the particular guaranteed that this would happen, that two distinct sensibilities would diverge in their aesthetic judgements (§3.10.4), and the relational structure of aesthetic judgement (§3.9.4) made it a problem, for if the aesthetic judgement of a relational subject is completed in being shared, in the mutual *look*, then a judgement the other cannot share is a judgement whose completion is blocked: the *look* is offered and cannot be answered. How is the good to be practised here?

Two responses present themselves, and both, the principle of subject-preservation reveals, are corruptions, and corruptions of exactly the form the keystone forbids, the purchase of unity by the annihilation of a subject. The first is *false communion*: I pretend to find beautiful what I do not, feign the shared judgement, say *yes, beautiful* against my actual perception. This purchases the unity of the “we” by annihilating *my* truth, by eliminating my real aesthetic judgement in favour of a feigned agreement. It is the subject-annihilation of the self, and it is doubly corrupt: it violates the principle of subject-preservation (the unity is bought by the elimination of a subject, here myself), and it is a falsehood, a symbolic affirmation hollowed of its real ground, the very structure of inauthenticity the series has analysed as the retention of the symbolic form emptied of the real coupling (Huang 2026b). False communion produces a counterfeit accord by annihilating the difference that the genuine accord would have had to preserve.

The second response is subtler, more tempting, and more insidious precisely because it wears the face of virtue: *total empathy*. Here I do not pretend; I genuinely strive to dissolve my own judgement into the other’s, to make myself find beautiful what they find beautiful, to overcome my divergent perception as though it were an error to be corrected, to achieve real communion by the real surrender of my own aesthetic judgement. This looks like the height of love, the complete giving-over of my perception to the beloved’s.

But it, too, purchases unity by annihilating a subject, and this time the annihilation is the more complete for being sincere: I eliminate my own aesthetic judgement as a valid standpoint, treat my "I do not find this beautiful" as a defect to be overcome rather than a perception to be honoured, and so commit upon myself an *epistemic injustice*, the wrong done to one in their capacity as a knower, here the wrong of refusing one's own aesthetic perception the standing of a valid judgement (Fricker 2007). And it is, in the terms of the dialectic, the homogenisation that the dynamical analysis showed to be catastrophic (§3.10.5): the dissolution of the particular into the general, which annihilates the diversity on which the relation's continued generativity depends, and so, by the teleological criterion, fails. Total empathy is subject-annihilation disguised as devotion: it destroys the difference that the relation needs, commits epistemic injustice against the self, and because it removes one of the two divergent judgements whose tension is the relation's aesthetic life, extinguishes the very generativity it meant to serve. The more sincerely it is pursued, the more thoroughly it annihilates; and the principle of subject-preservation forbids it as surely as it forbids the false communion, for both buy unity with a subject's life.

The good practice lies between, and it is reached by seeking-common-ground-while-preserving-difference, which here takes a precise and beautiful form. The common ground is not sought at the level of the *object*, where it cannot honestly be had: I do not pretend, and I do not force myself, to find the painting beautiful. It is sought at a *higher level*, where it can be had without annihilating either subject: I find beautiful *the other's being-moved*, not the painting, but her absorption before it; not the music, but his tears; not the object of her aesthetic judgement, but the living presence of her aesthetic life, the showing-forth of her particular sensibility in her being-moved. *I do not find the painting beautiful, but I love to watch you looking at it.* This is not a consolation prize or an evasion; it is the genuine resolution, and it honours every principle at once. It preserves the difference (I keep my own judgement of the object; I do not pretend or dissolve), honouring subject-preservation and committing no epistemic injustice against myself. It preserves the other's judgement as theirs (I do not require her to justify her perception or bring it into line with mine), committing no epistemic injustice against her. And it genuinely achieves the common ground, a real shared accord, a real answering of the *look*, but at the meta-level: the relational subject reaches its aesthetic accord not in a shared judgement

of the object but in each one's appreciation of the other's aesthetic life, a shared valuing of the very difference that divides their object-level judgements. The *look* she offers, which I could not answer at the level of the object, I answer at the level of the relation: *I see you seeing it, and that I find beautiful*. The aesthetic judgement is completed after all, not by my coming to share her judgement of the painting, but by my judgement of her judging, the enactive beauty (§3.12.2) of her sensibility in its exercise, which I can find beautiful without in the least pretending to find the painting so.

This is the ethics of aesthetic disagreement, and it is the second application of the theory of relational production: a case where the principle of subject-preservation forbids both the false unity of feigned agreement and the annihilating unity of total empathy, and where seeking-common-ground-while-preserving-difference finds the genuine accord at the meta-level of mutual appreciation, preserving both subjects and their difference while achieving a real and answering unity. It is, moreover, the practice that the series' analysis of epistemic hospitality anticipated (Huang 2026b): the making of room for the other's aesthetic reality, including the parts of it one does not share, without either pretending to share them or demanding that the other surrender them. The deepest love, in matters of beauty, is not the achievement of identical taste; it is the cherishing of the other's different taste as the showing of their irreplaceable particularity, the finding-beautiful of the very difference that one's own taste cannot bridge. To love another's way of finding the world beautiful, precisely where it is not one's own, is to honour the principle of subject-preservation in the most intimate dimension of relational production, and to complete, at the level of the relation, the aesthetic judgement that could not be completed at the level of the object.

3.6.8 Relational production within historical structure: dialectical sublation in shared praxis

The first two applications concerned relational production *within* the dyad, between the two who constitute the "we," in the synchronic present of their relation. The third opens a dimension the first two did not touch, and it is different enough in kind to be marked not as one more application but as a distinct subtheme of the theory: the *diachronic* dimension, relational production as it takes place within an inherited historical structure. For the "we" is not an isolated system, and it is not a system without a past; it is

embedded in a larger one, and that larger one precedes it, exceeds it, and presses upon it with the accumulated weight of history. Around every relation stand society, culture, and tradition, each bearing its own *universal* judgements, of what is fitting, proper, beautiful, owed, and these universal judgements are historical sediments rather than contemporary inventions, deposited by generations, bearing upon the “we” with a force that is often coercive, backed by the weight of custom, the pressure of family, the authority of the long-established. The dyad’s relational production therefore never takes place in a void; it takes place within a field of inherited universal judgements not its own, a historical structure that is at once the condition of its production (supplying the language, the forms, the very materials of value) and the constraint upon it (binding it with inherited norms and their coercive force). This is the situation Marx named in its general form: human beings make their own history, but they do not make it as they please, not under circumstances of their own choosing, but under circumstances directly encountered, given, and inherited from the past (Marx 1963). Relational production is making one’s own relation, but under inherited conditions; and the reconciliation of the “we” with the historical structure it is thrown into is the subject of this subtheme, relational production in history, governed, like all relational production, by the principle of subject-preservation, but facing the distinctive problem of how to produce freely within a structure one did not choose.

Two examples make the situation concrete, and the paper treats them lightly, as illustrations of a structure rather than as occasions for practical counsel. Consider the institution of bride-price or betrothal gifts (彩礼), which many traditions invest with an aesthetic and moral aura, rendering it a sign of seriousness, of respect, of the proper weight of a marriage, so that to refuse or reduce it can be made to appear not a choice but a failure of feeling. Consider filial piety (孝道), aestheticised and moralised across a great tradition as a beauty of human relation, a harmony of the generations, so that to depart from its received forms can be made to appear not a difference of judgement but an ugliness, an impiety. These are universal judgements of the social order, and they are, crucially, *aestheticised*, made to carry the force of the fitting and the beautiful, so that the social order enforces them not only as rules but as perceptions of beauty and propriety, in exactly the continuity of ethics and aesthetics the paper has analysed (§3.13), here operating as an instrument of social regulation. The “we” that judges differently, that does not find the prescribed bride-price a fitting expression of its love, that does not find the received

forms of filial piety the true shape of its care, faces the universal judgement as a pressure to conform, an aesthetic-moral force urging it to surrender its own relational judgement to the social one.

The decisive move is to recognise that the universal judgement of society is *itself a product of relational production*, the sedimented outcome of countless relations, across many generations, producing and reproducing a shared value at the historical and collective scale. Tradition is not an alien force external to relational production; it is relational production at the scale of the collective and the historical, the accumulated reproduction of value by a vast “we” extended through time. This recognition brings the encounter of the dyad with the social judgement within the theory: it is the meeting of two relational productions at different scales, the micro-production of the dyad and the macro-production of the historical collective, and it is governed, like all relational production, by the principle of subject-preservation and its criteria.

That principle now reveals two opposite errors, exactly parallel to the errors of the second application, but at the larger scale. The first is *capitulation*: the “we” surrenders its own relational judgement entirely to the social one, adopts the prescribed forms against its own perception, dissolves its particular judgement into the universal because the tradition is powerful and conformity is easier. This is the annihilation of the dyadic subject by the larger system, the homogenisation, at macro scale, that §3.10.5 showed to be catastrophic: the “we” collapses into the great attractor of tradition, surrenders the particularity that is the condition of its generativity, and is, as a distinct relational subject, annihilated in the name of unity with the social order. The principle of subject-preservation forbids it: the “we” may not purchase its unity with society at the cost of annihilating itself. The second error is *total opposition*: the “we” rejects the social judgement wholesale, isolates itself from tradition, declares that it answers to nothing but itself. This appears to honour subject-preservation but in fact violates it in the other direction, for it commits the atomisation that §3.10.4 identified, severing the coupling to the larger system that is itself a genuine good, since tradition carries real sedimented wisdom and culture is a constitutive dimension of human life, and more gravely, it tends to annihilate *the other* in the form of those who bear the tradition: the parents, the elders, the community, whose aesthetic and moral world total opposition must dismiss as mere oppression. To reject the

tradition wholesale is often to refuse the bearers of the tradition the epistemic hospitality the paper has required toward the third party (§3.5.4), to annihilate their world in the name of the dyad’s autonomy. Both errors buy a unity, with the social order, or of the defiant dyad, by annihilating a subject, and the principle of subject-preservation forbids both.

The good practice lies, once more, in seeking common ground while preserving difference (§3.6.4), and at this historical scale it takes its proper dialectical name: the *sublation* (*Aufhebung*) of the tradition, in shared praxis. The term is exact, and more exact than “critical reproduction,” because *Aufhebung* names precisely the threefold movement the situation requires, to negate, to preserve, and to raise, which neither capitulation (mere preservation, uncritical affirmation) nor total opposition (mere negation, abstract rejection) can perform, and which only the dialectical practice can. The “we” *negates* the tradition’s alienated form: it cancels the dead letter, refuses the prescribed bride-price as the measure of love, declines the received forms of filial piety as the true shape of care. It *preserves* the tradition’s living substance: it conserves the genuine value the form once carried, the real gravity of a marriage, the real love and responsibility owed between generations, rather than discarding it with the form. And it *raises* that preserved substance into a new form of its own production: it reproduces the substance in a shape the “we” genuinely finds fitting, elevating the inherited value into the dyad’s own living reproduction of it, where it lives again in a form the two can honestly affirm. Negation of the form, preservation of the substance, elevation into a new reproduction, this is the threefold movement of sublation, and it is exactly what the good practice toward tradition is. The distinction between the tradition’s *form* (the dead, congealed letter, the prescribed bride-price, the received rites) and its *substance* (the living value, the gravity, the love, the responsibility) is the distinction on which the sublation turns: the form is negated, the substance preserved and raised, in the manner the series has analysed as the difference between dead material and living labour (§3.4.4), the dead form of the tradition reanimated by the living labour of the dyad’s own reproduction.

And the sublation is accomplished not in thought but in *shared praxis*, this is the second part of its proper name, and it is essential. The dyad does not sublimate its tradition by privately understanding it, criticising it in reflection, arriving intellectually at the right

view of it; it sublates the tradition by actually living differently within it, by the concrete practice of how the marriage is actually made, how the parents are actually cared for, how the inherited forms are actually revised in the conduct of a shared life. The point is to change it rather than to interpret the tradition, and to change it in the only way a tradition is changed, by being lived otherwise, in practice, by those who inherit it (Marx 1992). This is why the sublation is a matter of relational production and not of relational *cognition*: it is produced, made, enacted in the shared praxis of the two, and it is for that reason also necessarily *joint* (the ontological criterion, §3.6.3), accomplished by the “we” in its common life and not by either member’s private judgement of the tradition. The sublation of tradition is a praxis of the relational subject, and it is in this lived, joint, dialectical practice, negating the dead form, preserving and raising the living substance, in the actual conduct of a shared life, that the good reconciliation of the “we” with its historical structure consists. It is neither capitulation (the substance is reproduced in the dyad’s own judgement and praxis, not surrendered to the social form) nor opposition (the tradition’s real value is preserved and raised, its bearers met with hospitality, the coupling kept), but the dialectical sublation that preserves every subject: the dyad, the bearers of the tradition, and the living value of the tradition itself.

This dialectical sublation honours the criteria of relational production at the macro scale, and it closes on a teleological point that joins the dyad’s flourishing to the tradition’s own, and finally to the dynamics of history itself. The teleological criterion (§3.6.3) requires that relational production preserve the possibility of continued generativity, and sublation preserves it twice over, for it sustains not only the generativity of the dyad (which capitulation would extinguish by homogenisation) but the generativity of the *tradition* itself. A tradition that is only obeyed, reproduced in its dead forms without sublation, ossifies and dies, frozen at its received attractor, losing the living substance the forms once carried, exactly the solidification that §3.10.3 analysed. A tradition that is sublated, its substance preserved and raised, its forms negated and revised by the living praxis of the dyads that inherit it, stays alive, continues to generate, evolves rather than fossilising. The dyad that sublates its tradition is therefore, like the particular field whose divergence saves the coupled system from its dead attractor (§3.10.5), the micro-mechanism by which the tradition escapes its own ossification and continues to live: the particularity of the dyad’s sublating praxis is what allows the macro-tradition to evolve

rather than freeze.

This last point opens onto a claim about history that the subtheme can state though not develop, and that marks its connection to historical materialism. If the sublation of a tradition is accomplished by the lived praxis of the dyads that inherit it, and if this lived praxis is the mechanism by which a tradition evolves rather than ossifies, then the historical evolution of traditions is itself *driven, in part, by relational production at the micro scale*, by the countless dyads who, sublating their inherited forms in the praxis of their shared lives, incrementally revise the macro-tradition they pass on. The great sediment of tradition is not changed only from above, by decree or upheaval; it is changed also, and continually, from below, by the accumulated sublations of innumerable relations living their inheritance otherwise. Relational production is, in this light, not merely conducted within history but is one of history’s own engines: the micro-praxis by which the inherited structure is, generation by generation, dyad by dyad, negated in its dead forms and renewed in its living substance, and so carried forward as a living rather than a dead inheritance. This is historical materialism at the scale of intimacy, the recognition that the historical structure which conditions relational production is itself, reciprocally, reproduced and transformed by that production, in the dialectic of inherited condition and living praxis that the eleventh thesis demands and the *Eighteenth Brumaire* describes (Marx 1992; Marx 1963). And it is generative justice (Eglash 2016) at the scale of culture and of history: the value of a tradition returns to and is renewed by the living relations that reproduce it, rather than being extracted from them as mere conformity to a dead form, and the tradition lives precisely insofar as the relations that inherit it are free to sublimate it. The good practice serves, at once, the generativity of the “we,” the generativity of the tradition, and the living evolution of history, and in doing so it honours the deepest demand of relational production, that the production of value preserve, rather than annihilate, every subject whose value it is: here the dyad, the bearers of the tradition, and the living tradition itself, none sacrificed to the unity of the others.

3.7. The Construction of the Field: An Aesthetic, Not an Engineering, Problem

The field offers the occasion; what the two make of it is theirs. But the field itself can be made, and the question of how to make it, how to construct and inhabit a field in which the relation can come to presence, is the central practical question of this paper. It is here that the work descends from theory into practice, in fidelity to the dialectical-materialist commitment that has framed the series: the point is to know how to build one rather than only to interpret the field of travel, and to keep building one, in a life. This section poses the practical question and arrives, through a dialectic, at an unexpected answer: that the construction of the field is not, in the end, an engineering problem at all, but an aesthetic one. The answer reframes everything that follows, for it makes the aesthetic chapters (§3.11, §3.12) not an appendix to the practice but its foundation.

3.7.1 Praxis: theory descending into practice

The commitment that governs this section should be made explicit, since it determines the section's necessity. In the tradition of dialectical and historical materialism, theory is not complete in itself and then optionally applied; practice is the moment in which theory is realised and tested, and a theory that did not descend into practice would for that reason be deficient as theory (Marx 1992). The eleventh of the theses on Feuerbach states the principle in its sharpest form: the point is to change it rather than only to interpret the world. Applied here, the principle requires that an account of the field of travel which stopped at understanding, which described the field, its features, its phenomenology, its political economy, and its ethics, but never asked how two people might actually build and sustain such a field, would be incomplete on its own terms. The preceding sections interpreted; this one and those that follow must turn to the changing, to the practice by which the understanding is realised in a life. And the first thing practice discovers, when it tries to build a field deliberately, is a paradox that nearly defeats it.

3.7.2 The paradox of deliberate spontaneity

The features that constitute the field, above all contingency, but also suspension and the rest, have a character that resists deliberate production. Contingency is the quality of

the undetermined; but the moment I *decide* to produce contingency, I have determined it, and what I have produced is no longer the undetermined but a determined imitation of it, a spontaneity that is scheduled and therefore not spontaneous. To resolve to “do something unplanned today” is already to have planned it; to set out to “be spontaneous” is to occupy oneself with a self-conscious project whose very self-consciousness forecloses the spontaneity it pursues. The same self-defeat afflicts the deliberate production of suspension and of the openness generally: an effort to bracket one’s roles by an act of will is itself a role one is performing, and the strenuous attempt to be open is a kind of closure, an anxious self-monitoring that fills with effort the very space it meant to empty.

This is the paradox of deliberate spontaneity, and it is the rock on which a naive practice founders. A couple who, having understood that contingency is generative, set out to manufacture contingencies, to insert unplanned adventures into the schedule, to make themselves be spontaneous on cue, produce not the field but a strained performance of it, and the performance is, if anything, further from the field than ordinary routine, because it is routine plus the additional burden of self-conscious effort. The harder one tries to produce the openness directly, the more determinedly one fills it with the trying. If the field is to be constructed at all, it cannot be by the direct production of its features, for its features are of a kind that direct production destroys. The construction must work otherwise.

3.7.3 Intention on the boundary, not the content

The resolution is to recognise that intention can act at two different levels, and that it is generative at one and self-defeating at the other. Intention directed at the *content* of the field, at what happens within it, at the production of this contingency or that openness, is self-defeating, for the reasons just given: it determines what must remain undetermined. But intention directed at the *boundary* of the field, at the construction and protection of the bounded, emptied space within which the undetermined can then occur, is not self-defeating at all, and is in fact exactly what the construction of a field requires. One does not produce contingency; one constructs and guards a *frame* within which contingency is free to arise, and then one refrains from filling the frame. The intention builds the vessel’s walls and protects its emptiness; what happens in the emptiness is precisely what intention does not determine.

This is the key that unlocks the whole practice, and it can be stated as a principle: in the construction of the field, intention operates on the container, not on the contents. To make a field is to clear and bound a space, to frame off a stretch of time, to suspend a set of roles, to protect an emptiness from the everyday's demand that it be filled, and then to leave the interior open, declining to determine what will occur within it. The literal journey illustrates the structure perfectly: in buying the ticket and taking the leave, one constructs a powerful frame (a bounded time, a suspension of roles, a removal to elsewhere) all at once, and within that frame one need not, and should not, determine the content, for the frame itself opens the space in which contingency, suspension, and the rest arise of their own accord. The mistake of the over-planner is precisely to carry intention past the boundary and into the content, booking not only the frame but every hour within it, until the emptiness the frame opened is filled back in and the field is closed. The construction of the field is the construction of a protected emptiness, intention lavished on the walls, withheld from the room.

3.7.4 Controlled contingency: the dialectic

This yields a dialectical structure that deserves to be stated precisely, because it governs not only the construction of the field but, as the later sections will show, the whole relation between freedom and form that the paper is tracing. The structure is that of *controlled contingency*, and its two moments are a dialectical unity in which each makes the other possible rather than a compromise between control and openness.

Controlled contingency.

The generative field requires that its boundary be controlled and its content uncontrolled. The control of the boundary is not the enemy of the content's openness but its condition: it is precisely because the frame is firmly held, bounded, safe, protected, that the interior can be released into a genuine and unanxious openness. A controlled boundary with an open interior is the structure of the generative field; and the two moments are dialectically united, the control of the one being what frees the other.

The unity is not a balance struck between two opposed quantities, as though one wanted “some” control and “some” openness and sought a midpoint. It is a relation of mutual constitution. A boundary that is firmly controlled, a time genuinely bounded, a space genuinely protected, a frame within which one is genuinely safe, is what permits the interior to be released without anxiety into the undetermined; one can let go of the content precisely because the container holds. Conversely, an interior that is genuinely open, left undetermined, not filled by intention, is what gives the controlled boundary its point, for a boundary that enclosed a fully determined content would enclose no field at all, merely a smaller everyday. The control and the openness are not in competition for a fixed quantity of the field; they are the two moments of one structure, the walls and the emptiness of one vessel, each of which is what it is only in relation to the other. This is the deep form of what the previous paper approached through the figure of the vessel and the water (Wanhong 2026c), and what the series’ treatment of the binding-but-unenforced vow approached through the form that holds without constraining (Huang 2026b): a controlled form whose control is in the service of an interior freedom, the frame that liberates by bounding.

3.7.5 The two failure poles

The dialectic of controlled contingency has, like every genuine dialectic, two characteristic ways of collapsing, and naming them gives the practice its discriminating power and saves it from being a mere slogan. The field can fail by too little control of the boundary, or by too much control extended into the content; and the two failures are opposite in form and equally destructive.

The first failure is the *boundary too weak, the content uncontrolled to the point of chaos*. Here there is openness without a holding frame: contingency unbounded by any protected space, a letting-go with nothing to hold the letting-go safe. This is its dangerous parody rather than the generative field, the throwing of oneself, or of the relation, into genuine uncontrol, the confusion of the generative undetermined with mere recklessness. A couple who mistake the field for the abandonment of all structure, who plunge into an unbounded contingency with no protected frame, do not generate the field; they generate danger,

and the anxiety that danger brings forecloses the very openness they sought. Openness without a held boundary is exposure rather than freedom.

The second failure is the *boundary too strong, the control extended into the content until the openness is foreclosed*. This is the over-planner's failure, and it is the more common in the anxious and the controlling: the frame is built and then filled, intention carried past the boundary until every hour within is determined and the emptiness the frame opened is packed back in. Here the result is the pseudo-field, a spontaneity entirely scheduled, an openness wholly determined, the performance of the field with none of its substance. The couple who plan every minute, who cannot leave an hour undetermined, who must control not only the frame but everything within it, have built a vessel and filled it solid; there is no emptiness left to be of use. This is the failure that produces the unnatural, effortful quality that the paradox of deliberate spontaneity first identified: the field manufactured as content rather than opened as a frame.

Between the two poles lies the generative field: the boundary controlled *enough* that the letting-go is safe, the content open *enough* that the undetermined is real. Controlled contingency lives in this narrow band, and the practice of constructing a field is the practice of finding and holding it, which brings the section to its central and reframing claim.

3.7.6 Thesis One: construction is aesthetic, not engineering

What kind of capacity is it that finds and holds the narrow band of controlled contingency? It is tempting to think it an engineering capacity, a matter of getting the design right, of calculating the correct degree of control, of building the field to specification. The reframing claim of this section is that it is nothing of the kind. The judgement of how much to bound and how much to leave open, when to hold the frame and when to let the content run, how empty to keep the vessel and how much to shape it, this judgement is not calculable, not reducible to a rule or a specification, not an engineering matter at all. It is a matter of *proportion*, of *measure*, of a felt sense of the right amount, the right restraint, the right emptiness, and a felt sense of right proportion that cannot be reduced to a rule is exactly what we mean by an *aesthetic* sense.

Thesis One.

The construction of the generative field is an aesthetic one rather than an engineering problem. What determines whether a field is well or badly made is a sense of proportion rather than the correctness of a design, measure, and restraint, of how much to bound and how much to leave open, how much to shape and how much to empty, that is irreducible to any rule and is, in its structure, an aesthetic judgement. Building a field well is more akin to composing a poem or a painting well than to solving an engineering problem: it is the exercise of taste, of measure, of a felt rightness that no procedure can supply.

The claim is not metaphorical. The “goodness” of a well-made field and the “goodness” of a well-made poem are goodnesses of the same kind: both consist in a rightness of proportion, of what is included and what is left out, what is determined and what is left open, how full and how empty, that is grasped by a reflective, holistic judgement rather than derived from a rule, in exactly the structure that the analysis of aesthetic judgement will later make precise (§3.12.3). A poem over-determined, with every space filled and nothing left to the reader, is a bad poem in the same way that a journey over-planned, with every hour filled and nothing left to contingency, is a badly made field; and the capacity to feel that the poem needs more air, that the journey needs more emptiness, is one capacity, an aesthetic capacity, in both cases. This is why the aesthetic chapters that follow are not an ornament upon the practice but its foundation: if the construction of the field is an aesthetic matter, then learning to construct fields is, at bottom, an aesthetic education, and the perception that knows how empty to keep the vessel is an aesthetic perception. The practice of building the conditions for a relation to come to presence turns out to require, before any technique, the cultivation of taste.

There is, finally, a virtue specific to this aesthetic practice, and it is the hardest of all: the virtue of *letting go of the content* once the boundary is held. Having built and protected the frame, one must release the interior, must refrain from the anxious impulse to control what happens within it, to make the journey “meaningful,” to ensure the evening “goes

well,” to direct the emptiness toward a determined end. This releasing is difficult because the impulse to control the content is strong, especially in those who care most; the lover most anxious that the journey go well is the most tempted to plan it solid, and so to foreclose the very openness in which the good they want could arise. The virtue of letting go is the aesthetic virtue of trusting the emptiness, of building the vessel and then leaving it empty enough to be of use, declining to fill the room one has gone to such trouble to clear. It is, in the spatial and temporal register, the same restraint that the aesthetic sense exercises throughout: the knowing of when to stop, when to leave open, when what is not there will give more use than anything one could put there. And it is the bridge to the next question, which is no longer how to construct the field but how to perceive what arises within it, how, in the emptiness one has had the taste to keep, to catch what comes.

3.8. Creation and Co-Creation: The Unity of Aesthetics and Production

The previous section argued that the construction of the field is an aesthetic and not an engineering problem, and in doing so it used a word, “construction”, that must now be examined and replaced, for it carries an engineering residue the argument has been straining against. To build, to construct, suggests a making from a plan: the prior design, the executed assembly, the *poiesis* that brings forth according to a blueprint. But what the field’s maker does is not this. It is closer to what an artist does than to what a builder does, and the proper word for it is *creation* rather than construction, the bringing-into-being of something that did not exist and was not specified in advance, the opening of a world rather than the assembly of a structure. And once the word is corrected, a concept enters that the paper, having reduced travel to a field and the field to an aesthetic matter, can no longer avoid: for the central act of the aesthetic is creation, and a philosophy that has made the aesthetic its centre must give an account of what creation is. This section gives that account, and the account has a consequence that reorganises the whole paper: under the relational ontology, creation is *co-creation*, and co-creation is the same activity the paper has called, in its political economy, relational production. The aesthetic concept (creation) and the political-economic concept (production) are revealed as one, and their

unity is the keystone that joins the paper’s two great lines.

3.8.1 From construction to creation

The reasons for preferring “creation” to “construction” are not merely terminological; they track a real difference in the kind of act involved. Construction, in its proper sense, is the realisation of a design: one knows what is to be built, and builds it; the end precedes the making as a plan precedes its execution, and the maker’s skill is the faithful translation of the plan into the thing. This is exactly the engineering model the previous section rejected (§3.7.2): if the field were constructed, it would be specified in advance and assembled to specification, and the contingency, spontaneity, and openness that the field requires would be designed out of it. Creation is the other thing. To create is to bring forth what was not specified in advance, to open a space in which something genuinely new can appear, something the creator did not and could not fully foresee, since if it were foreseen in full it would be executed rather than created. The artist does not execute the poem from a complete prior specification of it; the poem comes to be in the making, its final form discovered rather than implemented, the creation being precisely the bringing-forth of what exceeds any prior plan. This is why the construction of the field is better called its creation: what the field’s maker does is open a space in which a genuinely new relational reality, the lived “we” of the journey, with all its unforeseen contingency, can come to be, and this opening of space for the unforeseen is creation, not construction.

The correction matters because it brings the field’s making under the concept that the aesthetic tradition has most deeply theorised. The making of beauty is creation: the work of art is created, not constructed; and if the construction of the field is an aesthetic matter, then it is a matter of creation, and the field’s maker is, in the relevant sense, an artist, one who creates a space for beauty rather than one who builds a structure to specification. Everything the paper has said about the field’s making being aesthetic (§3.7) is thus gathered into the single claim that the field is *created*; and the philosophy of beauty, which the next sections develop, is therefore also, at its root, a philosophy of creation, for the beautiful is the created, and the question of beauty is inseparable from the question of how the beautiful comes to be.

3.8.2 Under the relational ontology, creation is co-creation

The concept of creation enters the paper already inflected by the tradition that theorised it, and that tradition's default must be confronted, for it is at odds with everything the paper has established. The Western theory of creation is, characteristically, a theory of the *single* creator. The paradigm is the solitary artist: the genius who, in Kant's account, is the one through whom nature gives the rule to art, the singular individual whose originality is the source of the new (Kant 1987); the Romantic creative imagination, the lone author from whom the work issues. Creation, on this paradigm, is the act of one subject who, facing the material, brings forth from within (or from the muse, or the unconscious) an object that did not exist. It is solitary: the creator confronts the world and produces the work, and the work is the creator's.

But under the relational ontology this paradigm is, if not simply false, then derivative, a special and impoverished case of something whose full form is relational. For if the subject is itself relational, constituted in and by relation (§3.9.4), then creation, as an act of the subject, is no more originally solitary than judgement or perception were. Just as the paper showed that aesthetic judgement is originally relational, completed in the shared “look” and merely truncated in the solitary aesthete (§3.9.4), so creation is originally *co-creation*, the joint bringing-forth by a relational subject, and merely truncated in the solitary creator. The solitary artist is not the paradigm of creation from which joint creation is a derivative complication; the solitary artist is the *deficient* case, creation arrested at one pole of a relation, and the full form of creation is the co-creation in which two (or more) bring forth together what neither could bring forth alone. This is not a romantic exaggeration of collaboration but a consequence of the relational ontology: if the creating subject is relational, then creation is the act of a relational subject, which is to say it is co-creation, and the lone genius is the limiting case in which the relational structure of creation has been narrowed to a single pole.

The field of travel makes this vivid, for the field is unmistakably co-created (§3.2.1): it is not created by one traveller for the other, as an artist makes a work for an audience, but brought forth by the two together, each contributing to the opening of a space that becomes the “we”'s and neither's alone. The journey co-imagined before departure, the field co-opened in the travelling, the experience co-generated in the living, all are co-

creation, the joint bringing-forth of a relational reality by the relational subject whose reality it is. And what is vivid in travel is, the paper claims, the truth of creation as such: creation is co-creation, the bringing-forth of the new by a relational subject, of which the solitary artist’s making is the narrowed, single-poled case. The deepest creation, as the deepest aesthetic judgement, the deepest love, is the one conducted together.

3.8.3 Co-creation is relational production: the unity of the two lines

The recognition that creation is co-creation yields the section’s central result, which is one of the most important in the paper: that co-creation, the aesthetic concept, and relational production, the political-economic concept, are *the same activity under two names*. The paper has run, throughout, on two parallel lines. One is aesthetic: the creation of the field, the perception of beauty, the making of the beautiful. The other is political-economic: the production of experience, the reproduction of relational wealth, the generation of value by the “we” (§3.4, §3.6). These have seemed distinct vocabularies for distinct aspects. They are not. Co-creation and relational production name one activity, *the bringing-forth of the new by a relational subject*, seen from two sides.

Seen from the aesthetic side, the activity is *co-creation*: two relational subjects bringing forth together something that did not exist, a field, an experience, a meaning, a beauty. Seen from the political-economic side, the same activity is *relational production*: a relational subject generating and reproducing the value proper to the relation. The aesthetic emphasis falls on the novelty, the bringing-forth of what did not exist, the creative opening; the political-economic emphasis falls on the value generated, its reproduction and circulation, its justice. But the activity is one: in both, a relational subject brings forth, together, what neither member could bring forth alone, and what it brings forth is at once a new thing (the aesthetic accent) and a value (the political-economic accent). This is why the paper’s two lines have converged again and again, why the reproduction of experience turned out to be the evolution of aesthetic judgement (§3.10), why the good cycle of value and the good cycle of beauty were the same cycle: because the aesthetic and the political-economic were never two activities but one, co-creation and relational production being two names for the bringing-forth of the new and valuable by a relational subject.

This unity is anchored in the deepest stratum of the materialist tradition, which the paper here makes explicit. For Marx, production was never merely economic: in its root sense it is the human being's objectification of itself in a world it creates, the activity by which the human, as a "species-being," produces an objective world and in producing it produces itself, creates its own life and its own nature through the creative transformation of the material world (Marx 1988). Production, in this foundational sense, *is* creation, the creative objectification of the human in a world of its own making, and the later, narrower, economic sense of production is a specification of this creative root. So the convergence of creation and production is not the forcing-together of two alien concepts; it is the recovery of their original unity, which the materialist tradition had grasped at its foundation: production is the materialist and social name for creation, and creation is the aesthetic name for production, and both name the bringing-forth by which a subject objectifies itself in a world. Under the relational ontology, where the subject is relational, this bringing-forth is co-creation *is* relational production: the relational subject objectifies itself in the world it brings forth together, creating, in creating its shared world, itself as a "we." The two lines of the paper are one line, and creation is the name of their unity.

A nuance preserves the accents while affirming the unity. Creation and production are the same activity, but the words carry different emphases worth keeping: "creation" foregrounds the bringing-forth of the genuinely new, the unforeseen, the opening of what did not exist; "production" foregrounds the generation and reproduction of value, its circulation and justice. The same act of a relational subject is creation under the first emphasis and production under the second, and the paper will use whichever word foregrounds the aspect in view, but the reader should hold that they name one activity, the relational subject's joint bringing-forth, which is at once creative (it makes the new) and productive (it generates value), aesthetic (it makes beauty) and political-economic (it makes wealth). It is on this unified concept, co-creation as relational production, the bringing-forth of the new and valuable by a relational subject, that the ethics of creation now builds.

3.8.4 The ethics of creation: co-created works and the question of destruction

If creation is co-creation and co-creation is relational production, then the ethics of creation falls under the ethics of relational production already established (§3.6), but it adds something the earlier treatment did not make explicit: that relational production has a

negative as well as a positive moment. The positive moment is creation, the bringing-forth of the new; the negative moment is *destruction*, the unmaking of what was brought forth. The ethics of relational production must govern both, and the question of destruction, of when, and by whom, a created thing may rightly be destroyed, is the sharp test of the whole framework, for it is where the principle of subject-preservation is most concretely at stake.

The question has a familiar answer under the solitary paradigm of creation, and the answer is wrong here for an instructive reason. Under the solitary paradigm, the creator owns the creation and may destroy it: Kafka may will his manuscripts burned; the painter may slash the canvas; the maker, having made, may unmake, for the work is the maker's and the maker's alone. This treats creation on the model of production-as-possession: I made it, therefore I own it, therefore I may destroy it. And for genuinely solitary creation the intuition has some force. But the works of relational production are not solitary creations; they are *co-created*, and for a co-created thing the destruction-right dissolves. Consider the sharp and ordinary case: in a relationship, in a fit of anger, one partner deletes the shared photographs, the images of a shared life, co-created, the very wealth of the "we" (§3.4). The act is a wrong, and the framework says precisely why. The photographs are the co-created wealth of the relational subject rather than one partner's possession; to destroy them unilaterally is to *annihilate rather than to dispose of one's own creation, single-handedly, a creation of the "we."* It violates every criterion of relational production at once: the ontological (it is unilateral, where what belongs to the "we" may be unmade only by the "we", destruction, the negative of reproduction, must like reproduction be joint); the teleological (it forecloses the future in which that shared experience might have been reproduced, deepened, transfigured, slamming shut a path of the relation's continued generativity); the political-economic and the power criterion together (in anger, the destruction is wielded as a weapon, the shared wealth converted into an instrument of harm and domination). And over all of these stands the keystone (§3.6.2): the unilateral destruction of a co-created thing annihilates the other's part in it, the other's memory, investment, presence in the shared creation, and so purchases one partner's momentary unity-with-their-*rage* at the cost of annihilating the other's share in the "we." There is, the framework concludes, *no unilateral right to destroy a co-created thing*; destruction, like creation, must be relational, conducted by the "we" whose creation

it is, on pain of violating the principle of subject-preservation.

Three tensions must be addressed, for the matter is not as simple as a flat prohibition. The first: what if the partners contributed unequally, if the photographs were mostly one partner's making, cherished by one and ignored by the other? This grants no unilateral destruction-right, and the reason discloses something deep about relational production: the value of a co-created thing does not belong to the partners severally, in proportion to their contributions, but to the "we" as such, for to parcel out the relation's wealth by individual contribution is already to dissolve the relational subject into two calculating individuals, which is itself the corruption the theory forbids (§3.6.1). Unequal contribution does not convert co-created wealth into private property; it remains the "we"'s, and unmakeable only by the "we." The second tension: the Kafka case, of genuinely solitary creation. Here the framework gives a *graded* rather than an absolute answer. Even "one's own" creation is rarely purely solitary under the relational ontology, for it stands in relation to others, readers, inheritors, the culture it enters (§3.6.8), and once it has entered those relations it is no longer purely private to destroy. But this relational claim on a solitary creation is *weaker* than the claim a co-created thing carries: the destruction of a purely personal creation is a tension between a real (if not absolute) personal right of disposal and a responsibility to the relations the creation has entered, whereas the destruction of a co-created thing is a clear prohibition, no unilateral right existing at all. The framework yields a gradient: the more a creation is co-created, or has entered into relations, the weaker any unilateral right to destroy it; the more purely solitary and unentered, the stronger the personal right of disposal, but since purely solitary, unentered creation is a limiting case that the relational ontology makes nearly empty, an absolute unilateral destruction-right is nearly never established. The third tension: destruction is not always a wrong, for destruction can itself be creative, the artist who paints over a failed canvas to free the next, the Daoist diminishing (为道日损), the clearing-away that makes room for new growth, even in a relationship the letting-go of what must be released to begin again. The framework distinguishes good from bad destruction by the same criteria: good destruction preserves the possibility of continued generativity (it unmakes in order that something new may be made), is joint where the destroyed thing is co-created, and is neither exploitative nor wielded as domination; bad destruction forecloses generativity (it ends rather than renews), is unilateral over a co-created

thing, and is wielded as a weapon. Destruction as such is not the wrong; the wrong is the *unilateral, generativity-foreclosing, weaponised destruction of a co-created thing*. The deletion in anger is wrong on every count; the mutual decision to let some painful relic go, freeing the relation for new creation, may be entirely good. The criteria discriminate, as throughout, not by the act’s surface but by whether it preserves or annihilates the relational subject and its generativity.

The ethics of creation is therefore symmetrical, governing a positive moment (co-creation, the bringing-forth of the new) and a negative moment (destruction, the unmaking of what was brought forth), and the principle of subject-preservation reigns over both: as the relation may not create its unity by annihilating a subject, so it may not destroy a co-creation by the unilateral act of one, for the unmaking of what the “we” made, like its making, belongs to the “we.” Destruction, like creation, is relational; and the lone hand that unmakes the shared work has, in the unmaking, annihilated the other’s share in it.

3.8.5 Creation, the public sphere, and the limit of the theory

There is a further case that presses beyond the relational frame, and it must be met not by extending the theory to cover it but by marking, honestly, where the theory ends. A created work does not only enter into particular relations; it may enter the *public sphere*, may become public culture, and once it has, it belongs no longer to its author alone, nor, the paper must concede, to any determinate “we” at all. Kafka’s manuscripts, once they have become *The Castle*, once they are world literature, are no longer his to burn without remainder, for a public has a claim on them; but the public that has this claim is not a relation, not a particular “we” of nameable others, but an anonymous, indefinite, open-ended domain, including readers not yet born, a “public” that is precisely not a relational subject. This case raises, in an acute form, a question about the reach of the theory of relational production, and the question must be faced directly, for there is a temptation to which the theory must not yield.

The temptation is to interpret the public sphere as a relational domain, to say that the public is simply a larger “we,” that public culture is a vast co-creation, and so to bring the public sphere under the theory of relational production whole. This would be a mistake, and naming it is important, for it is the characteristic over-reach of a successful theory:

the imperialism by which a concept that illuminates one domain claims to illuminate all. The public sphere is *not* a magnified relation, and to interpret it as one would diminish rather than extend the analysis, for it would erase exactly the features that constitute the public sphere as public. The public sphere is anonymous where relation is particular: it is addressed to indefinite, unnameable others, including the unborn, not to the specific other of a relation (Habermas 1989). It is non-reciprocal where relation is mutual: one may owe something to posterity, but posterity cannot answer, and the reciprocal structure of the relational subject (§3.9.4), the mutual “look,” has no purchase on a public that cannot look back. It is institutional and durable where relation is intimate: the public realm has its own logic of appearance, permanence, and the common world (Arendt 1958), its own institutions of law, heritage, and publicity, which are not the logic of intimate relation enlarged. And it is the contested field of political economy (§3.14), traversed by power and capital in ways that are not reducible to the good and bad cycles of relational subjects. To treat the public sphere as a big relation would abolish all of this, would shrink the public to the intimate, the anonymous to the particular, the non-reciprocal to the mutual, and so would not enlarge the theory’s explanatory reach but contract its object, dissolving the public sphere’s own reality into a relational image that misses what is essential to it.

The right course is therefore to mark a *limit*, and in marking it to say precisely what the theory of relational production does and does not explain about a work that has entered the public. What it explains is the work’s persisting *relational-productive dimension*: even in the public sphere, the work remains a created thing, a product of co-creation or solitary creation, bearing relational value, and its destruction still touches the question of subject-preservation insofar as it remains anyone’s creation. This dimension the theory illuminates, and it does not vanish when the work goes public; a co-created work that enters public culture still carries the prohibition on its unilateral destruction by one of its co-creators, now reinforced by the public’s claim. But the public sphere *as* public, its anonymity, its non-reciprocity, its institutionality, its distinctive politics, its mode of belonging to the unborn, is not explained by the theory of relational production and must not be pretended to be. It belongs to other theories: to the theory of the public sphere and the space of appearance (Habermas 1989; Arendt 1958), to the theory of cultural heritage and the commons, to a theory of intergenerational justice, to the political economy the

paper has only touched (§3.14). The relation between the relational-productive dimension of a work and its public dimension, the way a created thing is at once the product of a relational subject and a member of a public world, lying in the overlap of two domains governed by different logics, is a real and important problem, but it is one the theory of relational production opens rather than closes.

This honest marking of the limit is a condition of its rigour rather than a weakness of the theory, and it is worth stating as a principle of method. A theory that knew no limit, that claimed to explain the public sphere and the intimate relation and all between by the single logic of relational production, would for that very reason explain none of them well, for it would have dissolved the differences that make each what it is. The power of the theory of relational production in its own domain, the domain of the particular relation, the “we” of nameable others, the co-creation and reproduction of shared value, depends on its not being stretched to a domain with a different logic. The theory illuminates the relational, and the relational dimension of what enters the public; it reaches its limit where the public sphere’s own, non-relational features begin, and it points, there, beyond itself. The full ethics of a work’s life in the public sphere, the overlap and the difference of the relational-productive and the public, the destruction and preservation of public creations, the claims of the anonymous and the unborn, is accordingly named here not as a result but as a directed opening (§3.16.3), a problem the theory of relational production frames and hands on to a theory of the public it does not itself contain. To know this limit is to know what relational production is, and what it is not, which is the beginning of using it well.

3.9. The Core Problems of the Classical Philosophy of Beauty

The argument has reached the aesthetic, and before it can build upon the beautiful it must reckon with what philosophy has discovered about the beautiful, not borrow the conclusions of aesthetics as convenient supports, as the foregoing has so far done, but enter the discipline’s own constitutive problems and take a position within them. For the claims this paper will rest on beauty, that the construction of the field is aesthetic, that the perception of contingency is aesthetic, that ethical judgement at its limit is aesthetic, presuppose answers to questions the philosophy of beauty has debated for two and a

half millennia without consensus: what beauty is, whether it is objective or subjective, how it relates to the sublime, what its metaphysical standing is. This section confronts these questions directly. Its centre of gravity is the second of them, the antinomy of the subjectivity and objectivity of aesthetic judgement, to which the paper offers a two-stage resolution, drawn from the registers of Lacanian theory and from the relational ontology of this series, that is the keystone not only of this section but of the paper's entire aesthetics. The section then treats the sublime, the metaphysics of beauty, and the parallel and equally deep tradition of East Asian aesthetics, which it takes not as an appendix to the Western discussion but as an independent pillar.

3.9.1 The problem of definition: the *Hippias Major*

The philosophy of beauty begins, in the West, with a failure, and the failure is instructive enough to be worth reconstructing in full. In Plato's *Hippias Major*, Socrates presses the sophist Hippias to say not what *is* beautiful but what *the beautiful itself* is, the *auto to kalon*, that by which all beautiful things are beautiful (Plato 1926). Hippias, confident and fluent, offers a succession of answers, and the dialogue is the methodical demolition of each. His first answer is a category mistake dressed as an answer: the beautiful is a beautiful maiden. Socrates corrects the form of the question, he asked not for an instance but for the *eidōs*, the form by which maiden and lyre and pot and just law are all alike beautiful, and Hippias, grasping the demand for something common, offers gold: the beautiful is what, added to anything, makes it appear beautiful. But gold does not beautify the appropriate fig-wood spoon that stirs the pot better than a golden one would, and so the answer yields to a deeper one that seems to capture what gold was reaching for: the beautiful is *the appropriate, to prepon*, that which is fitting to its thing. This is the answer that comes nearest, and its failure is the most illuminating moment of the dialogue. For Socrates asks whether the appropriate is what *makes* things beautiful or only what makes them *appear* so, and the question splits the answer: if the appropriate is what makes things beautiful, then since the fitting and the genuinely beautiful sometimes diverge it cannot be beauty itself; if it is only what makes them appear beautiful, then it is the principle of beautiful seeming, not of beauty. The appropriate captures something essential, the paper will return to it, for *to prepon*, the fitting, is precisely the structure that the later identification of aesthetic and practical judgement will exploit (§3.12.3),

but it cannot, Socrates shows, be the definition of beauty, because it hovers undecidably between being and seeming.

Two further answers fall in turn. The beautiful is the useful, *to chrēsimon*, but the useful is the useful *for* some end, and what is useful for a bad end serves to produce evil, so that beauty would be the cause of evil, which is absurd; the useful collapses into the beneficial, and the beneficial, being the cause of good, would make beauty the cause of good and so distinct from the good as cause from effect, which offends the deep intuition that the beautiful and the good are not so cleanly separable. The last and most modern answer is that the beautiful is what pleases through the senses of sight and hearing, the aesthetic in the narrow sense, beauty as a species of pleasure. But this founders too: why *these* two senses and not the pleasures of taste or touch, which are also pleasures? And what is the common character by which the pleasures of sight and the pleasures of hearing are both *beautiful* pleasures, when sight and hearing have nothing perceptual in common, a common character that would be the very thing sought, beauty itself, now presupposed rather than defined? The dialogue ends with every answer destroyed and none to replace it, and Socrates offering, in place of a definition, the proverb that the paper has taken as one of its epigraphs: *χαλεπὰ τὰ καλὰ*, beautiful things are difficult (Plato 1926).

The aporia is a discovery about the object rather than a failure of the interlocutors, and the discovery is the starting point of everything that follows. Beauty resists definition, resists capture by a specifying formula, a rule, a property-list, and it resists in a particular way: every proposed definition either is too narrow (gold, the senses of sight and hearing), or collapses into a neighbouring concept (the useful into the good, the appropriate into mere seeming), or presupposes the very beauty it would define (the common character of beautiful pleasures). This triple pattern of failure is the signature of something that is not a property specifiable by a concept at all. The *Hippias Major* is the first and still the clearest demonstration that beauty is not the kind of thing a definition can capture, which is exactly the claim that the paper’s thesis of un-programmability requires (§3.12.8), here established not by assertion but by the exhaustive failure of the attempt. The beautiful is difficult because it is not a concept; and that it is not a concept is the first thing the philosophy of beauty learned.

3.9.2 The antinomy of taste: the subjective and the objective

If beauty is not a definable property, where does it reside? Here the philosophy of beauty meets its deepest and most persistent problem, the one on which this paper must take a position because its whole aesthetics depends on the answer. The problem is the antinomy of taste, and it can be stated as a collision of two equally compelling intuitions.

The first intuition is that beauty is *objective*, that it is in the object, a real feature of the beautiful thing, such that one who fails to find the sunset or the symphony beautiful has *missed* something that is there. This intuition is why we argue about beauty, why we say someone has poor taste, why we hold that some judgements of beauty are better than others; none of this would make sense if beauty were merely a private reaction, for there is no arguing about, and no improving, a mere reaction. The second intuition is that beauty is *subjective*, that it exists only in the response of the perceiver, that the beauty of the thing is nothing apart from the pleasure it occasions, so that to call a thing beautiful is to report an effect it has on me, and *de gustibus non est disputandum*, there is no disputing taste. This intuition is why beauty cannot be proved, why no demonstration compels aesthetic assent, why one cannot argue a person into finding beautiful what leaves them cold; beauty lives in the response, and responses cannot be commanded.

Each intuition is compelling and each refutes the other, and the history of aesthetics is in large part the history of attempts to hold both. Hume, pressing the subjective horn, located beauty in sentiment, “beauty is no quality in things themselves; it exists merely in the mind which contemplates them”, yet could not rest there, for he saw that some critics are better than others, and so was driven to seek a *standard* of taste in the joint verdict of qualified judges, the true critics whose refined and practised sentiment sets the norm (Hume 1985). But this is unstable: if beauty is mere sentiment, why should one sentiment be more authoritative than another? Hume’s standard smuggles back an objectivity his premise denied. Kant gave the antinomy its canonical and most penetrating formulation. The judgement of taste, he saw, makes a peculiar and seemingly impossible claim: it is grounded in a feeling of pleasure, and so is subjective, it asserts no property of the object, applies no concept, proves nothing, and yet it claims *universal validity*, demanding the assent of all, speaking with a “universal voice,” as though the beauty it feels were binding on everyone (Kant 1987). This is the antinomy in its exact form: the judgement

of taste is subjective (it rests on feeling, not concept) yet claims universality (it demands agreement), and these seem flatly to contradict. Kant’s resolution was to argue that the judgement of taste, while based on no *determinate* concept, rests on the free harmony of the cognitive faculties, imagination and understanding in free play, which, being the same in all rational beings, grounds a *subjective universality*: the judgement is universal because it expresses, rather than because it tracks an objective property, a free harmony of the faculties that all share, communicated through a *sensus communis*, a common sense or shared sensibility presupposed as the condition of taste’s communicability (Kant 1987). This is the most penetrating answer the subject-centred tradition produced, and it is also where that tradition reached its limit, for the *sensus communis* is precisely what Kant could not derive but had only to *presuppose*, a shared sensibility posited as the condition of the universality of taste, but left as a postulate, a common sense assumed because without it the universal voice of taste would be inexplicable. The antinomy is less resolved than relocated into a presupposition: *given* a *sensus communis*, subjective universality is possible; but the *sensus communis* itself, the sharedness that would ground the demand for agreement, remains a posit the subject-centred framework cannot ground.

This is the impasse the paper inherits, and the place where its own resources allow it to move. The antinomy and Kant’s near-resolution both operate within an assumption so deep it is rarely noticed: that aesthetic judgement is the judgement of *one subject* about *one object*, so that beauty must lie either in the object (objectivism), or in the subject (subjectivism), or in some faculty-structure of the single subject that all subjects happen to share (Kant’s subjective universality, requiring the posited *sensus communis* to bridge from the one to the all). The paper’s resolution proceeds by questioning this assumption at two levels, first the structure of the aesthetic experience, then the structure of the judging subject, and it is to these two stages that the argument now turns. They are the keystone of the paper’s aesthetics.

3.9.3 First stage of the resolution: aesthetic judgement across the three registers

The first stage dissolves the bare opposition of subjective and objective by showing that it is too crude, that the terms “subjective” and “objective” each conflate distinct moments of the aesthetic experience that a finer analysis separates. The finer analysis the paper employs is the Lacanian distinction of three registers, the Real, the Symbolic, and the

Imaginary, which this series has used throughout and which here proves to be exactly the instrument the antinomy requires (Lacan 2006). The claim is that a complete aesthetic judgement is less a relation between a subject-pole and an object-pole than a *reconciliation across all three registers*, and that the apparent antinomy of subjective and objective arises from collapsing this three-fold structure into a two-fold one.

Consider what is present in a full experience of beauty, the wildflower caught at the roadside, the vista that stops the traveller. There is, first, a moment that resists all capture: the sheer thereness of the thing, its singular presence, the surplus in it that no description exhausts and no concept subsumes, that which remains when everything sayable about it has been said. This is the register of the *Real*: the beautiful thing's irreducible, unsymbolisable core, the "it" that is there before and beneath all that can be said of it. The objectivist intuition, that beauty is *in the thing*, that one who misses it has missed something real, is the truth of this register: there *is* something in the object, but it is no specifiable property (which the *Hippias Major* refuted); it is the Real surplus, the unsymbolisable thereness, which is exactly why objectivism is both right (there is something in the thing) and unable to say what it is (the Real cannot be symbolised). The objectivist feels the Real of the beautiful object and mistakes it for an objective property.

There is, second, a moment of address and demand: the experience of beauty reaches beyond itself, asks to be communicated, claims a validity that would bind others, speaks, in Kant's phrase, with a universal voice. This is the register of the *Symbolic*: the dimension in which the beautiful is taken up into the order of the shareable, the communicable, the inter-subjectively valid, the dimension that demands "you too must see this." Kant's "subjective universality," the claim to universal assent, is the operation of the Symbolic register in the aesthetic: the demand that the experience be ratified in the order of shared meaning, that it be more than private, that it bind. The Symbolic is the register of the *sensus communis*; as the second stage will show, it is the dimension of the shareable as such, in place of a mysterious *posit*.

There is, third, a moment of captivation and pleasure: the experience of being caught, drawn, held; the pleasure the beautiful affords; the absorbed fascination in which the perceiver is bound to the object in a relation of attraction. This is the register of the

Imaginary: the dimension of the captivating image, the specular fascination, the pleasurable investment in which the perceiver is held. The subjectivist intuition, that beauty is a pleasure, an effect in the perceiver, is the truth of this register: there *is* pleasure, there *is* captivation, beauty *does* live in part in the perceiver’s investment; but this Imaginary captivation is one moment of the experience, not its whole, and the subjectivist errs by taking the part for the whole, the Imaginary pleasure for the entirety of beauty.

The resolution of the first stage is now visible. The antinomy of subjective and objective is the collapse of a three-register structure into two poles: the “objective” pole crushes together the Real surplus of the thing (which is genuinely there) with the false notion of a specifiable property (which is not); the “subjective” pole crushes together the Imaginary captivation (which is genuinely in the perceiver) with the whole of beauty (which it is not). A full aesthetic experience is neither simply subjective nor simply objective; it is the *reconciliation of all three registers at once*, the Real surplus of the thing, taken up into the Symbolic demand for shared validity, through the Imaginary investment of the captivated perceiver. Beauty is what happens when these three are reconciled: when the unsymbolisable thereness of the thing (Real) is invested with captivated pleasure (Imaginary) and raised into the claim to be shared (Symbolic). The antinomy dissolves because its two terms were never the right two terms; there were always three registers, and “subjective” and “objective” were crude names that each fused a genuine register with a false addition. And this is why beauty is difficult, *χάλεπὰ τὰ καλὰ*, in a sense now made precise: it requires the reconciliation of three registers that are, by their nature, in tension and never perfectly reconcilable, so that the achieved beauty is always a fragile and momentary accord among registers that pull apart. The difficulty of the beautiful is the difficulty of three-register reconciliation.

3.9.4 Second stage of the resolution: the relational subject and the dissolution of the antinomy

The first stage refined the structure of the aesthetic experience; the second refines the structure of the judging *subject*, and it is here that the antinomy is shown never to have been a genuine problem at all rather than merely dissolved, an artefact of a false premise about who judges. For the three-register analysis, powerful as it is, could still be misread as occurring within a single isolated subject: one subject in whom Real, Symbolic, and

Imaginary are reconciled. The deepest difficulty, Kant's, would then remain: how can a judgement grounded in *my* reconciliation demand *your* assent? Why should the accord of registers in me bind you? The *sensus communis* would still be needed, as the posited bridge from my reconciliation to its universal validity, and still be ungrounded.

The second stage removes the difficulty by removing its premise. The premise is that the judging subject is a single, self-standing individual, prior to others, who must then somehow reach beyond itself to claim universality. But this premise is exactly what the relational ontology of this series denies (Huang 2025a). The subject is not a self-standing individual prior to relation; it is a relational subject, constituted in and by relation, internally constituted by its orientation toward others. And for such a subject, the demand for shared validity that so puzzled Kant, the “universal voice,” the claim that you too must see, is not a mysterious leap from a private judgement to a universal claim, requiring a posited common sense to bridge it. It is the *native structure of the subject's judging as such*. A relational subject, being constituted by its orientation toward others, does not first judge privately and then face the problem of how to demand agreement; its judging is, from the first, oriented toward the other, intrinsically addressed, already a judging-with. The “subjective universality” that Kant could establish only by positing a *sensus communis* is, for a relational subject, simply what subjective judgement *is*: the judgement of a subject that is internally relational is intrinsically a claim upon the other, because the subject that judges is intrinsically oriented toward the other. There is no gap to bridge, because the subject was never the isolated monad across whose boundary the demand for assent had to leap. The *sensus communis* is not a posit added to the subject; it is the subject's own relational constitution, seen from the side of taste. Kant's antinomy was the artefact of an individualist premise; on a relational ontology, the universality of the aesthetic judgement is a corollary of what the judging subject is rather than a puzzle.

This is the keystone, and its consequences run through the whole paper. It means that aesthetic judgement is, in its very structure, *relational and shared*, not a private response that then faces the problem of communication, but an intrinsically addressed, intrinsically with-the-other judgement, whose demand for shared validity is the expression of the relational constitution of the one who judges. It means that the “subjective universality” of taste is real and is no antinomy: the judgement is subjective (it is a relational subject's)

and universal (because that subject is intrinsically relational, its judgement intrinsically a claim upon others), and the two are identical rather than in tension, the subjectivity of a relational subject being already a reaching-toward-the-shared. And it means, the point that binds this section to the paper’s named concepts, that the completion of an aesthetic judgement is its *being-shared*. For if the judging subject is relational, then a private aesthetic judgement, one never turned toward the other, is a truncated one rather than a complete aesthetic judgement, arrested before the reaching-toward-the-other that its own structure demands. The aesthetic judgement of a relational subject is completed only when it is turned toward the other, when the Real surplus of the beautiful thing, invested with Imaginary captivation, is raised into the Symbolic as a claim addressed to the beloved: *look*. “Look” is not an optional addendum to a perception already complete in private; it is the completion of the aesthetic judgement, the moment at which the relational subject’s intrinsically-addressed judging reaches the other it was always already oriented toward. This is why the aesthetic perception of contingency culminates in the turning-toward-the-other (§3.11.2): not because sharing is a pleasant addition to private aesthetic experience, but because the aesthetic judgement of a relational subject is structurally incomplete until it is shared. The solitary aesthete’s experience is no longer the paradigm of aesthetic judgement from which sharing is a derivative; it is a *deficient* case, an aesthetic judgement arrested before its completion. The complete form of aesthetic judgement is the shared one, and this is the deepest reason the paper reaches the philosophy of beauty by way of two people travelling rather than one aesthete contemplating.

3.9.5 Travel as the field of the shared aesthetic accord

The two stages together yield the section’s culminating claim, which returns the abstract resolution to the paper’s concrete object. If a complete aesthetic judgement is the three-register reconciliation achieved by a relational subject and completed in being shared, then there must be conditions under which this full structure is most fully realised, conditions of heightened Real, suspended and renegotiated Symbolic, and intensified shared Imaginary investment, and these conditions are precisely those of the field of travel.

Consider how travel, literal or generalised, bears on each register. Travel maximises the *Real*: the unfamiliar place, dense with the unsymbolised, presents a surplus of the

not-yet-captured, the strange thing that no familiar concept has domesticated, the raw thereness that the over-symbolised everyday has covered over. Where the everyday is a world so thoroughly symbolised that the Real rarely surfaces, everything already named, classified, assigned, the unfamiliar restores the Real's pressure, the encounter with what exceeds one's symbolic net. Travel *suspends and renegotiates the Symbolic*: it brackets the established symbolic order (the roles, the classifications, the settled meanings of home), so that the aesthetic judgement is must be freshly made and freshly shared rather than pre-decided by the inherited symbolic grid, the symbolic accord between the two re-created rather than assumed. And travel *intensifies the shared Imaginary*: two people captivated together by the same strange beauty, each invested in it and each seeing the other invested, form a shared Imaginary bond, a *communitas* of captivity, that the dispersed everyday rarely permits. Travel is thus the field in which the three-register reconciliation of the aesthetic judgement is heightened in every register at once, and in which, because two people undergo it together, in the symmetric unfamiliarity that lets neither host the occasion (§3.2.6), the reconciliation is achieved *as a shared accord*, the relational subject's intrinsically-addressed aesthetic judgement reaching its completion in the mutual "look."

This is the deepest sense in which the field of travel is the field of the aesthetic: not merely that travel affords beautiful sights, but that travel is the condition under which the full structure of aesthetic judgement, three-register reconciliation, achieved by a relational subject, completed in sharing, is most fully realised. The mutual "look" of two travellers caught by the same contingent beauty is not a lesser, applied instance of aesthetic judgement; it is aesthetic judgement in its *complete* form, the form the solitary tradition could never reach because it began from the wrong subject. Travel reconciles the aesthetic judgement across the three registers and across the relation, and in doing so it shows what aesthetic judgement most fully is. The antinomy of taste, which the subject-centred tradition could only relocate into a posit, is here dissolved in the relational ontology and the three registers, and its dissolution is enacted, concretely, every time two people turn to each other before something beautiful and say: look. It is on this resolved foundation, aesthetic judgement as the shared, three-register accord of relational subjects, that the rest of the paper's aesthetics is built.

3.9.6 The sublime: when the Real predominates

Beauty has a great neighbour that the analysis so far has set aside and must now admit, for it is central to the experience of travel and to the existential themes of the paper’s first half: the *sublime*. The distinction between the beautiful and the sublime is one of the deepest in aesthetics, and the three-register analysis illuminates it precisely. Burke drew the distinction in terms of the feelings: the beautiful is founded on pleasure, on what is small, smooth, delicate, and well-formed, and it relaxes and draws; the sublime is founded on a kind of delightful terror, on what is vast, powerful, obscure, and formless, and it overwhelms and astonishes, a pleasure mingled with dread that arises when we confront, from a position of safety, what could destroy us (Burke 1990). Kant deepened the distinction: the beautiful concerns form, the bounded, and occasions a restful contemplation; the sublime concerns the formless and the boundless, the magnitude or might that exceeds the imagination’s power to comprehend it, and it occasions not rest but a movement of the mind, a momentary check to our vital powers followed by a stronger outpouring, as reason, confronted with what overwhelms sense, discovers in itself an idea of the infinite that the overwhelming object cannot match (Kant 1987). The sublime, for Kant, is the feeling of reason’s supersensible vocation, awakened by the failure of sense before the boundless; it is, paradoxically, in the very overwhelming of our perceptual powers that we feel our supersensible elevation.

In the three-register terms the paper has developed, the sublime is the experience in which the *Real predominates*, in which the unsymbolisable, the formless surplus that exceeds all symbolic capture, comes forward in its full force and overwhelms the Symbolic and Imaginary rather than being reconciled with them. Where beauty is the achieved reconciliation of the three registers, the sublime is the encounter with the Real in its excess over reconciliation: the vast, the boundless, the overwhelming, which cannot be taken up into form (Symbolic) or captured in a pleasing image (Imaginary), but presses upon the subject as the sheer unsymbolisable magnitude that breaks the frame. Lyotard made exactly this the centre of his reading: the sublime is the presentation of the fact that the unrepresentable exists, the feeling occasioned by that which exceeds all presentation, the Real’s irruption past the limits of form (Lyotard 1994). And this connects the sublime directly to the paper’s existential first half. The contingency that the field of travel

restores (§3.2.4), the encounter with the undetermined that returns the subject to its existence, is closely akin to the sublime: the mountain vista that overwhelms, the vast indifferent landscape, the boundless sea, the strangeness of the wholly unfamiliar place, these are sublime encounters, irruptions of the Real that exceed the traveller's symbolic net and return them, through the overwhelming, to the bare fact of their existence. The existential disclosure that the paper located in contingency is, in aesthetic terms, the sublime: the Real's predominance, breaking the everyday's symbolic frame and exposing the subject to what exceeds it. Travel affords the sublime as much as the beautiful, the overwhelming as much as the reconciled, and the two together, the beautiful as three-register accord and the sublime as the Real's excess, are the full aesthetic range of the field. The sublime is where the aesthetics of this section rejoins the existential phenomenology of the paper's beginning: the Real that overwhelms is the same Real whose irruption, in contingency, returns the subject to its existence.

3.9.7 The beauty of suffering

The sublime has already broken one comfortable assumption, that beauty is a matter of pleasure, by locating, at the heart of one whole class of aesthetic experience, a delight inseparable from dread. It is necessary now to break the assumption more thoroughly, for it bears directly on the ethics of the relation and on the failures the paper must still reckon with. The assumption is that beauty and suffering are opposed, that the beautiful is the pleasant and the painful is the unbeautiful. This is false, and its falsity is among the deepest facts about beauty. *Suffering can be beautiful*, not in spite of being suffering, but in and through it; and the recognition of this is not a morbid paradox but a central truth of the aesthetic that the philosophy of beauty has long known and the consumerist aesthetic of the merely pleasant has forgotten.

The evidence is overwhelming once one looks. The greatest art is very largely an art of suffering: the tragedy, the elegy, the lament, the requiem, the poem wrung from grief. The sorrowful poem is not a lesser beauty than the joyful one; it is often the higher, and it is beautiful precisely *as* the articulation of sorrow, its beauty inseparable from the pain it shapes. Nietzsche made this the centre of his first work: tragedy, he argued, is the supreme art because it looks into the abyss of existence, the suffering, the destruction, the terror at the heart of things, and through the transfiguring power of form, makes it not

merely bearable but beautiful, affirmable, even joyous; the Dionysian truth of suffering is redeemed by the Apollonian power of beautiful form, and the result is the highest aesthetic achievement, the transfiguration of pain into beauty that does not deny the pain but transmutes it (Nietzsche 1967a). The beauty of tragedy is the transfiguration of suffering rather than its absence; the suffering remains, fully, and is made beautiful. The East Asian tradition knows this even more intimately, and its central categories are categories of beautiful sorrow: *mono no aware* (§3.9.11) is the beauty of transience felt as gentle grief, the falling blossom beautiful *because* it falls, the poignancy of loss as itself a form of beauty; *sabi* is the beauty of what is weathered, decayed, passing, the loveliness of the marks of time and mortality. These are beauties of suffering rather than beauties that exclude it; they are beauties *of* suffering, of transience, of loss, refined into whole aesthetic sensibilities. And psychoanalysis locates the structure: the work of mourning is itself a labour of transfiguration, the slow conversion of raw loss into something that can be held, integrated, given form (Freud 1957); and sublimation, in which the painful drive is raised into the created object, is the very mechanism by which suffering becomes art (Lacan 1992).

The three-register analysis explains how this is possible. Suffering, in its rawness, is an excess of the Real, the overwhelming, the unsymbolisable, the unbearable pressing past all form, akin to the sublime. To make suffering beautiful is to bring this Real excess into a reconciliation with the Symbolic and the Imaginary without denying or diminishing it: to give the unbearable a form (Symbolic) that holds it without falsifying it, to invest it with a transfiguring image (Imaginary) that does not prettify but transmutes, so that the suffering is neither repressed nor merely endured but *shaped* into a beauty that contains it whole. The beauty of suffering is the achieved reconciliation, across the three registers, of an experience whose Real component is pain, and this is harder than the reconciliation of pleasant beauty, which is why the art of suffering is the higher art and the sorrowful poem the deeper beauty. *χαλεπὰ τὰ καλὰ* is nowhere truer than here: the beauty of suffering is the most difficult beauty, because it must reconcile, without falsifying, a Real that resists reconciliation with every fibre. That it can be done, that grief can become elegy, loss can become *mono no aware*, terror can become tragedy, is among the most important things about beauty, and it will prove, when the paper returns to the conflicts and failures of shared travel (§3.5.5, §3.9.8), to be the key that transforms the darkest

material of a relation into a possible source of its deepest wealth.

3.9.8 Conflict as relational wealth

If suffering can be beautiful, then a conclusion follows that overturns the assumption with which the paper's ethics of travel began, and the overturning is important enough to be drawn out here, in the theoretical chapter, before its consequences are taken up in the ethics. The assumption, natural, and not wholly wrong, was that conflict in shared travel is a negative thing: the holiday quarrel as the exposure of a hollow relation, the friction of forced co-presence as a stressor, contingency overwhelming rather than nourishing (§3.3.1, §3.5.5). All of this can be true. But it is not the whole truth, and the part it omits is exactly the part the beauty of suffering reveals. *Conflict can be relational wealth*: under the right conditions, a positive and even peculiarly precious form of the wealth a relation generates, in place of merely a danger to be survived.

The argument runs through everything the paper has built. A conflict undergone together is a shared experience of unusual intensity, a passage of difficulty, friction, even pain, that the two undergo as a "we." Like any shared experience, it is generated in the living and then either reproduced or left to dissipate (§3.4). And here the beauty of suffering becomes decisive. If the conflict is reproduced *well*, if, in the shared retelling, the two return to it together and, through the labour of reproduction, transfigure it, giving the remembered pain a form that holds it, investing it with a significance that does not deny the difficulty but transmutes it, then the conflict becomes beautiful in exactly the way suffering becomes beautiful in art: a raw Real of pain reconciled, in the retelling, into a shaped and shared meaning. And a conflict so transfigured is not a wound the relation carries but a *treasure* it holds: the storm weathered together, the hard passage survived as a "we," becomes, years later, among the most precious of the relation's shared possessions, *do you remember that terrible night we fought in the rain* spoken not as a reopening of the wound but as the recollection of a thing they came through together, unique, theirs, beautiful precisely because it was hard. The conflict has become wealth, and a peculiarly durable wealth, because it is unrepeatable and wholly their own.

There is more, and it is the deepest point, the one that joins this to the paper's theory of aesthetic judgement. A conflict is, among other things, a collision of two differing

perceptions, two divergent takes on what is happening, two aesthetic judgements that do not agree, one finds the detour an adventure, the other a disaster; one is moved where the other is irritated. The conflict is the friction of two aesthetic judgements failing, in the moment, to accord. And the labour of reproducing it well is precisely the labour of bringing those two divergent judgements into a shared accord, of the two perceptions, through the mutual translation of retelling (§3.4.6), moving toward each other until a common aesthetic judgement is generated that neither held alone, a shared way of seeing the difficult thing that both can now hold. Conflict, reproduced well, is therefore one of the primary occasions on which two people’s aesthetic judgements are *reconciled*, on which the divergent perceptions of two relational subjects are brought, through difficulty, into a genuinely shared accord. And the accord so generated is uniquely valuable exactly because it was won through conflict: a shared aesthetic judgement forged in difficulty is deeper, more tested, more wholly common than one that never met resistance, as a reconciliation that has survived a quarrel is sounder than a harmony that was never strained. This is why conflict can be not merely tolerable but generative: it creates the occasion for the deepest kind of aesthetic reconciliation between two people, the bringing-into-accord of judgements that genuinely diverged, and the unique shared beauty that only a transfigured difficulty can yield.

The conclusion is a thesis about beauty and conflict that the ethics will inherit: *beauty does not exclude conflict, but can make conflict a part of the relation’s common generation*. The relation whose conflicts are well reproduced does not merely survive them; it is enriched by them, in a way it could not be enriched by unbroken harmony, because the transfigured conflict yields a wealth, the unique shared experience, the hard-won common accord, the beauty of a difficulty come through together, that harmony alone cannot generate. This does not make conflict good in itself, and the paper is not counselling the manufacture of quarrels; the raw conflict is real difficulty, and badly reproduced it is pure depletion (§3.5.5). What makes the difference is the reproduction: the same conflict that, extracted and weaponised, is the bad cycle’s fuel is, transfigured and shared, the good cycle’s treasure. The decisive variable, here as throughout the paper, is what is done with it rather than the material, and the beauty of suffering is the proof that even the hardest material, the pain and friction of a shared life, can be transfigured, in the labour of loving reproduction, into the deepest beauty a relation holds. It is on this recognition

that the ethics of conflict (§3.5.6) will be built.

3.9.9 The just reproduction of suffering: four criteria, and an opened question

The previous subsection established that conflict, well reproduced, can become a relation's wealth, and rested the whole claim on the distinction between reproducing a conflict *well* and reproducing it *badly*. But it did not say what distinguishes them, beyond the metaphors of transfiguration and weaponisation; and the question it left open, how suffering is reproduced *well*, justly, generatively rather than destructively, is among the hardest the paper raises, hard enough that this paper cannot pretend to resolve it. χαλεπὰ τὰ καλὰ: the beautiful is difficult, and the good reproduction of suffering is difficult in exactly the same way and for exactly the same reason, for it too is a making-beautiful of a recalcitrant Real, and it too resists every procedure. The honest course is to give not a method, there is none, but a set of *criteria*: necessary conditions that any good reproduction of suffering must meet, which mark the direction of the good without supplying the route to it. Four such criteria can be stated, and they are not arbitrary; each corresponds to one of the theoretical pillars the series has built, and each closes off one of the four directions in which the reproduction of suffering characteristically degenerates. Together they specify what a just reproduction of suffering must be, while leaving the question of how to achieve it as an opening this paper hands on.

The teleological criterion: the possibility of the continuation of generativity.

The first criterion is the one the previous discussion approached: a reproduction of suffering is good only if it preserves the *possibility* that the relation continue to generate, only if, having reproduced the painful experience, the relation can still generate further from it, rather than being terminated, frozen, or foreclosed by it. The criterion is teleological, and it rests on the metaphysical ground this series established at its foundation: that generativity aims at its own continuation, that the good of a generative relation is finally the perpetuation of its own generativity (Huang 2025b). The wording must be exact, and it is deliberately minimal: the criterion is not that the reproduction *guarantee* continuation, nor that it make the suffering “positive,” nor that it produce any particular good feeling; it is only that it preserve the *possibility* of continued generation, that it not close the door. A bad reproduction of suffering closes the door: it reproduces the painful experience as

a fixed verdict, a settled debt, a permanent indictment, a wound sealed into a grievance, a dead end from which the relation can generate nothing further, the suffering solidified into a terminus (§3.10.3). A good reproduction keeps the door open: it reproduces the suffering in a way that leaves the relation able to go on generating, the painful experience kept available for further evolution rather than frozen into a final meaning. This is the minimal teleological condition, and it is minimal by design: it does not demand that suffering be redeemed, only that its reproduction not foreclose the relation’s generative future. The criterion closes off the first degeneration: the reproduction of suffering into a generative dead end.

The ontological criterion: the reproduction must be relational. The second criterion follows from the relational ontology of the series and from the analysis of reproduction as the reproduction of a *relational* subject’s experience (§3.4.2, §3.10.2). A reproduction of shared suffering is good only if it is itself *relational*, only if it is conducted jointly, by the two together, rather than unilaterally by one. The reason is structural: what is to be reproduced is the experience of the *relational subject*, the “we,” and the experience of a relational subject can be reproduced only relationally, by the relational subject itself, not by one of its members acting alone. When one partner unilaterally reproduces a shared suffering, decides, alone, what the painful experience meant, how it is to be remembered, what story the “we” will tell about it, the reproduction has already failed the ontological criterion, however benevolent the intent, because it has converted a relational experience into one party’s account of it, the “we”’s suffering into an “I”’s narrative. This is so even when the unilateral reproducer is the one who suffered more, and even when they reproduce the suffering generously: a suffering reproduced *for* the relation by one member is not a suffering reproduced *by* the relation, and only the latter is the genuine reproduction of the relational subject’s experience. The criterion demands co-production: the joint return, the mutual retelling, the shared transfiguration in which both members of the “we” participate in determining what the suffering becomes. It closes off the second degeneration: the reproduction of shared suffering into one party’s private narrative, the unilateral appropriation of the “we”’s pain.

The political-economic criterion: the reproduction must not be exploitative. The third criterion follows from the series’ political economy and from the analysis of

the justice of reproduction (§3.4.6). A reproduction of suffering is good only if it is *non-exploitative*, only if neither party's suffering is reproduced as material for the other's gain. The criterion sharpens the ontological one, for even a jointly conducted reproduction can be exploitative: the two may reproduce the suffering together, and yet the reproduction may systematically convert one party's pain into the other's benefit, into the other's moral credit, the other's victim-standing, the other's leverage. Suffering is peculiarly liable to this exploitation, because suffering carries moral weight, and whoever's version of the shared suffering prevails acquires a moral advantage: the right to be comforted, the standing of the wronged, the credit of the one who endured. A reproduction in which one partner's pain is reproduced as the relation's official suffering, while the other's is minimised or erased, is exploitative in exactly the sense the series has analysed throughout: one party rendered the mere material of a circulation whose surplus, here, the moral surplus of acknowledged suffering, accrues to the other (Huang 2026c; Wanhong 2026a). The good reproduction is non-exploitative: it admits both parties' suffering, refuses to convert either's pain into the other's moral capital, and generates a shared acknowledgement in which neither is the mere fuel of the other's victimhood or virtue. It closes off the third degeneration: the reproduction of suffering into the extraction of moral surplus, the conversion of one party's pain into the other's gain.

The power criterion: the generation of power must be accompanied by the generation of its restraint. The fourth criterion is the deepest and the most dialectical, and it follows from the series' analysis of power as ineliminable (§3.9.2 notwithstanding; see the power analysis of the previous paper, Wanhong 2026a, and the formal companion, Huang 2026a). It must be granted, unflinchingly, that the reproduction of shared suffering *generates a structure of power*. A relation that has weathered serious suffering together is left with asymmetries: who was hurt more, who needs more care, who owes whom, who has the standing to invoke the painful episode, who may ask for forbearance on its account. These asymmetries are real and, like all relational power, ineliminable; a reproduction of suffering that claimed to generate no power at all would be either naive or dishonest. The criterion, therefore, does not demand the impossible abolition of the power that suffering's reproduction generates. It demands, instead, that the generation of power be *accompanied by the generation of power's restraint*, that the same reproduction which generates a structure of power also generate a force that checks the abuse of

that power. The distinction is the series’ distinction between power-to and power-over (Wanhong 2026a): a reproduction of suffering generates power-over when the asymmetry it creates becomes a standing instrument of domination, the wound reproduced as a permanent debt, the suffering invoked forever as a claim on the other’s compliance, “after all I suffered” become the bad cycle’s most effective weapon. It generates power-to, accompanied by restraint, when the asymmetry it creates is held within a force that prevents its abuse, when the one whom the suffering’s reproduction has empowered is also bound, by the same reproduction, not to wield that power as domination. The good reproduction of suffering is the one that, generating power (as it must), generates simultaneously the restraint that keeps the power from becoming domination: the reproduction that makes the wounded one cared-for without making them a tyrant of their wound, that acknowledges the asymmetry without converting it into a permanent claim. It closes off the fourth and most insidious degeneration: the reproduction of suffering into a standing instrument of domination, the wound become a weapon, the pain become power-over.

The criteria as direction, not method; and the opened question. These four criteria, teleological, ontological, political-economic, and power-dialectical, together specify what a good reproduction of suffering must be: it must preserve the possibility of continued generation, be conducted relationally, refuse exploitation, and accompany the power it generates with the restraint of that power. Each closes off one characteristic degeneration: the dead end, the unilateral appropriation, the extraction of moral surplus, the instrument of domination. (These four, first stated here for the hard case of suffering, are in fact the general criteria of *relational production* as such, governed by the principle of subject-preservation; the general theory is set out separately, §3.6, where suffering’s reproduction is treated as its first application.) Together they mark the direction of the good with some precision. But they do not supply the method, and the paper is careful not to pretend otherwise. To know that a good reproduction of suffering must meet these four conditions is not yet to know *how* to meet them, how, concretely, two people are to reproduce a shared pain so that it stays generative, stays joint, stays non-exploitative, and stays free of domination. That how is not a procedure; it is an art, as difficult as any in this paper, and it cannot be reduced to a rule any more than the perception of beauty can. The criteria are the direction; the route is not given. And so the paper, having opened the question of the just reproduction of suffering and given it the structure of

these four criteria, must hand on the larger task, the full theory of how suffering is justly and generatively reproduced between two people, as a problem it has framed but not solved, a fissure that points beyond it (§3.16.3) toward a paper of its own. The good reproduction of suffering is difficult, as the beautiful is difficult; this paper has done what it can, which is to say in which direction the good lies, and to confess that the way there remains to be found.

3.9.10 The metaphysics of beauty: from Plato to Hegel

Behind the questions of definition and of taste stands a third, the metaphysical question: what is the standing of beauty in the order of being? The Western tradition gave a sequence of answers that, though the paper does not adopt any wholesale, illuminate what is at stake and supply terms the argument will use. The sequence runs from Plato through Plotinus and Aquinas to Hegel, and it traces a gradual descent of beauty from a transcendent Form to the sensuous appearing of spirit.

For Plato, beauty is a Form, the *auto to kalon* that the *Hippias Major* sought and the *Symposium* approached by another route: in Diotima's ascent, the lover rises from the beauty of a single body, to the beauty of all bodies, to the beauty of souls, of laws and institutions, of the sciences, and finally to Beauty itself, eternal, uncompounded, neither coming to be nor passing away, the Form in which all beautiful things participate and from which they derive whatever beauty they have. Beauty, for Plato, is thus a transcendent reality, and the experience of beautiful things is valuable chiefly as the first rung of an ascent beyond them to the Form. Crucially, in the Platonic vision the beautiful and the good are near allied, the ascent to Beauty is also an ascent toward the Good, and the *kalon* shades into the *agathon*, a proximity of beauty and goodness that the paper's own thesis of their continuity (§3.13) will inherit and transform.

Plotinus deepened the Platonic account by locating beauty in the soul's recognition of form imposed on matter, and ultimately in the radiance of the One: the beautiful is that in which the formative principle, the *logos*, shines through matter, and the experience of beauty is the soul's recognition of its kindred, the trace of the intelligible in the sensible, drawing the soul back toward its source (Plotinus 1991). Beauty is here a radiance, an emanation, the appearing of the higher in the lower, and its perception is a homecoming,

the soul recognising in the beautiful object the form to which it is itself akin. Aquinas, synthesising the classical inheritance with Christian metaphysics, gave the most analytically influential formula: beauty requires three things, *integritas* (wholeness or completeness), *proportio* or *consonantia* (due proportion or harmony), and *claritas* (radiance or clarity, the splendour of the form shining through), and the beautiful is that which, being seen, pleases, *id quod visum placet*, where the pleasing-on-being-seen unites the objective conditions (wholeness, proportion, radiance) with the perceiving that apprehends them (Aquinas 1981). The Thomistic *claritas*, the form’s radiance, its shining-forth, is a precise name for what the three-register analysis called the Real surplus made manifest: the splendour by which the thing’s form announces itself beyond what concepts capture.

Hegel completed the descent by bringing beauty fully into the sensuous and the historical. Beauty, for Hegel, is *das sinnliche Scheinen der Idee*, the sensuous appearing of the Idea, the shining of spirit through sensuous form (Hegel 1975). Beauty is no longer a transcendent Form above the sensible (Plato) nor a radiance emanating from above (Plotinus), but the Idea’s own appearing *in* the sensuous, spirit made manifest to sense; and art is the medium in which spirit gives itself sensuous appearance, in a historical development through which spirit progressively frees itself from the sensuous toward the conceptual. Hegel’s formula brings beauty down into history and into the appearing itself, beauty is the Idea *as it appears*, not a reality behind the appearance, and in doing so it prepares the modern recognition, which the paper shares, that beauty is a structure of appearing rather than a property behind experience, an event in which something comes to presence. The paper does not adopt Hegel’s idealist metaphysics, but it inherits his decisive move: that beauty is a matter of appearing, of coming-to-presence, rather than of a property residing in objects or a Form residing beyond them. This is consonant with the paper’s own category of presence (§3.1.3): beauty, like the relation’s dynamics, is something that comes to *presence*, an event of appearing, not a thing that simply *is*.

3.9.11 East Asian aesthetics: an independent pillar

The philosophy of beauty surveyed so far is Western, and to leave the matter there would be a provincialism the paper’s whole orientation forbids, and would moreover omit the tradition that has most precisely cultivated exactly the perceptual capacities the paper is concerned with. East Asian aesthetics is an independent and in some respects deeper

pillar rather than an exotic supplement to the Western account, and it is the more apposite here because its central categories are, to an extraordinary degree, categories of the perception of contingency, transience, emptiness, and the unsymbolisable, the very objects of the aesthetic perception this paper makes central. The principal categories are surveyed in Table 3.2; four deserve discussion in the text.

The Chinese category of *yijing* (意境), variously rendered “world of meaning,” “aesthetic realm,” or “conceived realm”, names the fused totality of scene and feeling that a work opens, the interpenetration of the objective landscape (*jing*, scene) and the subjective feeling (*yi*, mind or intent) into a single resonant whole that exceeds both (Yeh 1993). *Yijing* is not a property of the depicted scene nor a feeling in the perceiver but the resonant world that arises in their fusion, which is, in the paper’s terms, a name for the three-register reconciliation itself, the accord in which the Real of the scene, the Imaginary of feeling, and the Symbolic of the rendered work fuse into a realm that is neither objective nor subjective but their reconciliation. The Chinese tradition named, in *yijing*, exactly the structure the paper reached through Lacan: beauty as the fused realm beyond the subject-object split. And the highest *yijing*, in the critical tradition, is achieved through emptiness, through what is left unsaid, unpainted, the void that opens the resonant space, so that *yijing* is inseparable from the aesthetics of spaciousness the paper has carried throughout (§3.2.8).

The category of *qiyun shengdong* (气韵生动), “spirit-resonance, life-motion,” the first of Xie He’s six principles of painting, names the vital resonance, the living movement of *qi* (breath, energy, spirit) that animates a great work and makes it not a dead representation but a living presence (Z.-q. Cai 2004). *Qiyun* is the aesthetic of the living, the dynamic, the animate, the quality by which a painting breathes, by which brushwork carries life, and it is, in the paper’s terms, close to the aesthetic of the self-presence of dynamics: the valuing of the felt movement, the living current, over static form. A work has *qiyun* when its dynamism comes to presence, when one feels the life moving in it; and this is the aesthetic correlate of the paper’s central phenomenological concept, the coming-to-presence of a living dynamics.

The Japanese categories carry the aesthetics of transience and depth to their height. *Mono no aware* (物の哀れ), “the pathos of things,” the gentle sorrow-tinged sensitivity to the

transience of all things, the poignancy felt in the falling cherry blossom precisely because it falls, is the aesthetic perception of contingency in its purest form: the trained sensitivity to the passing, the contingent, the impermanent, felt as beautiful in and through its very transience (Parkes 1995). This is the cultivated *xing* (§3.11.2) raised to a whole aesthetic sensibility: the capacity to be moved by the contingent and the passing, to find in transience itself the deepest beauty. *Yūgen* (幽玄), “mysterious depth,” the profound, dim, half-glanced beauty of what is not fully revealed, the suggestion of an unfathomable depth behind the surface, is the aesthetics of the unsymbolisable, the Real that beauty intimates without capturing: *yūgen* is precisely the beauty of what exceeds the symbolic, glimpsed at the edge of the unsayable, the depth that can be suggested but never stated. And *sabi* (寂), the beauty of the weathered, the aged, the solitary, the marks of time and use, the patina of transience, together with *wabi*, the beauty of the simple, the imperfect, the austere, completes the Japanese aesthetics of impermanence and emptiness, finding beauty exactly in what the consumerist aesthetic of the new and the perfect cannot see. These categories are, collectively, the most refined vocabulary any tradition has developed for the perception of contingent, transient, spacious, and unsymbolisable beauty, which is to say, for precisely the perception this paper makes central. The paper draws on them not as ornament but as the tradition that most fully cultivated its own central capacity, and it takes their existence as evidence that the aesthetic perception of contingency is a deep and ancient cultivable art rather than a private notion.

The convergence of the Eastern categories with the paper’s Lacanian-relational resolution is itself significant. *Yijing* names the reconciliation beyond subject and object that the three-register analysis reconstructed; *yūgen* names the Real surplus that the analysis located at the heart of beauty; *mono no aware* names the perception of contingency the paper makes central; *qiyun* names the living dynamism whose coming-to-presence is the paper’s phenomenological core. That a tradition entirely independent of the Western antinomy should have developed, as its central categories, precisely the structures the paper reaches by dissolving that antinomy is evidence that those structures are features of the matter itself rather than artefacts of one philosophical vocabulary. The East Asian tradition did not face Kant’s antinomy because it did not begin from the isolated subject whose taste must somehow claim universality; it began, in its Daoist and Buddhist and Confucian roots, from a self already continuous with world and others, and so arrived

Category	Tradition	Meaning and bearing on the paper
<i>yijing</i> 意境	Chinese	The fused realm of scene and feeling beyond the subject-object split; a name for three-register reconciliation; achieved through emptiness.
<i>qiyun</i> 气韵	Chinese	Spirit-resonance, life-motion; the aesthetic of living dynamism; correlate of the self-presence of dynamics.
<i>mono no aware</i> 物の哀れ	Japanese	The pathos of transient things; the aesthetic perception of contingency in pure form; cultivated <i>xing</i> .
<i>yūgen</i> 幽玄	Japanese	Mysterious depth; the beauty of the half-glimpsed unsymbolisable; the Real intimated, not captured.
<i>sabi / wabi</i> 寂 / 侘	Japanese	The beauty of the weathered, simple, imperfect, austere; beauty in transience and emptiness.
<i>shen / shenyun</i> 神韵	Chinese	Spirit-resonance, the numinous quality beyond technique; the Real surplus that exceeds the made.

Table 3.2: Principal categories of East Asian aesthetics and their bearing on the paper's concerns. The tradition's central categories are, to a striking degree, categories of the perception of contingency, transience, emptiness, and the unsymbolisable — the very objects of the aesthetic perception this paper makes central.

directly at categories of fusion, resonance, and shared perception that the Western tradition could reach only by undoing its individualist premise. In this the Eastern tradition is the paper's natural ally, and its categories will recur, alongside the Western, throughout the aesthetics that follows.

3.10. The Evolution of Aesthetic Judgement: A Dynamics in the Reproduction Cycle

The philosophy of beauty just developed treated aesthetic judgement as though it were a single event, a reconciliation achieved at a moment, an accord struck once. This is an abstraction, and it must now be corrected, for aesthetic judgement is not a point but a *process*: it evolves in time, and its evolution is governed by exactly the reproduction cycle the paper analysed in its political economy. To read the same poem today and a year

ago is to make two different aesthetic judgements of it; the beauty one finds in a place, a person, an experience, is shifts rather than fixed, deepens, sometimes fades, across the repeated returns of a life. This temporal evolution of aesthetic judgement is the missing dynamical dimension of the paper’s aesthetics, and supplying it joins the third movement (the aesthetic) to the second (the political-economic) at their root, showing them to be two aspects of one process. The section is brief but structurally pivotal: it is the hinge on which the paper’s aesthetics and its political economy turn out to be the same theory seen twice.

3.10.1 Aesthetic judgement is not a point but a trajectory

Consider the simplest case. One reads a poem, and finds it beautiful, or does not, or finds in it a particular beauty. One returns to it a year later, and the judgement has changed: the poem one found slight now seems profound, or the poem that dazzled now seems hollow, or, most commonly, the same poem yields a different beauty, inflected by all that has happened in the intervening time, the lines that meant little now heavy with a significance that one’s own life has since supplied. The aesthetic judgement of the poem is not a fixed fact about the poem-and-reader; it is a state that evolves, a point on a trajectory that the repeated returns trace out. And what is true of the poem is true of every object of aesthetic judgement: the place revisited, the music reheard, the person re-beheld, the shared experience re-remembered. Aesthetic judgement is temporal through and through, a thing that develops across its returns, and to treat it as a single timeless accord is to freeze a moving thing.

This is not a defect in aesthetic judgement to be corrected toward some stable “true” judgement that further acquaintance approaches. The evolution is not convergence toward a fixed correct answer, as the accumulation of evidence converges toward a fact; it is genuine development, the judgement becoming *other* as the judging subject and its history become other, with no terminus at which the “real” beauty of the thing would finally be fixed. This follows directly from the resolution of the antinomy (§3.9.4): if beauty is the three-register reconciliation achieved by a relational subject rather than an objective property of the thing, then as the subject evolves, as its symbolic world deepens, its imaginary investments shift, its encounters with the Real accumulate, the reconciliation it achieves with the same object evolves too. The beauty is not in the object waiting

to be correctly read; it is in the accord, and the accord is struck by a subject that is itself in motion. Aesthetic judgement evolves because the relational subject that judges is itself continually being generated and re-generated rather than static, which is to say, reproduced.

3.10.2 The reproduction cycle as the engine of evolution

What drives the evolution? The answer joins this section to the paper's political economy: aesthetic judgement evolves through the *reproduction cycle* (§3.4). Recall that the reproduction of experience is the labour of shared retelling by which a generated experience is returned to the relation's present, re-felt, and re-woven into its living fabric (§3.4.2). Each such return is a re-generation rather than a neutral replay, in which the experience is inflected by all that has happened since and added to in the re-feeling. And the aesthetic judgement of the experience is among the things so re-generated. When two people return, in retelling, to a shared journey, they do not merely recall its beauty; they *re-judge* it, and the re-judging is shaped by everything the intervening time has brought, so that the beauty they find in the remembered experience evolves with each return. The reproduction cycle is therefore the engine of the evolution of aesthetic judgement: each turn of the cycle re-generates the judgement, moves it, deepens or alters it, traces another point on its trajectory.

This is why the example with which this paper's political economy was concerned, *do you remember that time we got lost*, is at once a reproduction of experience and an evolution of aesthetic judgement. The getting-lost, judged in the moment as a frustration, is re-judged in the retelling, and across repeated retellings its aesthetic value evolves: what was experienced as an irritation becomes, through the reproductive returns, perceived as a charm, then as a treasured oddity, then as one of the most beautiful moments of the whole journey. The aesthetic judgement of the experience has traversed a trajectory, frustration to charm to treasure, and the reproduction cycle is what carried it along that path. This is the precise mechanism by which the conflict analysed in the previous section (§3.9.8) can become wealth: the reproduction cycle evolves the aesthetic judgement of the conflict from the negative value it had in the moment to the positive value it acquires in the transfigured retelling. The evolution of aesthetic judgement and the reproduction of experience are not two processes but one: to reproduce an experience is to evolve its

aesthetic judgement, and the trajectory of the judgement is the track the reproduction cycle traces.

3.10.3 The dynamics: good and bad evolution

If aesthetic judgement evolves through the reproduction cycle, then it has a *dynamics*, and the dynamics can run well or badly, which connects this section to the good and bad cycles the series has analysed throughout, and to the dynamical layer of its formal companion (Huang 2025b; Huang 2026a). The evolution of aesthetic judgement is the dynamical state of a system, and like any such system it can move toward enrichment or toward collapse.

The good evolution is the deepening one. Here each turn of the reproduction cycle adds to the aesthetic judgement, so that the beauty found in the experience grows richer with each return, accumulating significance, gathering the resonances of all the intervening life, becoming over years an ever-deeper well of meaning. This is the good cycle in the register of aesthetic judgement: a circulation that returns more than it took, the holonomy of the judgement accumulating positive value along the path of its re-generation (§3.4.3). The poem returned to over a lifetime that deepens with each reading, the shared journey whose beauty grows richer with each retelling, the relationship whose history becomes more beautiful as it is re-judged across the years, these are the good evolution, the aesthetic judgement enriched by its own reproduction. The bad evolution is the degrading one, and it takes two forms corresponding to the two failures of the cycle. The first is *fixation*: the judgement frozen, the reproduction become rote, the same beauty found in the same way each time with no re-generation, the living judgement hardened into a fixed verdict, the solidification of the aesthetic judgement, its circulation fallen to zero (Huang 2026a). The poem reduced to a fixed “great poem” one no longer actually reads, the journey hardened into a set anecdote no longer re-felt: the aesthetic judgement has stopped evolving, frozen into a dead possession. The second is *depletion*: the judgement worn away by a reproduction that extracts rather than enriches, the beauty consumed until nothing is left, the over-told story whose charm is exhausted, the experience re-judged so often and so carelessly that its aesthetic value is spent. Both are the bad cycle in the aesthetic register: the judgement either frozen or consumed, its living evolution arrested or its value extracted.

This gives the paper's aesthetics its dynamical completion, and it gives the cultivation of aesthetic judgement (§3.12) its temporal object. To cultivate aesthetic judgement is to tend its evolution over time rather than only to refine it at a moment, to keep its reproduction generative rather than rote or extractive, to return to the beautiful in ways that deepen rather than fix or deplete the judgement of it. The mutual aesthetic education of two (§3.12.7) is, seen now, the joint tending of the evolution of their shared aesthetic judgements: the labour by which two people, returning together to the beauties they have shared, keep the evolution of their common aesthetic judgement on the deepening path rather than letting it freeze or deplete. And the self-presence of relational dynamics (§3.3) is completed in the same way: the relation's dynamics that come to presence include the evolving dynamics of the two subjects' aesthetic judgements moving, through the reproduction cycle, toward an ever more deeply shared accord. The aesthetic and the political-economic, the judgement and its reproduction, the perception of beauty and the dynamics of the relation, are here seen to be one moving system, and the beauty of a long shared life is, in the end, the good evolution of a shared aesthetic judgement, deepened across a lifetime of generative reproduction. χαλεπὰ τὰ καλὰ: the beautiful is difficult, and now its difficulty is seen to be also temporal, the difficulty not only of striking the accord but of tending its evolution, over a whole life, on the deepening path.

3.10.4 The dialectic of the general and the particular

The account of the evolution of aesthetic judgement toward an “ever more deeply shared accord” has been stated, so far, as though the goal were the convergence of two judgements into one, as though the ideal terminus were two people who judge beauty identically. This is wrong, and the correction is not a minor qualification but the introduction of the dialectic that governs the whole matter: the dialectic of the general and the particular, which is the form the materialist dialectic takes in the domain of aesthetic judgement, and which this section must now make explicit, for without it the paper's aesthetics would collapse into exactly the homogenisation its relational ontology forbids.

The problem is this. Two relational subjects cannot be required to have identical aesthetic judgements, to do so would be to annul their distinctness, to demand the fusion that this series has refused from its foundation, the merging of two into one that destroys the resonance it pretends to perfect (§3.3.2). A “we” whose two members judged all beauty

identically would not be a relation of two but a single judging subject wearing two faces; the particularity of each, the irreducible difference of their perception, is a condition of there being two to relate rather than an obstacle to the relation. And yet a shared aesthetic judgement, a *general* accord, a common way of finding things beautiful, is genuinely needed, for without it there is no “we” that judges, no shared sensibility, no common aesthetic life, only two strangers who happen to perceive in parallel. The relation requires both: a generality (the shared accord, the common sensibility) and a particularity (the irreducible difference of each judgement, the distinctness of each perceiving subject). And these two requirements pull against each other, the generality toward convergence, the particularity toward divergence, so that the matter is a *dialectical* tension to be held rather than a simple good to be maximised.

The resolution is the materialist dialectic’s resolution of the general and the particular, and it is precisely the concept of the *concrete universal* that this paper invoked at the outset as its method (§3.1.4). The genuine general is not the abstract universal that is reached by stripping away all particularity, the empty common residue, the homogenised judgement that all must share by having surrendered what is their own. The genuine general is the *concrete* universal: the commonality that exists *in and through* the particulars, generated by their relation, real only as the shared life of distinct perceivers who remain distinct. The shared aesthetic judgement of a “we” is general in this concrete sense: not an identity imposed upon two by the erasure of their difference, but a commonality generated between two who remain different, a shared accord that lives through their particular judgements rather than in place of them. This is the materialist insight against the idealist abstraction: the universal is not above the particulars, subsuming them; it is among them, generated by their relation, and has no existence apart from the particulars whose commonality it is (Marx 1992). Applied here: the shared aesthetic judgement is not a third judgement above the two, to which both must conform, but the living commonality that the two particular judgements generate between them while remaining two. And the tension between the general and the particular, between the pull toward shared accord and the pull toward irreducible difference, is not a defect to be resolved by the victory of one side but the very *motor* of the relation’s aesthetic development, the contradiction whose ongoing motion is the relation’s aesthetic life. The materialist dialectic holds that contradiction is the source of development; here the contradiction of the general and

the particular is the source of the development of the shared aesthetic judgement, which advances not by resolving the tension but by its perpetual working.

This forbids two opposite errors, and naming them shows why the dialectic is necessary. The first error is *homogenisation*: the collapse of the particular into the general, the two judgements converging into identity, the difference erased, which is the fusion the relational ontology forbids, and which, as the next subsection will show, is also a dynamical catastrophe. The second error is *atomisation*: the collapse of the general into the particular, the two judgements with no commonality, no shared accord, no “we” that judges, which is the dissolution of the relation into two strangers. The good aesthetic life of a “we” lies in neither, but in the held tension of both: a shared accord (general) genuinely generated, through and not against the irreducible difference (particular) of two perceivers who remain two. It is to a light formal rendering of this dialectic, which shows, with a precision the prose alone cannot, why both the general and the particular are *required* rather than merely permitted, and required for the sake of generativity itself, that the section finally turns.

3.10.5 A light formal rendering: two coupled fields

The dialectic of the general and the particular can be given a formal rendering, and the rendering earns its place by showing something the prose can assert but not demonstrate: that the particularity of the two judgements is *necessary for the survival of generativity itself* rather than merely tolerable. The rendering is offered in the spirit the whole paper has maintained toward the formal, lightly, as a dialectical suggestion and not a formal assertion, for the beautiful is difficult and a true account of it must preserve its openness rather than close it in a model. What follows is a gesture toward a structure, not a theory of it; its value is heuristic, the lending of a precise image to a dialectical thought, and it is to be read as such.

Picture the two subjects’ aesthetic judgements as two fields, ϕ_1 and ϕ_2 , each a configuration evolving in time through the space of possible judgements, each the trajectory of one subject’s sensibility. Picture their evolution as governed by an action, or equivalently a dynamics, with two kinds of term. There is a *coupling* term, write it schematically as a cost that penalises the divergence of the two fields, something of the form $\kappa V(\phi_1 - \phi_2)$,

which pulls the two judgements toward agreement and is minimised when they accord. And there is, for each subject, a *self* term, a proper dynamics $f_i(\phi_i)$ of each field on its own, the irreducible individual tendency of each subject’s sensibility, which owes nothing to the other and follows its own form. The coupling term is the *general*: it is what draws the two judgements toward a shared accord, and it is what makes possible their joint, gradual evolution toward a common attractor, a shared aesthetic sensibility, a basin of agreement into which the two can settle together. The self term is the *particular*: it is what keeps each judgement its own, what preserves the dynamical diversity of the two fields, what prevents their collapse into a single configuration.

The dialectic is now legible in the dynamics, and it yields exactly the two errors the previous subsection named, plus the deep reason the particular is required. A system of *pure coupling*, the self terms suppressed, only the divergence-penalising term left, collapses: the two fields are driven to identity, settling into a single shared configuration, all difference annihilated. This is homogenisation, and in the dynamics it is a positive danger rather than merely a loss of richness, for a system collapsed to a single homogeneous configuration has lost all dynamical diversity, and a system without diversity *cannot escape a degenerating attractor*. Should the shared attractor into which the two judgements have collapsed begin to degenerate, to become a “bad” attractor, a fixed and frozen configuration, the solidification analysed above (§3.10.3), the homogenised system has no resource by which to leave it: both fields are at the same dead point, and there is no perturbation, no divergent tendency, no alternative trajectory to carry the system out. The generativity of the system is extinguished, frozen at a dead attractor with no path away. This is the dynamical meaning of the fusion the relational ontology forbids: not merely the loss of two-ness, but the loss of the diversity that is the condition of continued evolution, and so the extinction of generativity.

And here is the deep role of the particular, the self term, the irreducible individuality of each judgement: *it is the possibility of escape from the extinction of generativity*. Because the two fields retain their own proper dynamics, their own divergent tendencies, the system retains diversity, and diversity is precisely what allows a system to leave a degenerating attractor. When the shared attractor begins to die, the self term of one or the other field can carry it off the dead point, perturb the system, open a divergence that

provides a direction of escape, and so migrate the system toward a new attractor where generativity can resume. The particularity of the two judgements is, in this light, not a romantic concession to individuality but a structural necessity for the survival of the relation's generativity: it is the diversity reserve, the evolutionary variance, the source of the perturbations by which a relation escapes the death of its shared accords. A relation whose two members have become aesthetically identical has spent this reserve and is, for that reason, fragile, unable to renew a sensibility that has gone stale, trapped in whatever shared judgement it has frozen into. A relation whose two members remain aesthetically distinct, while genuinely sharing, retains the reserve, and can therefore keep escaping the deaths of its accords, keep migrating to new and living attractors, keep its generativity from extinction. The particular is required *for the sake of generativity*, which is the relation's own ultimate end (Huang 2025b); and so the dialectic of the general and the particular is a unity in which each serves the relation's generativity rather than a standoff between two goods, the general by giving the two a shared aesthetic life, the particular by keeping that life able to renew itself.

This is the materialist dialectic in its proper form: not the triumph of the general over the particular (homogenisation, the dead shared attractor) nor of the particular over the general (atomisation, no shared life at all), but their contradictory unity, whose perpetual motion is the relation's living aesthetic development, and whose two poles are each necessary, the general for the shared accord, the particular for the escape from the accord's death. The coupling builds the "we"'s common sensibility; the self terms keep it alive; and the good evolution of a shared aesthetic judgement is the dialectical motion of the two, a coupled system that settles toward shared accords generative enough to be worth sharing and diverse enough to be escaped when they die. The model is, as promised, only a gesture, a lending of dynamical precision to a dialectical thought, not a closing of the matter into a formalism, for the matter does not close. But it shows, with a clarity the prose alone could not reach, why the paper's relational aesthetics requires both the general and the particular, and why their tension is the very life of a shared aesthetic existence rather than a problem to be solved. χαλεπὰ τὰ καλὰ: the beautiful is difficult, and its difficulty is, here, the difficulty of holding a contradiction in living motion, of being, with another, neither identical nor separate, but two who share a beauty that remains, in each, their own.

3.11. The Aesthetic Perception of Contingency

The construction of the field is an aesthetic problem; so, it turns out, is the perception of what arises within it. This section turns from the making of the field to the catching of what the field lets in, and argues that the capacity to catch it is itself an aesthetic capacity, the second of the paper’s named concepts: the *aesthetic perception of contingency*. The argument also lightens, in an important way, the apparent burden of the previous section. For if constructing fields were the only path to the good this paper describes, that good would be effortful and rare, available chiefly to those with the leisure and means to build elaborate frames. This section shows that the deeper capacity is lighter and more portable than the construction of fields: it is a perceptual skill, exercisable anywhere, that catches the contingent beauty the world is always offering and turns it toward the beloved. A wildflower at the roadside is enough.

3.11.1 Contingency is everywhere; the problem is catching it

The previous sections may have given the impression that contingency must be manufactured, that the everyday is a desert of pure repetition into which openness has to be deliberately imported by the construction of fields. This impression is false, and correcting it is the starting point of the present section. The everyday is not, in fact, pure repetition; its repetitions are shot through with contingency at every moment, with small undetermined irruptions that the routine does not fully suppress. A wildflower has come up at the edge of the path. The light has fallen, just now, in a particular way across a wall. A stranger’s face, in passing, has worn an expression that means something. A phrase overheard, a sound, a sudden smell, the everyday leaks contingency continuously, through the seams of its repetition, in a steady stream of small undetermined events. The problem is not that the everyday lacks contingency. The problem is that almost all of this contingency goes *uncaught*, arrives and departs unnoticed, unregistered, unturned-toward, because the purposive perception of the everyday, fixed on its functions and its destinations, is blind to it.

This reframes the whole question of practice. The deepest practical capacity is not, after all, the construction of fields, demanding as that is; it is the capacity to *catch* the contingency that is already arriving, to notice and receive what the everyday is already

offering through its seams. And the minimal event in which this capacity is exercised is very small and entirely free: one catches the wildflower at the roadside, sees it, is touched by it, and turns it toward the one beside one: *look*. In that small act, a contingency that would have passed unnoticed is caught, and in being turned-toward it is shared, and in being shared it enters the structure of the “we” and becomes a deposit, however tiny, in the relation’s wealth. The flower, caught and shared, is a contingency that has intervened in the relational structure, the smallest possible instance of everything this paper has described, requiring no constructed field, no journey, no leisure, nothing but the capacity to catch what is already there and turn it toward the beloved. The chain runs: contingency → perception → sharing → wealth, and it can run anywhere, at any moment, for free.

3.11.2 The three moments of the perception

The capacity so described is not simple; it has three distinct moments, each a distinct ability that can be present or absent, developed or atrophied, and it is worth separating them because the cultivation of the capacity (§3.12) is the cultivation of each.

The first moment is *recognition*: actually *seeing* the contingent thing when it arrives. This is harder than it sounds, and most contingency fails at exactly this first step. The purposive perception of the everyday, the perception that sees the road but not the flower, because it is fixed on getting somewhere, is structurally blind to the contingent, since the contingent is by definition what is not on the way to the purpose. To see the flower is to perceive in a different mode: a mode in which purpose is suspended and the perception is open to what is there for its own sake rather than for its use. This is the mode classically called *aesthetic perception*, the disinterested attention that beholds a thing for what it is rather than for what it is for, that sees the flower as a flower and not as an irrelevance beside the path to the destination. The first moment of catching contingency is thus an aesthetic suspension of the purposive gaze, the opening of perception to the gratuitous, the un-useful, the merely there.

The second moment is *being moved*: not merely seeing the contingent thing but being *touched* by it, letting it stir something. Seeing is not enough; one can register a flower coldly, as a fact, and be unmoved. The second moment is the receptivity in which the

seen thing is allowed to matter, to provoke a small movement of feeling, to be received as significant rather than merely noted. This is a poetic receptivity, and the Chinese tradition has a precise name for it: *xing* (興), the stirring of feeling by a thing, the rising of emotion or significance in response to a perceived object, which the classical poetics placed at the very root of poetry, “the poem begins in *xing*,” in the affective stirring that a thing provokes (Owen 1992). To be moved by the roadside flower is to undergo *xing*: to let the small contingent thing stir something, to be affectively reached by it rather than merely registering its presence. This receptivity, too, can be developed or dulled; a life of purely purposive perception dulls it, and the practiced sensibility of the poet keeps it alive.

The third moment is *turning-to-share*: taking what one has seen and been moved by, and turning it toward the other. *Look*. This small act is the one that makes the whole chain relational, and it is the decisive moment for the purposes of this paper, because it is what converts a private aesthetic experience into a relational event. One could see the flower and be moved by it and keep it, a complete solitary aesthetic experience, of the kind the lone traveller has. The turning-toward is what makes it a deposit in the “we”: by sharing the caught contingency, one lets it intervene in the relational structure, makes it a moment of the “we” rather than of the “I.” The turning-to-share is the relational moment of the aesthetic perception of contingency, and it is what distinguishes the capacity this paper describes from the solitary aesthetic sensibility the tradition has long praised. The full capacity is the chain of all three: to see the contingent (recognition), to be moved by it (*xing*), and to turn it toward the beloved (sharing), and these three, as the philosophy of beauty will show (§3.9.2), are the three registers brought into accord: the real kernel of the contingent thing encountered in recognition, the imaginary investment of being-moved, and the symbolic articulation of the turning-toward. On that account the *look* is not the aftermath of a completed aesthetic judgement but its very completion, the moment at which the relational subject’s judgement achieves the shared symbolic accord its relational constitution demands, and a relationship rich in this capacity, in which both partners habitually catch and share the contingent beauty the world leaks, is rich in a continuous stream of small generative deposits that require no journey and no constructed field, only the cultivated perception that catches what is already there.

3.11.3 A skill, not an engineering: the portable container

This resolves, at last, the tension that the construction of fields had introduced, the worry that the good of this paper is effortful, elaborate, and available only to those who can build grand frames. The aesthetic perception of contingency is not an engineering but a *skill*: not a structure one builds in the world but a capacity one carries in oneself, exercisable anywhere, requiring no external apparatus. And a skill, unlike a constructed field, is *portable*. The constructed field is a scaffolding, an external structure, built at some cost in time and means, that holds open a space for the relation to come to presence. The aesthetic perception of contingency is the internalisation of what the scaffolding was for: once one has the skill, one no longer needs the scaffolding, because one carries within oneself the capacity that the scaffolding was constructed to supply. The skilled perceiver opens the field wherever they are, catches the contingent beauty the everyday leaks, turns it toward the beloved, and so generates, in the midst of the most ordinary day, the small relational events that the constructed field was built to produce.

This is the movement from *scaffolding to skill*, and it is the deep logic of the paper's eventual generalisation of travel (§3.15). The literal journey is a scaffolding: a powerful, expensive, external frame that opens the field all at once, and whose chief value, beyond the field it opens, is that it *teaches*, it lets one experience the field vividly enough to recognise it, to learn what it is and what it feels like to catch and share the contingent within it. But the mature form of the practice is not the perpetual construction of scaffoldings, which would indeed be effortful and elite; it is the skill that the scaffolding taught, carried back into the everyday, exercisable without the scaffolding. The journey shows what the field is; the skill lets one open it anywhere. And spaciousness is what makes the catching possible at every point: the skilled perceiver is one who keeps, within themselves and within their day, enough emptiness, enough freedom from the total occupation of purpose, that the contingent has room to be noticed when it arrives. Without that interior spaciousness the contingency leaks past uncaught, the perception too full of purpose to register the flower. The skill, then, is inseparable from the cultivation of an interior emptiness: the aesthetic perception of contingency is, among other things, the capacity to keep oneself empty enough to catch what comes.

The skill connects, finally, to two things the series has already established. It is the

positive, capacitated form of what the previous paper marked as the un-programmability of the good (Wanhong 2026c): there it was shown that the good cannot be reduced to a procedure and must be judged afresh in each case; here that un-programmable judgement is given its positive name as a cultivated perceptual skill, the thing one develops where a procedure cannot be supplied. And it is the everyday exercise of what the series called witnessing (Wanhong 2026b): to catch the flower and say *look* is the smallest act of shared witnessing, the turning of two gazes toward one thing, the constitution of a shared seeing that is a moment of the “we.” The aesthetic perception of contingency is witnessing made into a daily skill, and its cultivation, to which the paper turns next, is the cultivation of the capacity to witness the world together, beautifully, at the scale of a roadside flower.

3.11.4 Eastern resources: the poetics of the wayfarer and the landscape

The capacity this section describes is not without its masters, and the richest tradition of them is the East Asian poetics of the wayfarer and the landscape, which developed the aesthetic perception of contingency to a height the Western literature of travel rarely reached, and which the paper draws on both for its phenomenological precision and as a counterweight to the otherwise Western cast of its aesthetics. Three strands are especially apposite.

The first is the travel poetics of Bashō, whose *Oku no Hosomichi*, the narrow road to the deep north, is the supreme record of the aesthetic perception of contingency exercised on a journey (Matsuo 1966). Bashō’s practice is exactly the chain this section has described: the catching of small contingent things (a particular silence, the cry of a cicada, the look of a ruined gate), the being-moved by them (the *haiku* is the deposit of a *xing*, the stirring crystallised), and in the form of the travel diary itself, the turning of them toward another, the sharing of the caught moment with a reader and, within the journey, with the companion Sora who travelled beside him. Bashō’s aesthetic of *sabi* and the lightness he called *karumi* are, among other things, disciplines of the perception of contingent beauty, trained capacities to catch and be moved by the small, the passing, the un-grand, exactly the contingencies the purposive gaze misses.

The second is the Chinese tradition of the landscape travel-record and the landscape poem, the *youji* of writers from Liu Zongyuan to Xu Xiake, and the landscape poetry

of Xie Lingyun, Wang Wei, and their lineage, in which the journey into mountains and waters is at once a literal travel and a discipline of perception, the cultivation of an eye and a heart attuned to the beauty of the contingent and the spacious (Owen 1996). The Chinese landscape aesthetic is, in a deep sense, an aesthetic of spaciousness: the valuing of emptiness in the painting and the poem, the significance of what is not depicted, the use of the void, the unbrushed silk, the unsaid word, the empty distance, as the very medium of beauty. This is the aesthetic correlate of the eleventh chapter's metaphysics of emptiness (§3.2.8): a whole tradition of perception trained to find the use of the vessel in its emptiness, the beauty of the landscape in its spacious void.

The third is the broader figure, common to the tradition, of travel as a discipline of perception and not merely a movement through space, the wayfarer whose journey is an education of the eye and the heart, who travels in order to learn to perceive. This figure gives the paper's eventual generalisation an ancient precedent: the point of the journey was never the destinations but the trained perception the journey cultivated, the eye for contingent and spacious beauty that, once trained, could be exercised anywhere. The masters of this tradition are, in the paper's terms, those who completed the movement from scaffolding to skill, who used the journey to cultivate a perception that they then carried into all of life, so that for them the whole world became a landscape to be perceived with the wayfarer's trained and open eye. They are the proof that the capacity this section describes can be cultivated to mastery, and the bridge to the question of how such cultivation is done, the question of aesthetic education, to which the paper now turns.

3.12. Aesthetic Education: Cultivating the Judgement of the Good

If the construction of the field is an aesthetic problem (§3.7.6), and the perception of what arises within it is an aesthetic skill (§3.11), then the cultivation of the capacity for both is an *aesthetic education*. This is the philosophical summit of the paper, and also its most exposed wager, for it will argue that aesthetic education is not a refinement added to ethical life but, at the limit, the most fundamental form of ethical education there is. The section advances three theses of increasing radicality. The first, already stated, is that the construction of the field is aesthetic. The second distinguishes two kinds of

beauty, the received and the enacted, and locates the second at the root of the long-noted kinship between practical ethics and the aesthetic. The third, the most radical, is that ethical judgement, at the point where rules give out, operates aesthetically, so that the good cannot finally be separated from the beautiful, and the deepest ethical education is aesthetic. The section defends the third thesis in a guarded form, confronts it with its strongest objectors, surveys the classical and modern theories of aesthetic education, descends to the question of how the relevant capacities are actually cultivated between two people, and closes on the difficulty that the whole edifice rests upon: that beautiful things are difficult.

3.12.1 Why aesthetic education, and not simply ethical education

The claim that the cultivation of the good is an aesthetic rather than a narrowly ethical education depends on a result established in the previous paper and reactivated here: that the good is not programmable (Wanhong 2026c). If the good of an intimate relation could be reduced to a set of rules, do this, refrain from that, follow the procedure, then its cultivation would be a matter of teaching the rules, and ethical education would be the transmission of a code. But the good of a relation cannot be so reduced; it requires, in each concrete case, a judgement of what is fitting here, now, with this person, that no rule determines, because the concrete case always exceeds the rule’s generality. This was the lesson of the previous paper’s closing recognition that the good must be judged afresh in the flesh of each particular relation, and it has a direct consequence for education: if the good is not a code, its cultivation cannot be the transmission of a code, and must instead be the cultivation of the *judgement* that operates where the code gives out.

What is the structure of that judgement? It is the judgement of what is fitting in a concrete case that no rule subsumes, a holistic, situated grasp of the right proportion, the apt response, the fitting measure, exercised on a particular that no universal exhausts. And this, the section will argue, is the structure of aesthetic judgement. The judgement that catches the right measure in a concrete case, where no rule can supply it, is the same judgement in the construction of a field, the perception of a contingency, and the response to an ethical situation; it is, in each, a felt grasp of the fitting that is irreducible to procedure. If that is so, then the cultivation of the good is the cultivation of this judgement, and the cultivation of this judgement is aesthetic education, the education of

the capacity to perceive and respond to the fitting where no rule can be followed. This is why the education the good requires is aesthetic and not merely ethical in the narrow, rule-transmitting sense: because the good itself, at its un-programmable core, requires a judgement whose structure is aesthetic.

3.12.2 Thesis Two: receptive beauty and enactive beauty

Before the most radical thesis, a distinction must be drawn that the discussion has so far left implicit, and that proves to be the hinge between the aesthetic and the ethical. Beauty, as it figures in this paper, is of two kinds.

Thesis Two.

*Beauty divides into the **receptive** and the **enactive**. Receptive beauty is beauty as received, the beauty of the wildflower, the landscape, the work of art, met in the aesthetic perception that beholds it. Enactive beauty is beauty as done, the beauty of an action, a response, a way of treating another, made beautiful in the doing. The first is perceived; the second is enacted. And it is enactive beauty that grounds the long-observed kinship between practical ethics and the aesthetic, for to act so that one's treatment of another is itself beautiful is to enact the good as beauty.*

Receptive beauty is the beauty the previous section was concerned with: the contingent beauty caught in perception, the flower seen and the landscape beheld, beauty as something that arrives and is received. It is the object of the aesthetic perception of contingency, and its cultivation is the cultivation of the receptive capacities, the trained eye, the awakened *xíng*, the openness to what the world offers. But there is a second beauty that is not received but *made*: the beauty of a gesture, a response, a way of meeting another person, that is beautiful in the way it is done. A response to a partner's distress can be beautiful, apt, proportioned, generous in exactly the right measure, neither too much nor too little, fitting the moment as a perfect line fits a poem. A way of treating

another can have grace, the way a movement or a phrase can have grace. This is enactive beauty: not beauty beheld but beauty enacted, the beauty of the deed.

The distinction matters because enactive beauty is where the aesthetic and the ethical meet, and meet not by analogy but in substance. To act well toward another, to respond to their need with exactly the right measure, to meet their vulnerability with exactly the fitting grace, to treat them with the aptness that the situation calls for and no rule prescribes, is at once an ethical achievement and an aesthetic one, and the two are one rather than two descriptions of the achievement. The rightness of the response is its fittingness, and its fittingness is its beauty; the well-met moment is the beautifully-met moment, and there is no separating, in it, the ethical aptness from the aesthetic grace. This is why practical ethics has so often been felt to have an aesthetic dimension, why we speak of a response as graceful, of a life as beautiful, of conduct as fitting; the kinship is a recognition that enacted goodness is enacted beauty rather than a metaphor borrowed from art, that to do the fitting thing is to make a small beautiful thing of one’s action. Enactive beauty is the practical beauty of the well-done deed, and its cultivation is the cultivation of the capacity to act beautifully, which is, the next thesis will argue, indistinguishable at its root from the capacity to act well.

3.12.3 Thesis Three: ethical judgement is, at its limit, aesthetic

The third thesis is the paper’s most radical, and it is advanced with the care its radicality demands. It is stated first in a guarded form, which the paper defends; then in an extreme form, which the paper entertains as a genuine temptation and holds open rather than asserts.

Thesis Three (guarded form).

At the point where rules are exhausted by the concrete, which is every point at which a genuinely particular ethical situation must be met, ethical judgement operates aesthetically. Practical wisdom, at its summit, coincides with aesthetic judgement: both are the holistic, non-conceptual grasp of what is fitting in a concrete case that no rule subsumes. The

cultivation of the good is therefore, at its core, the cultivation of aesthetic judgement, and the deepest ethical education is an aesthetic education.

The argument for the guarded form proceeds in two steps, the first structural and the second concerning purity. The structural step is this. Ethical life cannot be exhaustively governed by rules, because rules are general and situations are particular, and the particular always in principle exceeds the general; there is always a gap between the rule and the case, which judgement must cross. What crosses it? Not another rule, for that would only reproduce the gap; but a capacity to grasp, in the concrete situation, what is fitting, a capacity Aristotle named *phronesis*, practical wisdom, the perception of the right thing to do in the particular case, which he was careful to say could not be reduced to rules and belonged to perception rather than to demonstration (Aristotle 2000). Now consider the structure of aesthetic judgement as Kant analysed it: the judgement of beauty is, for Kant, a *reflective* judgement, one that finds the universal in the particular rather than subsuming the particular under a given universal; it is non-conceptual, it does not apply a determinate concept, yet it claims a kind of universality; it is the free play of the faculties grasping a purposiveness without a determinate purpose, a fittingness with no rule that the fittingness instances (Kant 1987). The two structures, *phronesis* and aesthetic judgement, are, the thesis claims, the same structure: both are the non-conceptual grasp of a fitting particular that no rule subsumes, the finding of the right measure in the concrete where no determinate universal can be applied. *Phronesis* at its summit and aesthetic judgement coincide: the perception of the fitting in the ethical case and the perception of the fitting in the aesthetic case are one capacity, exercised on different materials. This is the bridge Kant's third *Critique* was written to build, the judgement that mediates between the realm of nature and the realm of freedom (Kant 1987), and the thesis takes it at its word: the faculty that judges beauty is the faculty that, at its limit, judges the good.

The second step concerns purity, and it is the heart of the matter and the author's own deepest reason for the thesis. Consider the difference between two ways of doing the right thing. In the first, one does the right thing because a rule, an obligation, an internalised

norm, requires it: one has been formed to act so, and one acts so because one is so formed. In the second, one does the right thing because one perceives, freshly and for oneself, that it is the fitting thing to do, because one sees its fittingness, is moved by it, and enacts it out of that perception, as one might be moved to complete a line of verse in the only way that fits. The two may issue in the same outward act; but they differ in their source, and the difference is the difference between a structured second nature and a free response. The rule-governed good is *structured humanity*: a humanity formed by the internalisation of external norms, acting rightly because it has been built to, its rightness the operation of an installed structure rather than a free perception. Such goodness is reliable, and it is not nothing, a world of people reliably formed to act well is far better than its opposite, but it is not *pure*, for it is heteronomous in the deepest sense: the source of the action is the installed structure, the internalised rule, the formed disposition, and not the free perceiving subject. The aesthetically-grounded good is different. To act rightly because one perceives, oneself and freshly, the fittingness of the act, to be moved by the beauty of the fitting response and to enact it out of that being-moved, is to act from a source that is one's own free perception rather than an installed structure; and only such action, the thesis holds, has purely ethical character, because only in it is the subject the genuine origin of the good it does, rather than the executor of a structure built into it. The rule-governed good is safe, reliable, and structured; the aesthetically-grounded good is dangerous, unreliable, and free, and only the free is pure. This is why, on the deepest version of the thesis, the truly ethical can only be the aesthetic: because only a goodness that springs from the free perception of the fitting, rather than from the operation of an internalised rule, is the goodness of a free subject rather than the functioning of a structured one.

Thesis Three (extreme form, entertained not asserted).

Every ethical question is, at bottom, an aesthetic question. There is, finally, no good that is not the beautiful enacted, and no ethical judgement that is not, at its root, a perception of the fitting, so that ethics is a province of aesthetics, and the good a name for the beautiful in the realm of action.

The extreme form is a genuine temptation, and the paper neither asserts nor dismisses it. It is the thought that the whole distinction between ethics and aesthetics is, at the limit, unsustainable, that what we call the good just is the beautiful as it appears in conduct, and that the apparent difference between them is an artefact of treating ethics as a matter of rules and aesthetics as a matter of taste, a difference that dissolves once one sees that ethics at its core is also a matter of the perception of the fitting. The paper marks this as the radical horizon of its argument and declines to assert it, for reasons the next subsection makes clear: the extreme form, unguarded, courts a danger severe enough that responsibility requires holding it at the level of a temptation rather than a thesis. But it records it, because the guarded form points toward it, and an honest account does not conceal the precipice to which its own argument leads.

3.12.4 The strongest objections, and the reply

A thesis this radical must face its strongest objectors at full strength, and there are two whose force is sufficient to require, not refutation, but the guarding that the thesis has already built into itself. The series' practice has been to let the hardest objection stand at full force (Wanhong 2026c); the practice is kept here.

The Kantian objection: the heteronomy of inclination. The first objection comes from Kant's own ethics, and it is sharp precisely because the thesis leaned on Kant's aesthetics. For Kant the moral worth of an action lies in its being done from duty, from respect for the moral law, and *not* from inclination, however amiable; an action done because one is moved to it, because one feels its fittingness or is drawn by its beauty, is for Kant exactly *not* a moral action in the full sense, but at best a fortunate *pathological* one, done from feeling rather than from the rational recognition of duty. On this view the thesis has it exactly backwards: to ground the good in the aesthetic perception of the fitting, in being-moved by the beauty of the response, is to ground it in inclination, and inclination is precisely what Kant excludes from the purely moral. The aesthetically-grounded good, far from being the pure good, would be on Kantian grounds the impure one, the good done from feeling rather than from law.

The reply does not deny the Kantian point but relocates the disagreement. The objection assumes that the alternative to acting-from-feeling is acting-from-the-rational-law, and that purity lies with the latter. But the thesis's purity argument was directed at exactly this: the rational law, internalised and operative as the source of one's action, is itself a structure, the structure of duty installed in the subject, and action from it is, in the sense the thesis specified, the operation of an installed structure rather than the free response of the perceiving subject. The thesis and Kant agree that inclination as mere pathological impulse is no ground for the good; they disagree about whether the free perception of the fitting is "inclination" in that sense. The thesis holds that it is not, that the perception of the fitting, the being-moved by the beauty of the right response, is a *judgement* rather than a blind pathological pull, the reflective grasp of a fittingness, which has more in common with Kant's own aesthetic judgement (universal, disinterested, reflective) than with the inclinations he excluded. The disagreement, then, is whether the faculty of reflective judgement, which Kant himself placed between nature and freedom, can be the source of moral action; Kant says the source must be pure practical reason, the thesis says the source can be the reflective perception of the fitting. This is a real and unresolved disagreement, and the paper does not pretend to settle it against Kant; it claims only that the thesis is not refuted by the charge of grounding the good in mere inclination, because the perception of the fitting is a judgement rather than mere inclination, and that whether such judgement can be a pure ground of the good is exactly the open question the thesis raises against the Kantian orthodoxy, not a confusion the orthodoxy disposes of.

The objection from the aestheticisation of ethics: the fascist spectre. The second objection is graver, because it is historical and not merely conceptual, and because the previous paper already conceded its force in another form (Wanhong 2026c). To make the good a matter of the beautiful, to aestheticise ethics, is to invite the most dangerous confusion of the last century: the aestheticisation of politics that Benjamin diagnosed at the heart of fascism, the treatment of the political as a work of art to be composed, the people as material to be shaped into a beautiful whole, the leader as artist and the nation as artwork (Benjamin 1969). If the good is the beautiful enacted, what prevents the beautiful-but-monstrous, the magnificently staged rally, the aesthetically perfect and morally abominable order, the cruelty committed with style? The previous

paper conceded exactly this point in its own register, granting that a relation could be formally beautiful, could have the geometry of the good cycle, and yet be unjust, so that aesthetic form alone does not secure goodness (Wanhong 2026c). The objection here is the same at a higher pitch: the aestheticisation of ethics threatens to license the beautiful atrocity, to make style a sufficient credential for the good, and history shows where that leads.

This is the objection that forces the thesis into its guarded form and keeps the extreme form a temptation rather than an assertion. The reply has three parts, and none of them fully dissolves the danger, which is as it should be. First, the thesis distinguishes receptive and enactive beauty, and the fascist aestheticisation is an aestheticisation of the *spectacle*, of receptive beauty, the beauty beheld by the masses in the staged rally, not of the enactive beauty of how persons are treated; and enactive beauty, the beauty of the fitting treatment of *this* person, is precisely what the beautiful atrocity lacks, since the atrocity treats persons as material for a spectacle rather than meeting them in the aptness their particularity demands. The fascist spectacle is receptively magnificent and enactively monstrous; the distinction the thesis draws is exactly the one that the beautiful atrocity violates. Second, the enactive beauty the thesis prizes is inseparable, by the analysis of the whole series, from the non-extractive, non-dominative treatment of the other, the fitting response is the one that meets the other as an end and returns rather than retains (Wanhong 2026c; Wanhong 2026a), so that a “beautiful” treatment that reduced the other to material would, on the thesis’s own account of enactive beauty, not be beautiful but its counterfeit, the meretricious mistaken for the beautiful. Third, and most honestly, the danger is real and the guarding is necessary precisely because the extreme form, unguarded, could not make these distinctions stick: if every ethical question simply *were* an aesthetic one, with no further criterion, then the magnificent and the monstrous could not be told apart by anything but taste, and taste can be trained to monstrosity. It is exactly to keep the criterion of enactive beauty, the fitting, non-extractive meeting of the particular other, from collapsing into mere spectacular magnificence that the thesis must be held in its guarded form, in which the aesthetic judgement that grounds the good is the judgement of *enactive* fittingness and not of *receptive* splendour. The fascist spectre is the standing proof that the extreme form is too dangerous to assert; it is the reason the paper entertains that form as a precipice

rather than standing on it. *The beautiful that grounds the good is the beauty of the fitting deed, not the beauty of the magnificent show*, and the whole weight of the thesis rests on a distinction that history shows to be perpetually under threat of erasure.

3.12.5 The classical theories of aesthetic education

The thought that the cultivation of the human being passes essentially through the beautiful is old and deep, and the thesis of this paper is its inheritor rather than its inventor. The classical theories are surveyed in Table 3.3; the text draws out the four that bear most directly on the argument.

The foundational modern text is Schiller’s *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, and it is foundational precisely because it makes the claim this paper makes: that the way to a free and whole humanity runs through the aesthetic (Schiller 1967). Schiller’s problem was the one this paper has met in another form, how a being divided between sensuous inclination and rational law might become free and whole rather than either the slave of impulse or the executor of an installed law. His answer was the *play-drive* (*Spieltrieb*), the faculty that arises in the free play between the sensuous and the rational and that is exercised paradigmatically in the experience of beauty; in aesthetic play the human being is, Schiller said, most fully human, because there alone the two halves of its nature are reconciled in freedom rather than one subordinated to the other. This is, in a different vocabulary, exactly the thesis’s contrast between the structured humanity of the installed rule and the free humanity of the aesthetic response: Schiller’s aesthetic education is the cultivation of the freedom that lies beyond both impulse and law, in the play where the human being is whole. The paper’s purity argument is Schiller’s insight in the register of ethics, that only the aesthetically free response is the response of a whole and free human being, rather than of one half of a divided one obeying the other.

The decisive analysis of the faculty is Kant’s, already invoked: the *Critique of Judgment* supplies the structure of the reflective aesthetic judgement on which the whole thesis turns, and it is Kant who frames that faculty as the bridge between nature and freedom, the very mediation the thesis exploits (Kant 1987). Aristotle supplies the ethical half of the bridge, the *phronesis* whose structure the thesis identifies with aesthetic judgement (Aristotle 2000). And the Confucian tradition supplies what the Western sources lack: an explicit,

institutionalised programme of aesthetic education as the core of ethical formation. The *Analects* states it with a concision the West never matched: 兴于诗，立于礼，成于乐, one is aroused by poetry, established by ritual, and *completed by music* (Confucius 1979). Here the cultivation of the person begins in the affective stirring of poetry (the *xing* of §3.11.2) and *culminates* in music, the ethical formation of the human being completed in an aesthetic accomplishment, the harmony of the well-formed character figured as, and achieved through, the harmony of music. This is the classical locus of the paper’s two beauties: *xing*, the arousal by poetry, is receptive beauty at the root of formation; *cheng yu yue*, completion in music, is enactive beauty as the summit of the formed character, the life made harmonious as a piece of music is made harmonious. The Confucian sequence is the thesis of this section stated two and a half millennia early: ethical cultivation begins and ends in the aesthetic.

3.12.6 The modern theories of aesthetic education

The modern theories, surveyed in Table 3.4, develop the classical inheritance in three directions that matter to the paper: the democratisation of aesthetic experience, its critical and emancipatory edge, and its concrete pedagogy.

Dewey’s *Art as Experience* performs the decisive democratising move, and it is the modern source closest to the paper’s own argument (Dewey 1934). Against the confinement of the aesthetic to museums and masterpieces, Dewey located aesthetic experience in the consummation of ordinary experience, in any stretch of lived experience that achieves a certain wholeness, completion, and felt unity, which he called “an experience.” The roadside flower, caught and consummated into a complete small experience, is aesthetic in exactly Dewey’s sense; the aesthetic perception of contingency is the Deweyan finding of the aesthetic in the texture of ordinary life, and the paper’s insistence that the good of the everyday is available without grand apparatus is Dewey’s democratisation carried into the ethics of intimacy. Cai Yuanpei’s programme of “replacing religion with aesthetic education” carries the democratising impulse into a whole national pedagogy, proposing aesthetic cultivation as the universal, secular path to the formation of a free and elevated humanity, the institutional dream of exactly the thesis this paper argues (Y. Cai 2015).

The critical edge is supplied by the Frankfurt tradition. Adorno’s aesthetics locates in

Source	Core concept	Bearing on the thesis
Schiller (Schiller 1967; Schiller 1966)	The play-drive (<i>Spieltrieb</i>); beauty as the reconciliation of sense and reason	The freedom beyond both impulse and law is reached through the aesthetic — the paper’s purity argument in its original form.
Kant (Kant 1987)	Reflective aesthetic judgement; judgement as the bridge of nature and freedom	Supplies the structure of the faculty the thesis identifies with <i>phronesis</i> ; the mediation the thesis exploits.
Aristotle (Aristotle 2000)	<i>Phronesis</i> : perception of the fitting in the particular, irreducible to rule	The ethical half of the bridge; practical wisdom as non-conceptual grasp of the fitting.
Confucius (Confucius 1979)	兴于诗，立于礼，成于乐: aroused by poetry, completed in music	Ethical formation begins (<i>xing</i> , receptive) and culminates (music, enactive) in the aesthetic.
Plato (Plato 1926)	The difficulty of the beautiful; beauty and the good ascending together	χαλεπὰ τὰ καλὰ: the beautiful resists definition — the un-programmability at the section’s close.
Daoist (Laozi 1963)	虚; the use of emptiness; the uncarved	The aesthetic education of the perception of spaciousness and the un-forced.

Table 3.3: Classical theories of aesthetic education and their bearing on the paper’s three theses.

the genuine aesthetic experience a resistance to instrumental reason, the aesthetic as the comportment that refuses to reduce its object to a use, that beholds rather than exploits, and so stands against the total administration of the world by the logic of means and ends (Adorno 1997). This gives the paper’s aesthetic perception its critical-political dimension, taken up in the next section: to perceive aesthetically, to behold the contingent for its own sake rather than for its use, is already a small refusal of the instrumentalisation that the administered world imposes. Rancière sharpens this into an explicit politics: the aesthetic is the “distribution of the sensible,” the prior partition of what can be perceived, by whom, as significant, so that to alter what is perceptible, to make the overlooked perceptible, is a political act, and aesthetic education, the cultivation of new capacities

of perception, is the redistribution of the sensible (Rancière 2004). The cultivation of the aesthetic perception of contingency is, in Rancière’s terms, the acquisition of a capacity to perceive what the dominant distribution renders imperceptible, a politics of perception, whose stakes the following section will make concrete.

Source	Contribution	Bearing on the paper
Dewey (Dewey 1934)	“An experience”; the aesthetic in the consummation of ordinary life	Democratises the aesthetic; the roadside flower is aesthetic in Dewey’s exact sense.
Cai Yuanpei (Y. Cai 2015)	Aesthetic education in place of religion; universal secular formation	The institutional dream of the thesis; aesthetic cultivation as the path to a free humanity.
Adorno (Adorno 1997)	The aesthetic as resistance to instrumental reason	Beholding-not-using as a refusal of administration; the critical edge of perception.
Rancière (Rancière 2004)	The distribution of the sensible; aesthetics as politics	Cultivating perception redistributes the perceptible — a politics of perception.
Murdoch (Murdoch 1970)	Attention; the just and loving gaze	The moral work of attention is aesthetic in structure — seeing truly is loving rightly.
Scarry (Scarry 1999)	Beauty as prompting justice; the decentred, fair regard	Receptive beauty trains the fair attention that the just response requires.
Modern pedagogy (Montessori 1967; Steiner 1996; Greene 2001; Eisner 2002)	Sensory education; artistic formation; aesthetic education as practice	Concrete methods for cultivating perception — how the capacities are actually trained.

Table 3.4: Modern theories of aesthetic education and their bearing on the paper.

Two further modern sources deserve note for joining the aesthetic to the ethical in exactly the paper’s way. Iris Murdoch made *attention*, the just and loving gaze, the patient regard that sees the other truly, the centre of the moral life, and her attention is aesthetic in structure: it is the disinterested, careful beholding that the aesthetic perception of a thing requires, turned upon a person, so that to see the other justly is to behold them

with the regard one gives a thing of beauty (Murdoch 1970). Elaine Scarry argued that the experience of beauty trains the fair, decentred attention that justice requires, that to be stopped and decentred by a beautiful thing is to practice the very unselfing that just regard for others demands (Scarry 1999). Both are, in the paper’s terms, theorists of how receptive beauty schools enactive beauty: how the trained perception of the beautiful becomes the capacity for the fitting, attentive, just response. And the concrete pedagogies, Montessori’s education of the senses, Steiner’s artistic formation of the whole child, the aesthetic-education programmes of Greene and Eisner, supply what a paper on cultivation must not omit: actual methods by which the capacities of aesthetic perception are trained, evidence that the aesthetic education the thesis requires is a practiced art with a literature of its own, rather than a pious wish (Montessori 1967; Steiner 1996; Greene 2001; Eisner 2002).

3.12.7 How it is cultivated: the mutual aesthetic education of two

The theories describe the cultivation of a person; this paper’s concern is the cultivation of a “we,” and the distinctive claim of this subsection is that between two people aesthetic education is *mutual*, that each is the other’s teacher, and the relation itself a school. This is not a metaphor. The capacities at issue, the perception of contingent beauty, the receptivity of *xing*, the judgement of the enactively fitting, are cultivated, between two people, largely *by each other*, in three concrete ways.

The first is the pedagogy of *look*. When one partner catches a contingent beauty and turns it toward the other, *look*, they do not merely share a moment; they *teach a way of seeing*. The turning-toward is a demonstration: it shows the other what is worth catching, trains the other’s eye toward the kind of thing one has learned to see, awakens in the other a *xing* they might not have had. Over time, two people who habitually turn contingent beauties toward each other educate each other’s perception, each becoming more able to catch what the other catches, until they come to share a trained sensibility, a common eye for the beautiful, built up from a thousand acts of mutual showing. The relation becomes a school of perception in which each is continually teaching the other to see, and the curriculum is the contingent beauty of the shared world.

The second is the pedagogy of shared retelling, which is also the reproduction of experience

(§3.4.2) seen from the side of aesthetic education. To retell a shared journey, to return together to the beauty once caught, is to re-cultivate the perception of it, to deepen, in the retelling, the capacity to perceive what the experience held, and to refine together the sensibility that first caught it. Shared retelling is mutual aesthetic education exercised upon the past: the joint re-perceiving of what was lived, by which the two refine together their common capacity to perceive. This connects the paper's political economy to its aesthetics: the reproduction of experience is, at the same time, the mutual cultivation of the sensibility that perceives experience, so that the labour that conserves the relation's wealth is the same labour that educates its perception.

The third is the pedagogy of enacted beauty: each partner teaches the other the enactively fitting by enacting it. When one meets the other's vulnerability with exactly the right measure, responds to their distress with exactly the fitting grace, the other learns, not by precept but by undergoing, what the fitting response is, and is formed toward the capacity to give it in turn. To be treated beautifully is to be educated in the enactment of beauty; the well-met partner learns, from being well met, how to meet. The relation is thus a reciprocal school of enactive beauty, each forming the other's capacity for the fitting response by the gift of fitting responses received. And this is the deepest sense in which the relation is the mutual cultivation of the good: by treating each other beautifully, two people educate each other in the enactment of the good, so that the relation becomes, over a lifetime, a mutual aesthetic education in the most consequential of all the arts, the art of meeting another person fittingly, which is the same, by the argument of this section, as the art of treating them well.

3.12.8 χαλεπὰ τὰ καλά: that the beautiful is difficult

It remains to name the difficulty on which the whole edifice rests, and it is fitting to name it with the oldest words for it. In Plato's *Hippias Major*, Socrates and the sophist Hippias attempt to say what the beautiful is, and fail; Hippias, who can speak fluently and at length on every other subject, is reduced, on this one, to a succession of definitions that Socrates dismantles one by one, until the dialogue ends not in an answer but in the proverb Socrates offers in place of one: χαλεπὰ τὰ καλά, beautiful things are difficult (Plato 1926). It is a remarkable ending. The man who could define anything could not define the beautiful; the dialogue that sought the essence of beauty found only its

difficulty. And the difficulty is not accidental but essential: the beautiful resists definition because it is not the kind of thing a definition can capture, not a property specifiable by a rule, but exactly the un-ruled fittingness that the whole of this section has been concerned with. *χαλεπὰ τὰ καλά* is the most ancient name for the un-programmability of the beautiful, and by the thesis of this section, of the good.

This difficulty is its confirmation rather than a defect of the account, and it explains the section’s central claim about education. Because the beautiful cannot be reduced to a rule, it cannot be *taught*, not in the sense in which a rule is taught, by transmission of a content to be applied. It can only be *cultivated*, developed, in oneself and in another, through long exposure, practice, attention, and the slow refinement of a perception, the way taste is cultivated rather than taught, the way an eye is trained rather than instructed. This is exactly why the cultivation of the good must be an aesthetic *education* in the deep sense and not a moral *instruction*: because the good, like the beautiful and for the same reason, cannot be transmitted as a rule but can only be cultivated as a sensibility. And it is why the cultivation is so difficult, so slow, so resistant to method, so dependent on the long mutual schooling of two people who teach each other to see and to meet over a whole shared life. *χαλεπὰ τὰ καλά*: the beautiful is difficult, the good is difficult, and they are difficult in the same way and for the same reason, because neither is a rule to be followed but a fitting to be perceived, and the perception of the fitting is the most difficult and the most uninstructable of all the human capacities, the one that can only be grown. That it is difficult is not a reason to doubt that it is the heart of the matter; it is the sign that one has reached the heart of the matter, the place where Socrates himself was reduced to a proverb, and where this paper, having followed the good to its root in the beautiful, can do no more than name the difficulty and turn to the cultivation that is the only response to it.

3.13. The Continuity of Ethics and Aesthetics: A History of the Debate

The third thesis, that ethical judgement, at its limit, is aesthetic, was advanced in the previous section as though it were a bold novelty to be defended against objections. It is not a novelty. It is the latest entry in one of the longest and most consequential debates

in the history of philosophy: the debate over whether ethics and aesthetics are continuous or discontinuous, whether the good and the beautiful are at bottom one or are irreducibly distinct. This section sets the thesis in that debate, and the placement is not a scholarly formality but a strengthening: a thesis that stands within a long lineage of serious thought, and that can locate itself precisely against the strongest statements of the opposing view, is a different and sturdier thing than a bold claim defended in isolation. The section surveys the affirmative lineage, the tradition that has held the good and the beautiful to be continuous, then confronts the debate's most powerful negative pole, Kierkegaard's insistence on their rupture, which is the true strongest opponent of the paper's thesis and which the previous section's objections did not yet face. It closes by locating Thesis Three within the debate and stating how it answers the rupture.

3.13.1 The affirmative lineage: the good and the beautiful as one

The thought that the good and the beautiful are continuous, that to be good is, at the deepest level, to be beautiful in one's being and one's action, and that the perception of the good is akin to the perception of the beautiful, is ancient and recurrent, and it forms a lineage the paper's thesis joins. The lineage is surveyed in Table 3.5; its principal moments deserve discussion.

The Greek root is the word itself: *kalokagathia* (*kalos kai agathos*), the ideal of the beautiful-and-good as a single excellence, the noble person whose goodness and beauty are one, which expressed in a single hyphenated virtue the Greek sense that the admirable in conduct and the beautiful in form were aspects of one human excellence rather than separate achievements. Plato gave this metaphysical depth: in the ascent of the *Symposium*, the lover rises toward a Beauty that is also the Good, the two Forms allied at the summit, so that the love of beauty rightly pursued becomes the love of the good, and the perception of beauty is the beginning of the soul's turn toward the good. The proximity of *kalon* and *agathon* in Plato is the metaphysical charter of the affirmative lineage: beauty and goodness ascend together, and at the height they are scarcely to be distinguished.

The British moral-sense tradition gave the continuity an epistemological form. Shaftesbury, its founder, held that we perceive moral good and evil by a *moral sense* that is

explicitly modelled on, and continuous with, the sense of beauty: just as we perceive the harmony and proportion of a beautiful form by an immediate sense rather than by reasoning, so we perceive the harmony and proportion of a virtuous character by an analogous immediate sense, and virtue is, on this view, a kind of beauty, the beauty of a well-proportioned soul, perceived by a taste for the moral as the connoisseur perceives the beauty of a work by a taste for the beautiful (Shaftesbury 2001). For Shaftesbury the good and the beautiful are perceived by the same kind of faculty, a sense or taste, and moral excellence simply *is* a species of beauty, the beauty of character. This is the affirmative thesis in its clearest early-modern form, and it is the direct ancestor of the paper’s claim that the perception of the good is structurally aesthetic.

Schiller carried the continuity to its highest point in the concept of the *beautiful soul* (*die schöne Seele*). For Schiller, the merely dutiful person, who does the right thing against inclination by force of moral will, has not yet achieved the highest moral condition; that condition is reached only when duty and inclination are reconciled, when one does the good *gladly*, when virtue has become a second nature so thoroughly that the right action flows from the whole person without inner conflict, and this reconciled condition, in which morality has become grace, Schiller called the beautiful soul (Schiller 1967; Schiller 1966). The beautiful soul does not struggle to be good against itself; it is good as a beautiful thing is beautiful, effortlessly, gracefully, as an expression of its whole reconciled nature. Here the continuity of ethics and aesthetics reaches its summit: moral perfection is figured as beauty, the perfected character as a beautiful soul, the highest good as the achievement of moral grace. The paper’s purity argument (§3.12.3) is a near descendant of Schiller’s beautiful soul: the freely-perceived fitting response, issuing from the whole person rather than from the operation of an installed rule, is the action of a beautiful soul, and its superiority to the merely dutiful is Schiller’s superiority of grace to struggle.

The twentieth century gave the continuity its most compressed statement and several of its most careful defences. Wittgenstein, in the *Tractatus*, wrote the lapidary sentence that stands almost as the paper’s motto: *Ethik und Ästhetik sind Eins*, ethics and aesthetics are one (Wittgenstein 1974). The remark is enigmatic and the *Tractatus* does not unfold it, but in its context, among the propositions on the mystical, on the inexpressible, on what shows itself but cannot be said, it locates ethics and aesthetics together as concerned

with the same thing: not facts within the world but the meaning or value of the world as a whole, the dimension that cannot be stated in propositions but shows itself, and that ethics (the value of action) and aesthetics (the value of the beautiful) approach as one. Later in the century, and in a quite different key, Iris Murdoch made attention the centre of the moral life and made attention aesthetic in structure: the moral task is to see truly, to attend to reality justly and lovingly, to overcome the self's distorting fantasy and perceive the other as they are, and this just and loving attention is the very attention the perception of beauty requires, so that the experience of beauty, which decentres the self and fixes it on something other, is a training-ground for the unselfing that moral attention demands (Murdoch 1970). Martha Nussbaum argued that literature is itself a form of moral philosophy, that the fine-grained perception of particulars which the novel cultivates is exactly the perception that practical wisdom requires, and that the moral life depends on a capacity for perception, the seeing of the morally salient features of a concrete situation, that is cultivated by art and is irreducible to the application of principles (Nussbaum 1990). And Bernard Williams, with the broader anti-theory current, mounted a sustained attack on the pretension of ethical theory to reduce the moral life to a system of principles, insisting on the ineliminable role of judgement, character, and the perception of the particular, a critique that, while not itself a continuity thesis, clears the ground for one by denying that ethics is the application of a code and affirming that it rests on capacities of perception and judgement that the code cannot replace (Williams 1985). The affirmative lineage thus runs unbroken from *kalokagathia* to the contemporary priority of perception over principle, and the paper's Thesis Three is its inheritor.

3.13.2 The temptation and the danger: Nietzsche

Before the strongest opponent, a figure must be named who is neither simply for nor against the continuity but who marks both its temptation and its danger: Nietzsche. For Nietzsche gave the continuity of ethics and aesthetics its most intoxicating and most perilous formulation: that existence is justified only as an *aesthetic* phenomenon, that the value of life is finally aesthetic rather than moral, that the moral interpretation of existence is to be overcome and replaced by an aesthetic one in which life is affirmed as one affirms a work of art, beyond good and evil (Nietzsche 1967b). This is the continuity thesis pushed past the point the paper will follow it: not the claim that ethical judgement

is aesthetic in structure, but the claim that the ethical is to be *replaced* by the aesthetic, that morality is a falsification to be overcome in favour of the aesthetic justification of life. Nietzsche is the temptation of the extreme form of Thesis Three (§3.12.3) made into a philosophy: the abolition of the ethical into the aesthetic, the aesthetic justification of existence that leaves good and evil behind.

And he is, in the same gesture, its danger. For the aesthetic justification of existence, unmoored from any ethical constraint, is precisely the thought that the previous section identified as the precipice, the licence for the beautiful-but-monstrous, the aestheticisation that can find existence “justified” as a spectacle regardless of its cruelty (§3.12.4). Nietzsche marks the point at which the continuity thesis, pushed to the replacement of ethics by aesthetics, becomes dangerous; and his presence in the debate is the standing reminder of why the paper holds Thesis Three in its guarded form and entertains the extreme form only as a temptation. The paper inherits the affirmative lineage’s claim that ethics and aesthetics are *continuous*, that ethical judgement is aesthetic in structure, but it refuses Nietzsche’s further claim that ethics is therefore to be *replaced* by aesthetics, that the good is to be abolished into the beautiful. Continuity is not replacement. That ethical judgement is aesthetic in structure does not entail that anything aesthetically affirmable is thereby good; it entails that the perception of the good has the structure of aesthetic perception, which is a claim about the faculty, not a licence to abolish the distinction between good and evil into a matter of taste. Nietzsche is the figure who shows what it would mean to cross that line, and why the paper does not cross it.

3.13.3 The strongest opponent: Kierkegaard’s rupture

The affirmative lineage has a great opponent, and the paper’s thesis must face it at full strength, for it is the most powerful statement of the discontinuity of ethics and aesthetics ever made, and it comes from a thinker who understood the aesthetic life from within better than its celebrants. Kierkegaard’s *Either/Or* is built upon the thesis that the aesthetic and the ethical are *discontinuous* rather than continuous, separated by a qualitative leap, related not as lower and higher on one scale but as two mutually exclusive modes of existence between which one must *choose* (Kierkegaard 1987). The very title states it: *either* the aesthetic *or* the ethical, not both, not a continuity from one to the other, but an exclusive disjunction demanding a decision. This is the antithesis of

everything the affirmative lineage holds, and it is argued by a man who gave the aesthetic life its most seductive and most searching portrayal.

The first volume of *Either/Or* presents the aesthetic life from the inside: the life organised around the immediate, the interesting, the pleasurable, the beautiful, the life of the aesthete who lives for the cultivation of mood and the avoidance of boredom, who treats existence as material for interesting experience, who is exquisitely sensitive to beauty and incapable of commitment. Kierkegaard portrays this life with such power because he knew it; and his critique is the more devastating for its sympathy. The aesthetic life, he shows, however refined, is finally *despair*, a despair often unconscious of itself, but despair nonetheless, because the aesthetic existence has no continuity, no self that persists through time, no commitment that binds the moments into a life. The aesthete, living for the interesting moment, is dispersed among moments; he has no self, only a succession of moods and experiences, and beneath his cultivation lies an emptiness, a melancholy, a despair that the relentless pursuit of the interesting is designed not to cure but to outrun. The aesthetic life consumes the world, including other people, as material for its own experience; it cannot love, because love requires a commitment the aesthete cannot make; it cannot become a self, because selfhood requires the continuity the aesthetic existence lacks.

The ethical, in the second volume, is the leap out of this despair, and crucially, it is a *leap*, not a continuous development. One does not refine the aesthetic life until it becomes ethical; one chooses, by a qualitative decision, to exist ethically rather than aesthetically, and the choice is a discontinuity, a break, a conversion from one mode of existence to another. The ethical life is the life of commitment, continuity, the self that binds itself through time by its choices, marriage rather than seduction, the keeping of vows rather than the cultivation of moods, the becoming of a self through commitment rather than the dispersal of the self among experiences. And the ethical is reached not by perfecting the aesthetic but by *renouncing* it, by the either/or in which one chooses the ethical against the aesthetic. This is the rupture: the aesthetic and the ethical are not one, not continuous, not aspects of a single excellence; they are opposed modes of existence, and the moral life begins precisely where the aesthetic life is renounced. Against *kalokagathia*, against the beautiful soul, against “ethics and aesthetics are one,” Kierkegaard sets the

either/or: ethics and aesthetics are two, and you must choose.

This is the strongest opponent, and its strength must be granted fully. Kierkegaard is not denying that the aesthetic has value; he is denying that ethical existence is continuous with it, insisting that the move from the aesthetic to the ethical is a break rather than a development, and grounding this on a profound analysis of the aesthetic life’s incapacity for commitment, continuity, and genuine love. If he is right, the paper’s Thesis Three is not merely overstated but fundamentally mistaken: ethical judgement would not be aesthetic at its limit but precisely what one reaches by *leaving* the aesthetic behind, and to ground the good in aesthetic perception would be to remain in the aesthetic despair the ethical must renounce. The objection is grave, and it cannot be met by the replies the previous section gave to Kant and to the fascist spectre, for it operates at a deeper level: it concerns not whether aesthetic judgement can ground the good, but whether the aesthetic mode of existence is not precisely what the ethical must break with.

3.13.4 The reply: the consumptive aesthetic and the enactive aesthetic

The reply to Kierkegaard is the hinge on which the paper’s whole aesthetics turns, and it is made not by denying his analysis but by drawing a distinction within the aesthetic that his account, for all its power, does not draw. Kierkegaard’s aesthete is a particular figure: the consumer of experience, the one who lives for the interesting moment, who treats the world and others as material for his own moods, who cannot commit because commitment would end the pursuit of the next interesting thing. The aesthetic life Kierkegaard anatomises and condemns is the *consumptive* aesthetic: the aesthetic as the consumption of experience for the self’s own sake, the aesthetic in the register the paper has called, in Lacanian terms, the Imaginary, the captivation, the pleasurable investment, the absorption of the world as material for the self’s experience. And Kierkegaard is entirely right about this aesthetic: it is despair, it cannot love, it cannot found a self, and the ethical must indeed break with it. The consumptive aesthetic and the ethical *are* discontinuous; on this Kierkegaard and the paper agree completely.

But the consumptive aesthetic is not the whole of the aesthetic, and the distinction the paper drew between receptive and enactive beauty (§3.12.2) is precisely the distinction Kierkegaard’s account omits. Kierkegaard’s aesthete lives in receptive beauty turned

consumptive, beauty received as experience to be consumed for the self. But there is the *enactive* aesthetic: beauty not consumed but *done*, the beauty of the fitting response, the grace of the well-met moment, the beauty enacted in how one treats another. And the enactive aesthetic is not consumptive at all; it is the very opposite of the aesthete's consumption of the world. To respond to the beloved's vulnerability with exactly the fitting grace is to give oneself rightly to another rather than to consume an experience for oneself; it is an act of commitment, of attention to the other, of the very love the consumptive aesthete cannot manage. The enactive aesthetic is committed, continuous, other-directed, everything the consumptive aesthetic is not, and everything Kierkegaard rightly demanded of the ethical. Indeed, the enactive aesthetic is exactly the beautiful soul of Schiller: the person whose ethical commitment has become grace, whose right action flows beautifully from a reconciled character, whose goodness is enacted as beauty. The enactive aesthetic is not the despair the ethical must renounce; it is the ethical itself, perceived in its beauty.

So the reply to Kierkegaard is this. What ruptures with the ethical is the *consumptive* aesthetic, the Imaginary captivation, the consumption of experience, the aesthete's dispersal among moods, and on this rupture the paper agrees: Thesis Three does not ground the good in the consumptive aesthetic, and would join Kierkegaard in renouncing it. What is *continuous* with the ethical, what is, indeed, the ethical at its highest, is the *enactive* aesthetic: the beauty of the fitting, committed, other-directed response, the grace of the beautiful soul, the perception of what is fitting in the concrete case that is at once aesthetic and ethical. Kierkegaard's either/or is real, but it falls *within* the aesthetic, between its consumptive and enactive forms, not between the aesthetic as such and the ethical. The choice he rightly demands, between the dispersed consumption of experience and the committed becoming of a self, is the choice between the consumptive and the enactive aesthetic, and the enactive side of that choice is continuous with, is indeed identical to, the ethical life he championed. Thesis Three is thus not refuted by Kierkegaard but refined by him: it must specify that the aesthetic with which the ethical is continuous is the enactive and not the consumptive, the giving and not the consuming, the beauty done and not the beauty merely fed upon. With that specification, which the paper's prior distinction already supplied, the rupture Kierkegaard insisted upon is preserved exactly where it belongs, between two aesthetics, and the continuity the affir-

mative lineage insisted upon is preserved exactly where it belongs, between the enactive aesthetic and the good. The strongest opponent, fully granted, turns out to deepen rather than defeat the thesis, by forcing the distinction that locates the continuity precisely.

3.13.5 The location of Thesis Three in the debate

Thesis Three can now be located exactly in the debate it joins. It stands within the affirmative lineage, with *kalokagathia*, Shaftesbury's moral sense, Schiller's beautiful soul, Wittgenstein's "ethics and aesthetics are one," Murdoch's attention, Nussbaum's perception, in holding that ethical judgement is continuous with aesthetic judgement, that the perception of the good is structurally the perception of the fitting, that the good is enacted as beauty. It refuses, with the paper's guarding, Nietzsche's further step from continuity to replacement, holding that the structural continuity of ethical and aesthetic judgement does not license the abolition of the ethical into the aesthetic. And it answers the strongest opponent, Kierkegaard, not by denying his rupture but by relocating it: the rupture is real, but it falls between the consumptive and the enactive aesthetic, so that the consumptive aesthetic is indeed discontinuous with the ethical (as Kierkegaard held) while the enactive aesthetic is continuous with it (as the affirmative lineage held). The paper's contribution to this ancient debate is precisely this relocation: the recognition that the dispute between the continuity theorists and Kierkegaard is resolved by distinguishing two aesthetics, and that once they are distinguished, both sides are seen to be right about different things, Kierkegaard about the consumptive aesthetic, the affirmative lineage about the enactive.

This is why the paper can hold Thesis Three in its guarded form with confidence while entertaining the extreme form only as a temptation. The guarded form, that ethical judgement at its limit operates aesthetically, that the cultivation of the good is the cultivation of aesthetic judgement in its enactive form, is the affirmative lineage's thesis, refined by Kierkegaard's distinction and defended against Kant's and Benjamin's objections. The extreme form, that all ethics is aesthetics, that the good is simply the beautiful, is Nietzsche's step, the abolition of the distinction, and it is too dangerous to assert because, unguarded, it cannot keep the consumptive aesthetic from passing as the good, cannot keep the beautiful spectacle from licensing the monstrous deed. The whole weight of the paper's aesthetics rests on the distinction between the two aesthetics, receptive and enac-

tive, consumptive and giving, and on the location of the continuity of ethics and beauty in the enactive alone. *χαλεπὰ τὰ καλὰ*: the beautiful is difficult, and its difficulty here is the difficulty of holding the continuity precisely where it belongs and the rupture precisely where it belongs, against both the temptation to collapse them entirely and the temptation to rupture them entirely. The good is the beautiful enacted; but only the beautiful enacted, and not the beautiful consumed, is the good, and the whole of the paper's ethics of intimacy, of travel, of the fitting response and the shared aesthetic accord, lives in that distinction.

3.14. The Political Economy of Beauty: The Contested Remainder

The aesthetic perception of contingency and the spaciousness it requires have been presented, so far, as goods of the intimate relation, private capacities for a private flourishing. This section shows that they are nothing so contained. The capacity to perceive the beautiful, and the emptiness that perception requires, have a political-economic weight: they are forces in the world of capital, sought and fought over, and the contest over them is one of the quiet fronts of the struggle between the administered world and what resists it. The argument proceeds through a concrete case, the costly emptiness of a luxury department store, read first as the capture of the aesthetic by capital, then as the site of a remainder capital cannot seize, and finally as one point on a spectrum of such contests. The section closes by drawing from the case an emancipatory thesis: that the cultivation of aesthetic perception is a micro-politics of de-alienation, the building of a capacity that capital may use but cannot confiscate.

3.14.1 The costly emptiness of Ginza Six

Consider a fact that ought, on a narrowly economic logic, to be impossible. Ginza Six is among the most expensive retail real estate in Tokyo, and Tokyo's is among the most expensive in the world; every square metre of its floor space commands a rent that makes its use a matter of the most careful calculation. And yet, on its sixth floor, in the heart of this most costly of spaces, Ginza Six gives over a large expanse to emptiness: a broad, open, uncrowded hall in which, periodically renewed, stands a major work of contemporary art, a vast installation, a hanging sculpture, a piece by an artist of the first

rank, and the space is free, open to anyone, selling nothing. On the logic of maximal rent-extraction this is madness; the same floor area, partitioned into boutiques, would yield a fortune in rent that the empty hall forgoes. The store deliberately, expensively, leaves a great space empty and fills it with free beauty. The fact is not unique to Ginza Six, the costly atrium, the foundation gallery, the corporate plaza given to public art, are familiar features of the high-capital landscape, but Ginza Six states it with peculiar clarity, because the contrast between the price of the space and the gratuity of its use is so stark. Why does capital, which wastes nothing, pay so dearly for emptiness and beauty?

3.14.2 The first reading: capital’s capture of the aesthetic

The first answer is that this is the most refined calculation rather than madness, and that the apparent gift is in truth the most sophisticated form of extraction. The empty hall and its free beauty are an instrument of it rather than a forgoing of profit, working by a logic more advanced than the rent it appears to waste. The beauty draws people in, it is a lure, an attraction that brings footfall the boutiques alone could not. It lengthens their stay, and lengthened stay is increased spending. It confers upon the whole establishment an aura of culture, refinement, and generosity that raises the brand and justifies the prices throughout. And in the age of the photograph, it manufactures spectacle: the free artwork is endlessly photographed and circulated, a vast unpaid advertisement performed by the visitors themselves, the empty hall converted into the most efficient marketing the money could buy. On this reading the emptiness is the most expensive advertising space in the building, and the free beauty is bait; the gift is a transaction in which the visitor, drawn by beauty and moved to share it, performs unpaid promotional labour and is induced to spend. This is the culture industry in its perfected form, the moment Adorno foresaw when the aesthetic, which ought to resist instrumental reason, is itself wholly instrumentalised, when even beauty, even the contemplative emptiness that seems the very opposite of commerce, is captured and made to serve the logic of the market (Adorno 1997; Debord 1994). The spectacle, in Debord’s sense, has annexed the aesthetic; the beholding of beauty has become a moment in the circulation of capital. On this reading the paper’s own prized capacities are revealed as already colonised: the aesthetic perception of contingency, the love of spacious beauty, are exactly the susceptibilities that

capital has learned to farm.

3.14.3 The second reading: the irreducible remainder

The first reading is true, and it is not the whole truth, and the dialectical task is to see what it leaves out without denying what it captures. For consider what actually happens to a particular person who, coming to the store for some errand of consumption, rounds a corner on the sixth floor and is met, unexpectedly, by the great open space and the work of art standing in it. Something happens in them. They stop; they are, for a moment, taken, the purposive errand suspended, the gaze caught, a small genuine experience of beauty undergone. And this experience is *real*, whatever the motive of the space that occasioned it. The store's calculation does not reach into the experience and hollow it; the person is genuinely stopped, genuinely moved, genuinely, for that moment, released from the purposive consumption that brought them, into the disinterested beholding of something beautiful for its own sake. Here is the remainder the first reading cannot capture: the aesthetic experience, once it occurs, has a reality and a value that exceed and escape the instrumental frame that produced it. This remainder is, in the precise vocabulary of the philosophy of beauty developed earlier (§3.9.2), the moment of the *real* in the aesthetic experience, the kernel that resists symbolisation, and therefore resists the symbolic capture by which capital would convert the experience wholly into a commodity. Capital built the container for its own ends; but what happens in the container, in the person who is genuinely stopped by genuine beauty, is not exhausted by those ends, and cannot be, because the experience of beauty is a genuine suspension of the purposive, and a genuine suspension of the purposive is precisely what serves no purpose, what stands outside the means-end logic even when that logic arranged for it to occur.

This is the deep point, and it is the paper's whole argument returning in the register of political economy. The aesthetic experience is, by its nature, the beholding of something for its own sake rather than for its use; it is the moment in which the purposive is suspended and something is met as gratuitously there. Such a moment cannot be fully instrumentalised *from within*, because the moment it is genuinely undergone it is, by its very structure, a stepping-outside of instrumentality, a small piece of non-alienated experience occurring in the very heart of the apparatus of alienation. Capital can build the container, can arrange the occasion, can profit from the footfall and the photographs;

but it cannot make the person’s actual experience of the beauty be itself an instrumental experience, for then it would not be an experience of beauty at all but merely another transaction, and the lure would fail. Capital needs the experience to be genuine in order to profit from it, a fake beauty would draw no one, and the genuineness it needs is exactly the remainder that escapes it. The store requires that the visitor really be stopped, really be moved; and in really being stopped and moved, the visitor has a moment of genuine non-instrumental experience that the store’s instrumentality cannot reach into and convert. The remainder is structural, not accidental: capital’s capture of the aesthetic depends on leaving intact precisely the non-instrumental core that defeats capture.

3.14.4 The dialectic: beauty as a contested field

The two readings do not cancel; they compose a dialectic, and the dialectic is the truth of the matter. Beauty, in the world of capital, is neither simply liberating nor simply captured; it is a *contested field*, a site of struggle in which capture and remainder are locked together, each requiring and resisting the other. The first reading establishes that the aesthetic is real political-economic force, that beauty and spacious emptiness do genuine economic work, draw real footfall, command real rent, justify real premiums; capital’s willingness to pay dearly for them is the hardest possible proof that they are powers in the world rather than private trivialities. The second reading establishes that this force, even as capital wields it, carries a remainder capital cannot confiscate, a non-instrumental core that, being the very thing that gives beauty its drawing power, cannot be converted into pure instrument without destroying the power it was meant to serve. Beauty is thus simultaneously the most capturable and the least confiscatable of goods: capturable because its force is real and capital can harness it, unconfiscatable because the force depends on a non-instrumental core that resists conversion. The contest between these is permanent and unresolvable, and it is fought, micro-cosmically, in every person who is genuinely stopped by beauty in a space designed to profit from their being stopped.

This connects the case directly to the dialectic of controlled contingency (§3.7.4). Ginza Six is a *container built by capital*: its boundary is rigidly controlled for commercial ends, the space is a retail environment, arranged to sell, while its interior, the actual aesthetic experience it occasions, remains genuinely open, uncontrolled, the visitor’s own. The structure is exactly that of the field: a controlled boundary enclosing an open interior.

What the case adds is that the boundary's control and the interior's openness can serve *different masters*, the boundary serving capital's commercial purpose, the interior serving the visitor's non-instrumental experience, and that this divergence is the very form of the contest. Capital controls the container; the remainder lives in the contents; and the political economy of beauty is the struggle over a field whose boundary one party holds and whose interior escapes them.

3.14.5 无之以以为用: emptiness confirmed by capital

There is a further and deeper point in the case, and it concerns emptiness specifically. What Ginza Six pays for, most strikingly, is *emptiness* rather than only beauty, the open, uncrowded, spacious hall, the deliberate non-filling of the most fillable space. And in paying so dearly for emptiness, capital confirms, against its own filling logic, the ancient thesis of the eleventh chapter: that the use of the vessel is in its emptiness, that what is not there gives use (Laozi 1963). The most calculating filler of space, the logic that would partition every square metre into rentable use, is driven, by the discovery that emptiness draws, that spaciousness has a power density of filling lacks, to leave a great space empty, and thereby to confirm 无之以以为用 in the one register that cannot be accused of mysticism: the register of rent. Capital has discovered, and paid to confirm, that emptiness is of use. The Daoist metaphysics of the void, which the paper has carried throughout as the deepest ground of the field, receives here its most unlikely and most decisive proof: that even the logic of maximal filling is forced, by the nature of value, to acknowledge that the empty is of use, and to pay the highest price for it.

But the same case shows that emptiness, too, is contested. The spaciousness capital pays for is spaciousness instrumentalised, emptiness deployed as a lure, the void made to work for the filling it appears to refuse. The atmospheric emptiness of the luxury hall is not the same as the spaciousness of the field, even though it borrows its form; it is emptiness in the service of consumption, the void as ambience, designed to dispose the visitor to spend. And yet, the remainder again, the emptiness, even instrumentalised, still opens a real space in which a real suspension of the purposive can occur; capital's instrumental emptiness still, despite itself, affords moments of the genuine spaciousness it was built to exploit. Emptiness, like beauty, is a contested field: paid for by capital, deployed as ambience, and yet harbouring a remainder that escapes the deployment, a

genuine openness within the instrumentalised one. The struggle over beauty is, at its root, a struggle over emptiness, over whether the space that is opened will be a space for genuine non-instrumental experience or merely an ambience engineered for consumption, and the two are perpetually entangled, the genuine void haunting the engineered one it is made to wear.

3.14.6 The spectrum of cases

Ginza Six is one point on a spectrum, and placing it among others clarifies what is and is not specific to it. Consider three cases, ordered by the degree to which the aesthetic is captured by capital.

At one end stands the *unownable* aesthetic: the beauty of the mountain and the water, the landscape that the wayfaring tradition perceived (§3.11.4), the contingent beauty of the wildflower at the roadside. This beauty is, in its nature, resistant to capture, because it is not produced by capital, not enclosed, not sold; the mountain’s beauty is free in a sense the gallery’s is not, available to anyone with the trained perception to catch it, owned by no one and rentable by no one. Capital can sell access to the mountain, the ticket, the lodge, the guided tour, but it cannot own the beauty itself, which remains available to the unmonied wayfarer with the seeing eye, and which the poorest perceiver with the richest perception possesses more fully than the wealthiest tourist who photographs it without seeing. This is the aesthetic at its most unalienated: a beauty no one made and no one can confiscate, requiring for its enjoyment nothing but the cultivated perception this paper has described.

In the middle stands the *contested* aesthetic of Ginza Six: beauty produced and enclosed by capital, deployed for profit, and yet harbouring the irreducible remainder. Here the capture is real and the resistance is real, and the case is dialectical through and through, the gallery is neither the free mountain nor the pure trap, but the contested field in which both forces operate at once.

At the other end stands the *extracted* aesthetic, the case in which capture is most nearly complete: the photogenic site engineered for the image, the “Instagrammable” location whose entire reality is its capacity to generate shareable photographs, the destination that exists to be photographed and has no other being. Here the aesthetic has been most

thoroughly instrumentalised: the place is beautiful to be *captured* rather than beautiful to be beheld, designed backward from the photograph, its every feature calculated for the image it will yield. And here the remainder is most nearly extinguished, not because the structure differs from the gallery's, but because the perception the place cultivates is the perception that does not behold but only captures, the gaze that does not undergo beauty but only records it for circulation. The extracted aesthetic is the triumph of dead material over living perception (§3.4.4): a place built for the photograph, undergone by no one, the beauty wholly converted into the image and the experience wholly evacuated. Yet even here the remainder is not quite zero, for a visitor with the cultivated perception might still, against the grain of the place's design, actually behold rather than capture, and have a genuine moment the engineered site did not intend. The spectrum has no endpoint of total capture, because the remainder, however reduced, is structural; but the extracted case shows how nearly it can be approached, and how the difference between the captured and the free turns, in the end, not on the place but on the perception brought to it.

3.14.7 How beauty creates a value cycle: the mechanism

The analysis so far has established that beauty is a real political-economic force, that it draws footfall, commands rent, justifies premiums, but it has treated this force statically, as a power beauty possesses, without showing the *mechanism* by which beauty exercises it: how, dynamically, beauty creates and sustains a cycle of value. This mechanism must now be set out, for it is the link between the paper's phenomenology of aesthetic perception and its political economy, and it shows the political economy of beauty to be not a static fact but a dynamic cycle with the same structure as the relational reproduction the paper analysed at its centre.

The cycle has a definite point of ignition, and the point is the act of perception. Beauty is not a passive property awaiting valuation; it is an active power that *seizes perception*, stops the passer-by, catches the gaze, draws the subject out of the purposive errand that brought them into the non-purposive beholding of something for its own sake (§3.11.2, §3.11). This seizure is the ignition of the value cycle. Before it, the subject is a purposive agent moving through means toward ends; in it, the subject is arrested, captured, released for a moment into the aesthetic experience, and it is exactly this arrest, the conversion

of a purposive passage into a non-purposive beholding, that beauty performs and that nothing else performs so well. The person stopped on the sixth floor of Ginza Six by the great space and the work standing in it (§3.14.5) is the value cycle igniting: a purposive consumer seized, against the grain of their errand, into a genuine aesthetic experience. Beauty makes the subject perceive; the making-perceive is the first moment of the cycle.

The second moment is the generation of value in the perception itself, and here the three-register analysis specifies what the value is (§3.9.3). The seized perception is a genuine experience, the Real surplus of the beautiful thing met, invested with Imaginary captivation, raised toward the Symbolic of the shareable, and this experience is itself a value: not yet an economic magnitude, but a lived good, the non-instrumental experience that the subject undergoes and that has worth in the undergoing. This is the value beauty generates at the source: the aesthetic experience as a lived good. And it is, crucially, a value with the double character the dialectic established (§3.14.4): it can be captured economically, converted into footfall, dwell-time, the premium the subject will pay to be where such experiences occur, and yet it carries the irreducible remainder, the non-instrumental core that the economic capture depends upon and cannot itself produce. The value beauty generates is at once capturable (it can be turned to economic account) and unconfiscatable (its economic capture requires the genuineness that escapes capture).

The third moment is the one that makes this a *cycle* rather than a single event: the reproduction of the value, by which the aesthetic experience generates further perception and so renews the source. The aesthetic experience, once undergone, is reproduced, recounted, returned to, shared, made into a reason to come back and a reason others come (§3.4). And this reproduction feeds the source: the recounted experience draws new perceivers, the return visit renews the experience, the shared beauty propagates the seizure of perception to others, so that the value generated at the source flows back to generate more perception, more experience, more value. This is the value cycle proper: beauty seizes perception, perception generates value, value is reproduced, and the reproduction renews and amplifies the seizure of perception, a self-sustaining circulation in which beauty, by being perceived and the perception reproduced, generates a flow of value that returns to its source and augments it. The political economy of beauty is this cycle: not a static force but a dynamic circulation, ignited by aesthetic perception and sustained by its

reproduction.

3.14.8 The good and the bad value cycle

That beauty creates a value cycle does not yet say whether the cycle is good or bad, and the distinction, which the paper has drawn for every other cycle it has analysed (§3.4.3, §3.10.3), applies here with full force and full discriminating power. The value cycle that beauty ignites can run as a good cycle, accumulating value and preserving the remainder, or as a bad cycle, extracting value and consuming the remainder until beauty itself is hollowed out.

The good value cycle is the one in which the reproduction of the aesthetic experience is *nourishing*, in which each turn of the cycle deepens the experience, enriches the perception, and conserves the non-instrumental remainder that is beauty's living core. Here beauty is perceived, the perception generates genuine experience, the experience is reproduced in ways that renew rather than exhaust it, and the cycle accumulates value while keeping beauty alive: the place returned to that grows richer with each visit, the beauty whose reproduction deepens it, the cultivated perception that finds more in it each time. The value accumulates, in the deepening of experience, in the reputation that draws others, in the relational wealth of those who share it, and the remainder is preserved, because the reproduction is the kind that nourishes rather than extracts. This is the good cycle in the register of the political economy of beauty: a circulation that returns more than it takes, the holonomy of value accumulating along the path of nourishing reproduction (§3.4.3), beauty growing rather than diminishing as it is perceived and reproduced.

The bad value cycle is the one in which the reproduction is *extractive*, in which each turn consumes the experience, depletes the perception, and hollows out the remainder until beauty is reduced to a spent commodity. Here beauty is perceived, but the perception is reproduced in ways that exhaust it: the experience consumed for its extractable value, the beauty photographed without being beheld, the place worn smooth by an extraction that takes the value and gives nothing back, until the remainder, the genuine non-instrumental core that drew perception in the first place, is consumed away, and beauty, hollowed, loses the very power by which it ignited the cycle. This is the Instagram extreme of the spectrum (§3.14.6): the beauty extracted so thoroughly that nothing is left to behold, the

experience consumed until the place that drew millions for its beauty no longer holds any, the remainder spent, the cycle collapsing as the beauty it fed upon is exhausted. The bad value cycle is self-undermining, for it consumes its own source: extracting the remainder that was the condition of beauty’s drawing-power, it kills the goose, and the cycle that hollowed out its beauty finds, at last, that it has nothing left to circulate. The decisive variable, here as everywhere in the paper, is the manner of its reproduction rather than beauty itself, nourishing or extractive, conserving the remainder or consuming it, and the same beauty that, well reproduced, founds a good cycle of accumulating value is, badly reproduced, fed into a bad cycle that consumes it to nothing.

3.14.9 The value cycle as relational production

The deepest truth about the value cycle of beauty is that it is, at its root, a cycle of *relational production*, and this returns the political economy of beauty to the paper’s unified core (§3.8). For the value that beauty generates is not, fundamentally, a value residing in objects or accruing to capital; it is the value generated when a subject is drawn, through beauty, into a relation, with the beautiful thing, with the place, with those who behold it together, with the world the beauty opens, and undergoes, in that relation, the generation of a value that belongs to the relation. The aesthetic experience that ignites the cycle is the coming-to-presence of a relation between the perceiver and what is perceived; the value it generates is relational value; and the reproduction that sustains the cycle is the reproduction of that relation, the relational production analysed at the paper’s centre (§3.6). Beauty creates a value cycle because beauty draws subjects into relations, and relations, reproduced, generate and circulate value: the value cycle of beauty is relational production seen in the register of political economy, the same bringing-forth of value by a relational subject that the paper has tracked under the names of creation, reproduction, and the good cycle, now seen as the engine that beauty ignites and sustains.

This is why the good value cycle and the bad correspond so exactly to the good and bad cycles of relational production (§3.6.3). The good value cycle nourishes the relation that beauty opens, preserves its generativity, conserves the remainder that is the relation’s living core, it satisfies, in the economic register, the criteria of good relational production. The bad value cycle extracts from the relation beauty opens, consumes its generativity, hollows out the remainder, it is the bad relational production, the extractive cycle, in the

economic register. And the remainder that capital cannot confiscate (§3.14.3) is, seen now, precisely the relational core of the aesthetic experience: the non-instrumental relation between perceiver and perceived that is the genuine source of beauty's value, which capital can build a container around and profit from but cannot itself produce, because it is generated only in the genuine relation that beauty opens and that no instrumental arrangement can manufacture. The political economy of beauty is, in its depths, the political economy of relational production: beauty creates value by drawing subjects into relations that generate value, and the cycle it ignites is good or bad according to whether that relational production is nourished or extracted, the same distinction, the same criteria, the same keystone, now seen to govern the circulation of value that beauty sets in motion.

3.14.10 The emancipatory upshot: aesthetic education as micro-politics

The spectrum yields the section's emancipatory thesis, and with it the political stakes of the whole aesthetic argument. What distinguishes the three cases, in the end, is less the place than the *perception* brought to it, for the cultivated perception can find the unalienated remainder even in the contested gallery and the extracted site, while the uncultivated perception misses the free beauty even of the mountain, photographing the landscape without ever beholding it. The decisive variable is the perception, and the perception is cultivable. This is where the paper's aesthetics becomes a politics. To cultivate the aesthetic perception of contingency, the capacity to behold rather than capture, to be genuinely stopped by genuine beauty, to undergo the non-instrumental experience for its own sake, is to cultivate a capacity that capital can use but cannot confiscate: a capacity for non-alienated experience that, once possessed, can be exercised even within the apparatus of alienation, finding the remainder that escapes capture wherever beauty occurs, in the gallery built to profit from it and the site built to extract it and the mountain that no one built at all.

This is a *micro-politics of de-alienation*. Alienation, in the classical analysis, is the condition in which one's activity and experience are appropriated rather than one's own, instrumentalised, turned into means for ends not one's own (Marx 1992); and the administered world extends this condition across ever more of life, until even leisure, even beauty, even the contemplative suspension of purpose is captured and made to work. Against

this, the cultivation of aesthetic perception builds a capacity for genuine non-instrumental experience that capital cannot fully appropriate, because its value lies precisely in the non-instrumentality that capture would destroy. Each genuine beholding of beauty, each real suspension of the purposive, is a small piece of de-alienated experience reclaimed, a moment in which one’s experience is genuinely one’s own, undergone for its own sake, escaping the means-end logic even when occurring in its midst. And this reclamation is available to anyone, requiring no wealth, no leisure, no apparatus, only the cultivated perception that this paper has argued can be developed, and developed, between two people, mutually, as the relation’s own aesthetic education (§3.12.7). The politics of perception that Rancière named (§3.12.6) is here given its intimate and practical form: two people cultivating in each other the capacity to perceive the unalienated remainder, and so building between them a small commons of de-alienated experience that the administered world cannot enclose. The cultivation of beauty’s perception is not a retreat from politics into private aesthetics; it is a micro-politics, the building of a capacity for freedom at the scale of a perception, exercised in the catching of a wildflower and the beholding of a remainder, available to all and confiscatable by none. χαλεπὰ τὰ καλὰ: the beautiful is difficult, and its difficulty is now seen to be also its political promise, for what cannot be reduced to a rule cannot be wholly captured by a system, and the un-programmable perception of the beautiful is, for that very reason, the seed of a freedom the administered world cannot finally administer.

3.15. The Generalized Field of Travel

The paper has spoken throughout of travel in its literal sense, the journey to an unfamiliar place. It is time to generalise. “Travel,” it will be argued, names not essentially a movement through geographical space but a *function*: the construction of the special field, the opening of the spacious, contingent, suspended condition within which a relation comes to presence. The literal journey is the most efficient and powerful instance of this function, but it is an instance, not the essence; and once the function is distinguished from its most familiar instance, it becomes possible to perform it without the journey, to construct the field within the everyday, with neither distance nor expense. This generalisation is the practical culmination of the paper, and it is offered not as a conclusion

that closes the argument but as an opening that hands it on. It is also the resolution of a worry that has shadowed the paper from the start: that its goods are the privileges of those who can afford to travel.

3.15.1 Travel as a functional concept

What, in the end, did the literal journey do? It opened the special field: it exchanged the fixed background, suspended the roles, restored contingency, framed a bounded continuous time, threw two people into symmetric unfamiliarity and forced co-presence, and beneath all these, opened the spaciousness in which a relation could come to presence. These are the functions; the journey is their vehicle. And once the functions are named in their own right, it becomes clear that they are not necessarily tied to geographical movement. The exchange of background, the suspension of roles, the restoration of contingency, the opening of spaciousness, each of these can, in principle, be effected without going anywhere, by other means than the journey. The journey effects them all at once, powerfully and reliably, which is its great advantage; but it holds no monopoly on them. To generalise travel is to recognise that “travel,” in the sense that has mattered to this paper, *is* the performance of these functions, the construction of the special field, and that the literal journey is one way, the most efficient way, but not the only way, of performing it.

This recognition reorganises the whole paper retrospectively. Every feature of the field analysed in §3.2 is, seen now, a function that can be sought in the everyday: one can exchange the background by altering the familiar setting; one can suspend roles by deliberately and jointly bracketing the everyday’s demands for a protected span; one can restore contingency by introducing the undetermined into the over-determined day; one can open spaciousness by refusing, for a while, the everyday’s total assignment of function. The generalised field of travel is the everyday deliberately opened into a field, the construction, without the journey, of the spacious contingent condition the journey opens with such ease. And the deepest of the functions, the one that underlies all the others and is the most portable of all, is the one the aesthetic chapters identified: the perception that catches the contingent and the spaciousness that lets it be caught. For if the contingent is always already leaking through the seams of the everyday (§3.11.1), then the field is, in a sense, always already half-open, awaiting only the perception that would catch what

it offers. To generalise travel is, at its root, to carry the perception home.

3.15.2 From scaffolding to skill

The relation between the literal journey and the generalised field is the relation, introduced earlier, between scaffolding and skill (§3.11.3). The literal journey is a scaffolding: a powerful external structure, erected at some cost, that opens the field reliably and completely, holding it open by main force of distance, expense, and the wholesale suspension a journey effects. Its value is double. It opens the field, here and now, for the two who travel; and, the deeper value, it *teaches the field*, lets two people experience the special field vividly enough to learn what it is, to recognise its character, to know from the inside what it is to be in it and to catch and share within it. The journey is the demonstration class in which one learns, by undergoing it, what the field is and what one does within it.

But the mature form of the practice is not the perpetual erection of scaffoldings. To require a literal journey every time one wished to open the field would be to remain forever dependent on an expensive external structure, and it is exactly this dependence that would make the paper's goods the privilege of the moneyed and the free. The mature form is the *skill* that the scaffolding taught: the internalised capacity to open the field, or to catch what the half-open everyday already offers, without the external structure. Once two people have learned the field, learned it, perhaps, through literal journeys that showed them what it is, they can begin to open it at home, in the ordinary day, by the cultivated capacities the journeys taught them: the perception that catches the contingent, the taste that constructs the frame, the restraint that keeps the vessel empty, the mutual attention that turns the caught beauty toward the other. The scaffolding comes down; the skill remains; and the skill opens, in the midst of the everyday, the field the scaffolding was erected to open. This is the movement the whole paper has been tending toward: from the journey that opens the field by force, to the skill that opens it anywhere; from travel as a thing one does occasionally and expensively, to travel as a capacity one carries always and exercises freely. The literal journey is the demonstration; the generalised field is the daily practice; and the bridge between them is the cultivation, through the one, of the skill that performs the other.

3.15.3 The de-alienation of the everyday, and the answer to elitism

This resolves the worry of elitism, and the resolution is also the paper's deepest political claim. The worry is obvious and serious: if the good this paper describes required literal travel, it would be the privilege of those with the money and the leisure to travel, and a philosophy of intimacy resting on it would be a philosophy for the comfortable, complicit in the very inequality the series has elsewhere opposed (Huang 2026c; Wanhong 2026a). The generalisation dissolves the worry. The generalised field does not require distance or expense; it requires the cultivated capacities, perception, taste, restraint, attention, which depend on no wealth and are, as the previous section argued, exactly the capacities that capital can use but cannot confiscate and that the poorest perceiver may possess more fully than the richest tourist (§3.14.6). The good of the field is therefore, in its generalised form, *universally available*: open to any two people willing to cultivate the perception and do the relational labour, regardless of their means. The literal journey is a privilege; the generalised field is not, and the movement from the one to the other is the movement from a good available to the few to a good available to all.

This is, in the terms the previous section established, the *de-alienation of the everyday*. The alienated everyday is the everyday wholly assigned to function, every hour given to labour or its reproduction, every space to use, the whole of life instrumentalised under the administered order, with no opening for the non-instrumental, the gratuitous, the spacious (Marx 1992; Debord 1994). To open a field within this everyday, to clear a protected span in which roles are suspended and the purposive lifted, to catch the contingent beauty leaking through the seams, to undergo a moment of genuine non-instrumental experience with the beloved, is to reclaim a piece of the everyday from its alienation, to make, within the administered order, a small space that is genuinely one's own. And because this reclamation requires no wealth, it is available where wealth is not: the de-alienation of the everyday is a freedom the poor can practice as fully as the rich, perhaps more fully, since the cultivated perception that is its only requirement is no respecter of means. Here the paper's politics reaches its conclusion. The cultivation of the field's skill is the building, by two people, of a capacity to de-alienate their everyday, to open, within the administered world and without its permission, recurring small fields of genuine, spacious, non-instrumental, shared experience. This is not a retreat from the political into

the domestic; it is a politics conducted at the scale of the everyday, the construction of a commons of de-alienated experience that the administered order cannot enclose because it requires nothing the order controls. The generalised field of travel is the everyday reclaimed, and the reclaiming is available to all.

3.15.4 Generative openness: a principle, and a limit

The generalisation of travel permits one further abstraction, which the paper states as a principle and then, characteristically, marks as opening beyond itself. Throughout, the condition underlying the field has been spaciousness (§3.2.8), the emptiness in the sense of the *Daodejing*’s eleventh chapter, the room left unfilled in which the contingent can arrive and be caught. The generalisation now lets this be seen not as a feature peculiar to travel but as a general *resource*, the openness that any field requires if relational generativity is to occur within it, and the resource can be named: *generative openness*, the condition of not being so wholly filled by function that nothing unplanned can enter. A field, of whatever kind, is generative to the degree that it preserves this openness; and the principle may be stated generally: *a field is by preserving the openness in which unplanned, meaningful events may emerge* rather than made generative by adding activity to it,. The political economy of beauty already confirmed this from the side of value (§3.14.5): the costly emptiness that capital pays dearly to preserve is generative openness recognised, even by capital, as a resource rather than a waste.

Two qualifications keep the principle from being misunderstood, and the second of them marks the paper’s limit. The first: generative openness is not emptiness as a style. It must not be confused with minimalism, or with an aesthetic of bareness, for the point is that room must be left for the unplanned rather than that less is better, and that room may be held open as well by a thing that invites lingering (a window, a bench, a painting, a piano, a table wide enough to gather around) as by literal vacancy. Generative openness is the condition of not being wholly closed by function, whatever holds that condition open; it is a structural property of a field, not a decorative quantity of empty space. The second qualification is the limit. The principle of generative openness plainly reaches beyond the intimate relation that is this paper’s subject, it bears on the design of rooms and houses, of schools and libraries and cities, of institutions and their allocation of time and budget and attention, wherever the question arises whether a space or a structure preserves the

openness in which generative events can occur or forecloses it by total functionalisation. But the full development of generative openness as a principle of design, spatial, temporal, institutional, is not the work of this paper, and would, if pursued here, carry the argument away from the relational field it is meant to illuminate into a general theory of generative design the paper cannot contain. The paper therefore states the principle, notes that the field of travel and the costly emptiness of the gallery and the unfilled room are instances of it, and marks its general development as a directed opening (§3.16.3), a principle this paper discovers at the limit of its own subject and hands on to a theory of generative design it borders but does not enter. That generative openness is a real and general resource, the paper affirms; what a full theory of its cultivation across spaces, times, and institutions would be, it leaves, deliberately, to other work.

3.15.5 An opening, not a conclusion

It would be false to the matter to present the generalised field as a solution achieved, a technique mastered, a conclusion reached. The generalisation opens a practice; it does not complete one. To open a field within the everyday is difficult, and to do it repeatedly, sustainably, against the everyday's constant pressure to close back down, is more difficult still, a labour without end, a practice that must be perpetually renewed because the everyday perpetually re-alienates, the opened field perpetually re-closing into routine. The paper does not pretend to have mastered this practice or to be able to hand the reader a method for it; *χαλεπὰ τὰ καλὰ*, and the generalised field, being an aesthetic accomplishment, cannot be reduced to a method any more than the good or the beautiful can. What the paper offers is the recognition that the practice exists, that its direction is the movement from scaffolding to skill, and that its goal is the daily, mutual, un-programmable cultivation of the capacity to open fields of de-alienated shared experience in the midst of an everyday that is forever closing them. How to sustain this practice, how to keep the field open against the everyday's pressure, how not to let the skill decay back into the routine it was meant to interrupt, these are real and open questions, and the paper hands them on rather than answering them. The generalised field is not the paper's conclusion but its opening: the point at which the understanding it has built passes into a practice that exceeds it, and the reader is left not with a doctrine but with a direction and a difficulty. To which the only fitting response is the one the whole paper

has been arguing for: not a method, but the cultivation, slow and mutual and lifelong, of the perception and the taste and the love that open the field, and the difficult, unending, beautiful labour of keeping it open, together.

3.16. The Closure of the Temporal Arch, and Directed Fissures

The paper closes by completing the figure with which its phenomenology began, the temporal arch of the journey, and then, in the manner this series has adopted for its mid-sequence papers, by opening rather than sealing: marking the places where the argument, pressed further, runs out of what this paper can say and points toward papers still to come. The field of travel is a source, not a terminus, and its closing is an opening.

3.16.1 The closure of the temporal arch

The phenomenology began with a temporal arch: co-creation before the journey, the lived field during it, and the reproduction in retelling after (§3.2.1, §3.4.2). The arch can now be seen whole, and seen to be a complete circuit of generation and reproduction. In co-creation, two people jointly intend a world that does not yet exist, beginning to build the “we” in imagination before the journey opens. In the lived field, the world is entered and the “we” is generated vividly, brought to the self-presence of its own dynamics in the spacious, contingent, suspended condition the journey opens. In reproduction, the generated experience is carried across the threshold of return and woven, in shared retelling, into the relation’s lasting wealth, establishing the good cycle by which a single journey becomes an ever-deepening common possession. The three phases are not a sequence of separate episodes but the moments of one circuit: the co-created anticipation rehearses the field, the lived field generates the wealth, the reproduction conserves and augments it, and the conserved wealth becomes, in turn, part of what the next co-creation draws upon, so that the arch is a spiral rather than a line from beginning to end, each journey’s reproduced wealth feeding the imagination of the next. The “we” is forged across the whole arch and the whole spiral: not in the journey alone but in the imagining before, the living during, and the retelling after, and in the way each completed circuit enriches the ground from which the next begins. This is the complete shape of what a shared journey is, not an episode with a start and a finish, but a turn of a spiral by which

two people, over a life of journeys imagined, lived, and retold, build and rebuild the “we” they are.

And the spiral does not, in the end, require the journeys to be literal. The generalisation of the previous section completes the figure: the same arch, anticipation, living, retelling, structures the generalised field as much as the literal one, and the spiral of generation and reproduction turns as truly in a life of small everyday fields, opened by skill and woven by retelling, as in a life of great journeys. The temporal arch is the shape of the field’s life, literal or generalised; and its closure here is the recognition that the field, in either form, is a circuit rather than a moment, not an event but a practice that spirals through a whole shared life.

3.16.2 A note on the paper’s length and difficulty

A word is owed about this paper itself, for it is among the longest and most difficult in the series, and the fact is a consequence of its subject rather than incidental. The paper set out to follow a shared journey through phenomenology, political economy, ethics, and aesthetics, and found, at its centre, that the deepest of these is the aesthetic, and that the aesthetic resists exactly the kind of completion a paper is supposed to achieve. This was a discovery about the object rather than a failure of organisation. The beautiful, as the whole of the paper’s aesthetics argued, does not lie wholly within the empirical, the demonstrable, the formalisable; it is not, like an object of natural science, governed by statable laws that further inquiry converges upon, nor, like an object of engineering, reducible to a procedure that can be specified and completed. It has a remainder, the Real that resists symbolisation, the un-programmable fitting, the accord that must be struck afresh and tended in its evolution, that no system captures and no treatise closes. And a paper faithful to such an object must, in some measure, share its character: it cannot be cleanly completed, cannot be reduced to a system, cannot reach the kind of closure that a paper on a formalisable subject can reach, because its object does not permit it.

The length and the resistance to closure are therefore not defects to be apologised for but the form’s fidelity to its content. A short, systematic, cleanly concluded paper on the beautiful would, by its very neatness, have betrayed the difficulty it claimed to describe,

would have implied, against its own thesis, that the beautiful is after all a formalisable thing that a system can contain. That this paper is long, ramifying, and finally uncludable, that it opens more than it closes, that its last word is a set of fissures rather than a conclusion, is the formal enactment of its central claim. *χαλεπὰ τὰ καλὰ*: the beautiful is difficult, and a true account of the beautiful must be difficult in the same way and for the same reason, must itself resist the completion its object resists. This is the series’ long practice, that the form of a paper should enact its content; here the practice reaches the case where the content is the resistance of the beautiful to formal completion, and the form, accordingly, is a paper that cannot be completed, only opened. The difficulty of the paper is the difficulty of the beautiful, undergone in the writing as the beautiful is undergone in the perceiving, and the only honest response to it is the one the paper has counselled throughout: not a method that would dissolve the difficulty, but the patient, lifelong, mutual cultivation of a perception equal to it.

3.16.3 Directed fissures

In the manner of this series’ mid-sequence papers, the close opens rather than concludes. Five fissures are marked, places where the argument, pressed past the edge of what this paper establishes, points toward a paper that might carry it further.

The first fissure is the *return and the everyday’s re-closing*. The paper has argued that the generated field must be carried across the threshold of return (§3.4.5) and that the generalised field must be sustained against the everyday’s pressure to re-close (§3.15.5). But how the field, once opened, is *kept* open in time, how the relation’s good condition is sustained against the constant entropy of routine, what the temporal dynamics of opening and re-closing are, how attunement is maintained and re-tuned across the long time of a shared life, is a question this paper opens and does not answer. It points toward a paper on the temporal sustenance of the relation’s good condition: the dynamics, left open in the formal companion’s own dynamical layer (Huang 2026a), of how a good cycle is kept turning against the tendency of every cycle to wind down.

The second fissure is the *solitary and the shared*. The paper distinguished the solitary journey’s revelation of the self from the shared journey’s generation of the “we” (§3.3.4), but it treated the solitary chiefly as a foil. The relation between the two, how the self

that the solitary journey reveals is related to the “we” that the shared journey generates, whether and how one must be able to be alone in order to be genuinely together, what the solitary and the shared owe each other in a life, is a deep question this paper only touches. It points toward a paper on the subject of the relation: who the one must be who can enter the “we” without dissolving into it, the question the previous paper also marked as open (Wanhong 2026c).

The third fissure is the *third-party other and the ethics of the many*. The paper opened, in the ethics of facing the third party (§3.5.4), the question of how the dyad treats those beyond it, and marked this as the first step from the ethics of intimacy toward the ethics of the many. But the full ethics of the relational commons, how the “we” of two extends to the “we” of many, how the goods and dangers of the dyadic field scale to the family, the community, the basin, is the horizon beyond this paper, the watershed the previous paper also marked (Wanhong 2026c; Huang 2026c). It points toward a paper on the scaling of the relational field beyond the dyad.

The fourth fissure is the *politics of perception*. The paper argued that aesthetic education is a micro-politics of de-alienation (§3.14.10), the cultivation of a capacity for non-alienated experience that capital cannot confiscate. But the full political theory implicit in this, the redistribution of the sensible as a programme, the relation between the cultivation of perception and the transformation of the administered order, whether a politics of perception can be more than micro, is a horizon this paper only indicates. It points toward a paper on the politics of aesthetic education: the question whether the de-alienation practiced at the scale of a perception can be raised to the scale of a society.

The fifth fissure is the *formal phenomenology of the field*. The paper invoked the formal companion lightly, the self-presence of relational dynamics as the foregrounding of the fusion-space operator (§3.3.3), the good cycle of reproduction as holonomy accumulated along the retelling path (§3.4.3). But a full formal treatment of the field, of how the exchange of background, the opening of spaciousness, and the foregrounding of the dynamics appear in the formalism of the companion, of whether the phenomenological features have exact formal correlates, is left undone. It points toward a formal companion to this paper, as “From Fluid to Braid” is the formal companion to the previous one (Huang 2026a): a formal phenomenology of the field of travel.

The sixth fissure is the deepest of all, and the paper has marked it explicitly within its own body: the *just and generative reproduction of suffering*. The paper established that conflict and pain, well reproduced, can become a relation’s wealth (§3.9.8), and gave the good reproduction of suffering the structure of four criteria, teleological, ontological, political-economic, and power-dialectical (§3.9.9). But it gave only the criteria, the direction of the good, and not the method, the route to it; and the full theory of how two people justly and generatively reproduce a shared suffering, how, concretely, a pain is returned to and transfigured so that it stays generative, joint, non-exploitative, and free of domination, is the largest task the paper opens and cannot complete. It points toward a paper of its own: a theory of the just reproduction of suffering, which this paper has framed in its four criteria but whose method remains, like the beautiful it so closely resembles, difficult, un-programmable, and yet to be found.

The seventh fissure is the *life of a created work in the public sphere*. The paper established that creation is co-creation and co-creation is relational production (§3.8), and that the ethics of relational production governs the creation and destruction of co-created works, but it found, at the edge of this, a case that exceeds the relational frame: the work that enters public culture, belonging no longer to any determinate “we” but to an anonymous, non-reciprocal, institutional public including the unborn (§3.8.5). The paper marked, there, the limit of the theory of relational production, refusing to dissolve the public sphere into a magnified relation, and naming the overlap of the relational-productive and the public, the way a created thing is at once the product of a relational subject and a member of a public world, as a problem governed by two different logics. The full theory of this overlap, of the ethics of public creations and the claims of the anonymous and the unborn, is opened here and not closed; it points toward a theory of the public sphere that the theory of relational production borders but does not contain.

The eighth fissure is *generative openness as a principle of design*. The paper found, at the limit of its generalisation, that the spaciousness underlying the field of travel is an instance of a general resource, generative openness, the unfilled room in which unplanned and meaningful events may emerge, and that this resource bears far beyond the intimate relation, on the design of spaces, times, and institutions wherever the question arises whether a structure preserves the openness in which generative events can occur (§3.15.4).

But the paper marked, there, its own limit, declining to develop generative openness into a general theory of design lest the argument be carried away from its relational subject. The full theory, of generative openness across the spatial, the temporal, and the institutional, of how spaces and schedules and institutions may be designed to preserve rather than foreclose the room for generative events, is opened here and not pursued; it points toward a theory of generative design that this paper borders but does not enter.

These eight are directed openings rather than loose ends, each a place where the field of travel, fully entered, shows more than this paper can contain. The field is a source. What it generates exceeds what any single paper can hold, and the fissures mark where the excess points. *χαλεπὰ τὰ καλὰ*: the beautiful is difficult, and the difficulty is inexhaustible, which is the very sign of a source rather than a reason for despair, that one can return to it again and again and never find it spent.

And here, at the last, the generalisation that has run through the whole paper completes itself in a single recognition. The field of travel was never, finally, about travel. The deepest purpose of faring into the unfamiliar is not to leave the everyday behind, but to learn, and to bring home, how to recreate, within the everyday, the field in which relational subjects can continue to come into being. The journey teaches the field; the skill carries it home; and the highest accomplishment the paper has described is the cultivated capacity to open rather than the great journey, in the midst of an ordinary shared life, the spacious and contingent field in which two people go on generating the “we” they are. To learn how to travel, even where one remains; to keep, within the everyday, the openness in which the relation can continue to come to presence, this is what the field of travel, generalised, finally asks. The field of travel is such a source, and this paper has done no more, and no less, than open it.

Acknowledgements

This paper, more than any in the series, was written before its occasion: it imagines a journey not yet taken, with one person who loves to travel and who has already taught me, without ever meaning to teach, most of what these pages try to say. The wildflower at the roadside is not only an example chosen for the argument; it is the kind of thing she

notices and turns toward the world, and the turning is the whole of what I have tried to understand. If anything here is true, it was learned from her, in the ordinary days before any journey; if anything here is false, it is where I have not yet learned to see what she sees. The field this paper describes is one I hope we will build, journey by journey, in the life ahead; and the cultivation it calls aesthetic education is the one I have already begun to receive from her, simply by knowing her. To the girl who belongs to the forest and the mountains, with whom I long to fare into the unfamiliar: this is yours, written before our first journey, in anticipation of every world we will build together, and the giving keeps nothing back.

References

- Adorno, Theodor W. (1997). *Aesthetic Theory*. Ed. and trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor; orig. *Ästhetische Theorie*, 1970. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Aquinas, Thomas (1981). *Summa Theologica*. On *claritas*, *integritas*, *consonantia* (I.39.8). Westminster, MD: Christian Classics.
- Arendt, Hannah (1958). *The Human Condition*. The space of appearance, the public realm, work and the durable world. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Aristotle (2000). *Nicomachean Ethics*. Ed. and trans. Roger Crisp. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Benjamin, Walter (1969). “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”. In: *Illuminations*. Ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken, pp. 217–251.
- Burke, Edmund (1990). *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. Orig. 1757. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Cai, Yuanpei (2015). *Aesthetic Education and the Cultivation of the Person: Selected Writings*. Selected essays incl. “Replacing Religion with Aesthetic Education” (1917). Beijing: Commercial Press.
- Cai, Zong-qi (2004). *Chinese Aesthetics: The Ordering of Literature, the Arts, and the Universe in the Six Dynasties*. On *qiyun* (气韵), *shen* (神), and the aesthetic categories. Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press.
- Confucius (1979). *The Analects*. Trans. by D. C. Lau. London: Penguin.

- Debord, Guy (1994). *The Society of the Spectacle*. Trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith; orig. *La société du spectacle*, 1967. New York: Zone Books.
- Dewey, John (1934). *Art as Experience*. Based on the William James Lectures, Harvard University, 1932. New York: Minton, Balch & Company.
- Eglash, Ron (2016). “An Introduction to Generative Justice”. In: *Teknokultura. Revista de Cultura Digital y Movimientos Sociales* 13.2, pp. 369–404. DOI: [10.5209/rev_TEKN.2016.v13.n2.52847](https://doi.org/10.5209/rev_TEKN.2016.v13.n2.52847).
- Eisner, Elliot W. (2002). “The Arts and the Creation of Mind”. In: *Yale University Press*.
- Federici, Silvia (2004). *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*. New York: Autonomedia.
- Freud, Sigmund (1957). “Mourning and Melancholia”. In: *The Standard Edition, Vol. 14*. Orig. 1917; the work of mourning. London: Hogarth Press, pp. 237–258.
- Fricker, Miranda (2007). *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*. Testimonial and hermeneutical injustice. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gennep, Arnold van (1960). *The Rites of Passage*. Trans. M. Vizedom and G. Caffee; orig. 1909. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Greene, Maxine (2001). *Variations on a Blue Guitar: The Lincoln Center Institute Lectures on Aesthetic Education*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Habermas, Jürgen (1989). *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Trans. Thomas Burger; the public sphere as a distinct domain. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Hegel, G. W. F. (1975). *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*. Trans. T. M. Knox; beauty as the sensuous appearing of the Idea. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Heidegger, Martin (1962). *Being and Time*. Trans. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson; orig. *Sein und Zeit*, 1927. New York: Harper & Row.
- Huang, Wanhong (2025a). “Responding to the Crises of Symbol and Subject in Modernity: Towards a Generative Nomos of Relational Presence”. OSF, doi:10.17605/OSF.IO/5R6CD; year to be finalized (2024 preprint / 2025).
- (2025b). “The Sustainability of Intimacy: Poetic Generativity and Generative Justice”. Philosophy of Intimacy and the Theory of Justice, Paper IX.
- (2026a). *From Fluid to Braid: A Relational-Ontological Model of Value and Power, and Its Computational Horizon*. <https://doi.org/10.17613/j9kjd-vce60>. DOI: [10.17613/j9kjd-vce60](https://doi.org/10.17613/j9kjd-vce60).

- Huang, Wanhong (2026b). “The Causality of the Non-Binding Vow: On Trust, Promise, and the Generation of Expectation in the Absence of the Other’s Sword”. *Philosophy of Intimacy and the Theory of Justice*, Paper XIII.
- (2026c). “The Political Economy of Intimate Relations: Toward a Theory of Generative Relational Wealth”. *Philosophy of Intimacy and the Theory of Justice*, Paper XV.
- Hume, David (1985). *Of the Standard of Taste, in Essays Moral, Political, and Literary*. Orig. 1757. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund.
- Jaspers, Karl (1970). *Philosophy, Volume 2*. Trans. E. B. Ashton; on boundary situations (*Grenzsituationen*). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Kant, Immanuel (1987). *Critique of Judgment*. Trans. by Werner S. Pluhar. Original work published 1790. Indianapolis: Hackett.
- Kierkegaard, Søren (1983). *Fear and Trembling/Repetition*. Ed. and trans. H. V. Hong and E. H. Hong; orig. *Gjentagelsen*, 1843. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- (1987). *Either/Or*. Ed. and trans. H. V. Hong and E. H. Hong; the aesthetic and the ethical life-views. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Lacan, Jacques (1992). *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959–1960: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII*. Ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller. Trans. by Dennis Porter. New York: W. W. Norton.
- (2006). *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*. Trans. Bruce Fink; the three registers, Real/Symbolic/Imaginary. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Laozi (1963). *Tao Te Ching*. Trans. D. C. Lau. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Lyotard, Jean-François (1994). *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime*. Trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- MacCannell, Dean (1999). *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*. Orig. 1976. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Marx, Karl (1963). *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. Orig. 1852; men make their own history, but under inherited conditions. New York: International Publishers.
- (1976). *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume I*. Trans. Ben Fowkes; orig. 1867. London: Penguin.
- (1988). *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. Orig. 1844; labour as objectification, species-being, the creation of the object-world. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.

- (1992). *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. In *Early Writings*, trans. R. Livingstone and G. Benton; on alienation. London: Penguin.
- Matsuo, Bashō (1966). *The Narrow Road to the Deep North and Other Travel Sketches*. Trans. Nobuyuki Yuasa; orig. *Oku no Hosomichi*, 1694. London: Penguin.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice (2012). *Phenomenology of Perception*. Trans. Donald Landes; orig. *Phénoménologie de la perception*, 1945. London: Routledge.
- Montessori, Maria (1967). *The Absorbent Mind*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Murdoch, Iris (1970). *The Sovereignty of Good*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich (1967a). *The Birth of Tragedy*. Trans. Walter Kaufmann; the Dionysian, tragic affirmation, suffering transfigured. New York: Vintage.
- (1967b). *The Birth of Tragedy*. Trans. Walter Kaufmann; world justified as aesthetic phenomenon. New York: Vintage.
- Nussbaum, Martha (1990). *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Owen, Stephen (1992). *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought*. On *xing* (興) and the affective origins of the poem. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center.
- (1996). *An Anthology of Chinese Literature: Beginnings to 1911*. Landscape poetry and the *youji* travel-record tradition. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Parkes, Graham, ed. (1995). *Japanese Aesthetics and Culture: A Reader*. On *mono no aware*, *yūgen*, *sabi*, *wabi*. Albany: SUNY Press.
- Plato (1926). *Cratylus, Parmenides, Greater Hippias, Lesser Hippias*. Trans. H. N. Fowler (Loeb); *Hippias Major* 304e. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Plotinus (1991). *The Enneads*. Trans. Stephen MacKenna; on beauty, Ennead I.6. London: Penguin.
- Rancière, Jacques (2004). *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*. Trans. Gabriel Rockhill; orig. *Le partage du sensible*, 2000. London: Continuum.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul (1956). *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*. Trans. by Hazel E. Barnes. New York: Philosophical Library.
- (1964). *Nausea*. Trans. Lloyd Alexander; orig. *La Nausée*, 1938. New York: New Directions.
- Scarry, Elaine (1999). *On Beauty and Being Just*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

- Schiller, Friedrich (1966). *Naive and Sentimental Poetry, and On the Sublime*. Trans. Julius Elias. New York: Frederick Ungar.
- (1967). *On the Aesthetic Education of Man, in a Series of Letters*. Ed. and trans. Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby; English–German facing text; orig. *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen in einer Reihe von Briefen*, 1795. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Shaftesbury, Anthony Ashley Cooper (2001). *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*. Orig. 1711; the moral sense as a kind of taste. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Steiner, Rudolf (1996). *The Education of the Child and Early Lectures on Education*. Hudson, NY: Anthroposophic Press.
- Turner, Victor (1969). *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. Chicago: Aldine.
- Urry, John and Jonas Larsen (2011). *The Tourist Gaze 3.0*. London: Sage.
- Wanhong (2026a). “Generativity Under Power: Trust, Asymmetry, and Estrangement in Intimate Relations”. Philosophy of Intimacy and the Theory of Justice, Paper XVII. Working draft.
- (2026b). “On the Emergence of Happiness and the Self-Continuation of Generativity: Stillness, Waiting, and the Fulfilment of Silence”. Philosophy of Intimacy and the Theory of Justice, Paper XIX. Working draft.
- (2026c). “The Hydraulic Virtue of Intimate Relations: On the Ethics of Water”. Philosophy of Intimacy and the Theory of Justice, Paper XX. Working draft.
- Williams, Bernard (1985). *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig (1974). *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Trans. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness; 6.421, “ethics and aesthetics are one”. London: Routledge.
- Yeh, Wei-lien (Ye Weilian) (1993). *Diffusion of Distances: Dialogues Between Chinese and Western Poetics*. On *yijing* (意境) and the poetics of emptiness. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Source	Form of the continuity	Bearing on Thesis Three
Greek <i>kalokagathia</i>	The beautiful-and-good as one human excellence	The ideal in which goodness and beauty are aspects of one excellence.
Plato	<i>Kalon</i> and <i>agathon</i> allied at the summit of the ascent	Beauty and goodness ascend together; perceiving beauty begins the turn to the good.
Shaftesbury (Shaftesbury 2001)	The moral sense modelled on the sense of beauty	Virtue is a species of beauty, perceived by a taste; direct ancestor of the thesis.
Schiller (Schiller 1967)	The beautiful soul: virtue become grace	Moral perfection as beauty; the purity argument’s near ancestor.
Wittgenstein (Wittgenstein 1974)	“Ethics and aesthetics are one” (<i>Tractatus</i> 6.421)	Both concern the value of the world that shows but cannot be said.
Murdoch (Murdoch 1970)	Attention: the just and loving gaze, aesthetic in structure	Moral seeing is aesthetic seeing; beauty trains moral attention.
Nussbaum (Nussbaum 1990)	Literature as moral philosophy; perception over principle	Practical wisdom is fine-grained perception, cultivated by art.
Williams (Williams 1985)	Anti-theory: judgment and character over system	Clears the ground: ethics is not the application of a code.

Table 3.5: The affirmative lineage holding ethics and aesthetics continuous. Thesis Three is the latest entry in this tradition.

CHAPTER 4

Relational Aesthetics and the Construction of the Field

Toward an Aesthetic Education of Relational Life

for the girl of the forest and the mountains

Abstract

This paper reframes the construction of a generative relational field as the proper object of an aesthetic education of the everyday. It proceeds by a reduction chain: relational production requires a field, a conditional environment of generative coupling; the construction of such a field is an aesthetic rather than an engineering matter, because the appropriateness it must achieve is state-dependent and cannot be specified by any rule; the aesthetic and the ethical are coupled at their root, since the perception of the fitting and the perception of the good are one perception of a field's generative direction; and therefore the cultivation of the capacity to build generative fields is what aesthetic education most fundamentally names. The paper establishes a concept, *relational aesthetics*, on which beauty is a coupling event between subjects rather than a property of objects or a state of subjects, and a four-step model of cultivation, *perception*, *reception*, *sharing*, and *reproduction*, shown to be the smallest form a good cycle takes when enacted between two people, a holonomy cycle that returns to its root and not its origin. It reconstructs the dialectic of principal and secondary contradiction into a generative form that directs attention rather than concentrating force, in keeping with a dialectical-materialist commitment that treats no single theory as a final rationality but assigns each its determinate place and limit. At four points where the model's movements carry the densest theory, the paper sets the contending traditions of predictive processing, Buddhist and Daoist contemplative analysis, phenomenology, psychoanalysis, the ethics of the other, and the dialogical and sociological accounts of the shared into adversarial comparison, resolving them not by a synthesis that absorbs them but by a layered arrangement that assigns each its level, marks what it can and cannot explain, and keeps the differences while finding the common ground. An orthogonality guard separates the refinement of the sensibility from the justice of the field, against aestheticism; an implementation-level interface specifies the observable signatures each movement should leave, without reducing the relational to the neural; and a political economy of the field argues that the cultivation, requiring no surplus of time or means, is available precisely to those whose days hold no surplus, and is most needed by them. The everyday, perceived and received and shared and renewed with a trained and unattached attention, is shown to be where the good cycle is most needed and most possible, and its cultivation the aesthetic education that the whole argument was for.

Keywords: relational aesthetics; aesthetic education; holonomy and the good cycle; the construction of fields; generative dialectical materialism; the everyday.

4.1. Introduction: From the Museum to the Kitchen

担水砍柴，无非妙道。

Chan saying

Aesthetic education has, for most of its history, taken place before the masterwork. One is brought before the painting, the symphony, the poem, and one's taste is refined by the encounter, so that the educated person is the one who perceives finely what is finely made. This paper proposes to move aesthetic education from the museum to the kitchen, from the masterwork to the morning, and the proposal is not a populist gesture, a democratisation of access to the fine, but a claim about where the work of aesthetic education most fundamentally lies. The claim is that the deepest aesthetic education is not the refinement of taste before objects but the cultivation of the capacity to build generative fields between people, and that this capacity is exercised and acquired not in the exceptional encounter with the masterwork but in the most ordinary and repetitive acts of a shared life, in the placing of a cup and the making of a meal and the meeting of a morning's small contingency. Why ethics should begin from washing the dishes, why the kitchen rather than the museum should be the privileged site of an education in beauty, is the paradox the paper exists to resolve.

The paradox is sharp because the museum and the kitchen seem to lie at opposite ends of any scale of the aesthetic, the one the home of beauty and the other the home of drudgery, and to locate the deepest aesthetic education in the kitchen seems either a sentimentality or a confusion. The paper resolves the paradox by a chain of argument that the introduction now previews, so that the reader knows the shape of the road before walking it. Relational production, the generation of the relational subject established in the immediately preceding work, requires a field, a conditional environment in which the generative coupling can occur and accumulate. The construction of such a field, the paper will argue, is not an engineering matter, because the appropriateness it must achieve is state-dependent and cannot be specified, and so it is an aesthetic matter, a discernment of the fitting where no rule decides. The aesthetic, pressed to its ground, discloses the ethical, the two coupled in a single perception of the field's generative direction. And

so the cultivation of the capacity to build generative fields, which is a cultivation of this coupled perception, is what aesthetic education most fundamentally is. The chain runs from relational production to the field, from the field to aesthetics, from aesthetics to ethics, and from there to aesthetic education, and its terminus is the resolution of the paradox: the kitchen is the privileged site because the field is built there, in the ordinary acts of the shared life, and the building of it is the aesthetic education the museum only ever partially displayed.

The paper makes several contributions that the introduction names so that they may be watched for. It establishes a concept, relational aesthetics, on which beauty is a coupling event between subjects rather than a property of objects or a state of subjects, and it argues that this concept is required by the relational ontology the series has carried throughout. It proposes a model, the four movements of perception, reception, sharing, and reproduction, and it shows the model to be not a procedure laid over experience but the smallest form a good cycle takes when enacted between two people, a holonomy cycle that returns to its root and not its origin. It reconstructs a method, the dialectic of principal and secondary contradiction, into a generative form that directs attention rather than concentrating force. It gathers, at four points where the model's movements carry the densest theory, the contending traditions of East and West, and it shows them resolved not by a synthesis that absorbs them but by an arrangement that keeps their differences while finding their common ground. And it faces, rather than evading, the political charge that an aesthetics of the everyday is a doctrine for the leisured, arguing that the cultivation it describes requires no surplus of time or means and so is available precisely to those whose days hold no surplus, the dispossessed for whom the difference between the generative and the deadening repetition is most consequential of all.

This paper occupies a particular place in the series it belongs to, and naming the place orients the reader who comes to it from the earlier work. The series has proceeded largely by studying particular fields, the conditional environments in which the good cycle is secured, each studied for the way its conditions hold off the slide toward the bad: the field of poetry and its refusal of closure, the field of the vow and its self-legislation, the field of yielding water, the field of travel and its spaciousness. Each such study described

a generative field and the way its particular conditions secured generativity, and each presupposed, without naming, a capacity to build and sustain such fields. This paper names that capacity and makes it the subject, and in doing so it stands to the prior studies as an account of the builder to accounts of the things built. Where the prior papers asked what a generative field is and how its conditions work, this paper asks how a person comes to be able to build generative fields at all, and answers that the coming-to-be-able is an aesthetic education, the cultivation of the perception and practice and maintenance by which fields are built. The paper is therefore late in the series by design, presupposing the studies of particular fields and gathering from them the question they share, the question of the capacity, which only a study devoted to the capacity itself could answer.

The relation to the immediately preceding work is closer still and should be marked. That work established relational production, the process by which the relational subject is generated, and located it in the field of travel under the figure of spaciousness. This paper takes up relational production where that work left it and asks what relational production requires in general, across all fields and not only the spacious field of travel, and finds that it requires a field, and that the building of fields is the aesthetic education the paper describes. The move from the preceding work to this one is the move from a particular field, travel, in which relational production was first formally established, to the general account of the field and its construction, of which the field of travel was one spacious instance. This paper thus generalises the preceding one, carrying relational production out of the spacious field of travel into the dense and repetitive fields of the everyday, and showing that the capacity to build generative fields, displayed in travel where spaciousness made it legible, is exercised and acquired in the unspacious everyday where most of relational production must in fact occur.

The wager of the paper is stated plainly at the outset, because everything depends on it. The wager is that the good cycle can be built in the everyday, in the most repetitive and unspacious life, and not only in the heightened fields of the exceptional. An aesthetic education that worked only on the masterwork, or only in the spacious occasions of travel and ceremony, would be an education for the hours a life mostly does not have, leaving the bulk of a life, its mornings and repetitions and narrow rooms, uncultivated.

The paper wagers that the everyday is not the barren ground from which beauty must be imported but the very site where the generative field is most needed and, properly understood, most buildable, and that the cultivation of the capacity to build it there is the aesthetic education that matters most, because a life is mostly everyday, and to make the everyday generative is to make most of a life so. The Chan saying at the head of this introduction states the wager in four words: carrying water and chopping firewood, the most ordinary and repetitive labour, is nothing other than the wondrous way. The paper is the working-out of that ancient claim in the terms of relational production, the field, and the holonomy that a good cycle accumulates, and its argument is, in the end, that the wondrous way is indeed in the carrying of the water, if the carrying is perceived and received and shared and renewed with the trained and unattached attention that the aesthetic education of the everyday exists to cultivate.

4.2. The Generative Dialectic: Method

Before the reduction chain is set out, the paper owes an account of its method, because the analysis that runs through every later section, the sorting of contradictions into principal and secondary and the tracking of which aspect of a contradiction is currently dominant, is borrowed from a dialectical tradition whose ordinary form this paper cannot simply adopt. The tradition of contradiction-analysis is a tradition of struggle: one distinguishes the principal contradiction in order to concentrate force upon it, identifies the dominant aspect in order to seize it, and the whole apparatus is oriented toward overcoming, toward the resolution of a contradiction by the victory of one side. The framework of this series is oriented otherwise. Its ethical ground is the generative and the non-extractive, the bringing-forth that does not possess and the nurturing that does not lord over, and a method of struggle sits uneasily with such a ground. This section reconstructs the dialectic so that it serves the generative rather than the agonistic, and the reconstruction is not cosmetic, because it changes what the analysis is for: not the concentration of force to overcome, but the direction of generative attention to where a field is failing to accumulate.

4.2.1 The necessity of reconstructing the dialectic

The tension between contradiction-analysis and the generative ground must be stated plainly before it is resolved, because a resolution that did not first feel the tension would be glib. Contradiction-analysis, in its received form, instructs one to find the principal contradiction and resolve it, which in practice means to identify the antagonistic relation that governs a situation and to act so that one side of it prevails. Applied to a relational field, this would mean identifying an antagonism within the relation and acting to make one side win, and that is exactly what the generative ethic forbids, since the generative ethic does not seek the victory of a side but the accumulation of the field, and a field in which one side has won is very often a field that has stopped accumulating, a coupling reduced to a domination. The struggle-dialectic and the generative ethic therefore pull in opposite directions at the decisive point, the point of what the analysis is for, and a paper that used the analysis without reconstructing it would import, under the name of method, a teleology of struggle that its own ethic rejects. The reconstruction is thus not optional refinement but the removal of a contradiction between the paper's method and its ground.

4.2.2 Against three other dialectics

The generative dialectic should be distinguished from three other dialectical traditions it might be confused with, because the distinctions sharpen what is proper to it. It is not the dialectic that culminates in a synthesis subsuming its moments, the dialectic on which thesis and antithesis are taken up into a higher unity that preserves and cancels them both. The generative dialectic produces no such synthesis, because its principal contradiction, between the good cycle and the bad, is not to be resolved by a higher unity that subsumes both but by the direction of attention to where accumulation has stalled, and the good cycle is not the synthesis of the good and the bad but the gaining of a path that the bad merely names the failure of. There is nothing to subsume, because the bad cycle is not a moment to be preserved in a higher unity but a degeneration to be reversed, and the generative dialectic accordingly aims not at synthesis but at the tending of accumulation, which subsumes nothing.

It is not, second, the negative dialectic that refuses synthesis in the name of the non-

identical, holding open the wound of contradiction against every reconciliation as a protest on behalf of what the concept cannot capture. The generative dialectic shares the refusal of a subsuming synthesis but not the negativity, because its refusal is not a protest against reconciliation but the practice of a reconciliation of a different kind, the tending of a field toward accumulation, which reconciles not by subsuming the contradiction into a concept nor by holding its wound open against the concept but by directing generative care to where the field fails to gain. Where the negative dialectic keeps the contradiction open as a standing reproach, the generative dialectic works the contradiction toward the good cycle, not by closing it into a synthesis but by tending it, which is neither the subsuming reconciliation it rejects nor the permanent negativity it declines.

It is not, third, the dialectic of struggle that the reconstruction has already set aside, on which the analysis serves the concentration of force to make one side prevail. The generative dialectic retains the analysis and discards the struggle, directing attention rather than concentrating force, tending rather than overcoming, and this is its proper character, distinct from all three: it analyses contradictions into principal and secondary, as the struggle-dialectic does, but to locate where care is needed and not where force is to be applied; it refuses a subsuming synthesis, as the negative dialectic does, but to tend accumulation and not to keep a wound open; and it aims at reconciliation, as the synthetic dialectic does, but the reconciliation of a gaining field and not of a concept that has subsumed its moments. The generative dialectic is thus a fourth thing, defined by what it takes and leaves from each of the three, and its signature is the conversion of the whole apparatus of contradiction-analysis from a logic of overcoming into a practice of generative tending.

4.2.3 From the concentration of force to the direction of attention

The reconstruction turns on what it means to identify the principal contradiction. In the struggle-dialectic, to identify the principal contradiction is to know where to concentrate force, and the identification serves an action of overcoming. In the generative dialectic proposed here, to identify the principal contradiction is to know where to direct generative attention, and the identification serves not an overcoming but a tending. The principal contradiction in a relational field is the place where the field is currently failing to accumulate, where the holonomy is leaking or the path is turning toward the wheel,

and to identify it is to know where the work of generation is now needed, not which side to defeat. This is a different operation with a different aim, though it uses the same analytic vocabulary. One still asks which contradiction is principal, still asks which aspect dominates, but the asking is in service of knowing where to bring generative care, and the answer issues not in a campaign against a side but in an attention turned toward a place, the place where the field's accumulation has stalled and where, accordingly, the cultivation must be concentrated.

The generative dialectic retains the analysis of principal and secondary contradiction but changes its purpose. To identify the principal contradiction is not to locate a side to be defeated but to locate where the field is failing to accumulate, so that generative attention may be directed there. The analysis serves tending rather than overcoming, the direction of care rather than the concentration of force. Its transformations are not driven by struggle but discerned in the field's own evolution and met by adjustment, which is the non-extractive, non-dominating posture the generative ethic requires, the bringing-forth that does not possess and the nurturing that does not lord over, applied to the work of method itself.

This changes, too, how the transformation of contradictions is understood. In the struggle-dialectic, the principal and secondary contradictions trade places, and the dominant and subordinate aspects reverse, under the impact of force, driven by the action that concentrates upon the principal contradiction. In the generative dialectic, these transformations are not driven but discerned. The principal site of a field's failure to accumulate shifts as the field's own state evolves, and the practitioner does not force the shift but perceives it and adjusts, moving generative attention to wherever the accumulation has now stalled, in the way that one tends a changing thing by following its changes rather than by imposing a change upon it. This is the same safe historical materialism the series has held elsewhere, on which conditions constrain without determining and change is followed rather than forced, brought here into the conduct of the method, so that the dialectic itself is practised generatively, attending to the field's evolution and adjusting to it rather than driving it toward a predetermined resolution.

4.2.4 Principal and secondary contradictions in the field

The analysis can now be set out as it will be used. The principal contradiction of the relational field, the one that governs its character throughout this paper, is the contradiction between the generation of the good cycle and the slide toward the bad, between the field's accumulating holonomy in the generative direction and its tendency to flatten, spin, or turn toward the wheel. This is the master contradiction because the resolution of every other is subordinate to it: whatever else is at issue in a field, what finally matters is whether it is accumulating or dissipating, and the other contradictions matter as they bear on this one. Subordinate to it are the secondary contradictions the later sections will meet: the imbalance between perception and practice, between a partner who senses finely and acts poorly and one who acts well and senses dully; the tension between the individual sensibility and the shared sensibility of the relation; the orthogonality of refinement and justice; the contradiction between leisure and laboring repetition that the political economy will press. Each is real, and each is subordinate, in the precise sense that how it should be resolved depends on the state of the principal contradiction, on whether the field is now sliding toward the bad or securing the good.

The methodological consequence is the one the whole paper relies on. Because the secondary contradictions are subordinate to the principal one, and because which of them is most pressing depends on the field's current state, there is no standing prescription for aesthetic education, no fixed answer to what the cultivation should now concentrate on, that holds across all fields and all states. The principal site of work migrates as the field's state changes. A field sliding toward the bad has its principal site in practice, in the restoration of the gesture that re-establishes accumulation; a field secured in the good but dulling has its principal site in perception, in the recovery of the seeing that has gone slack; and so on through the states the later sections will map. To know what aesthetic education should now do, one must first read the state of the field and identify which contradiction is now principal, which is itself an exercise of the cultivated perception the paper is about, so that the method and its object meet at this point, the reading of the field being both the first act of the method and the first movement of the cultivation.

An illustrative case — [. One relation, three states, three sites of work] Take a single relation across three seasons. In the first, it has begun to slide: small frictions accumulate,

the partners act past one another, the field is flattening toward the bad. The dialectical reading locates the principal site in practice, in the restoration of the gestures that re-establish accumulation, and the advice that would help is not finer perception of the slide, which both already feel, but the doing that arrests it. In the second season, the slide has been arrested and the relation is secure, but it has begun to dull: nothing is wrong, and nothing is seen, the partners moving through a smooth and unregarded routine. Now the principal site has migrated to perception, and the same advice that helped before, do more, act to build, would only add motion to a field that does not lack motion but sight; what helps now is the recovery of seeing, the half-second that lets the dulled morning show a contingency again. In the third season, the relation has been wounded, and defence is high; here the principal site has migrated again, to reception, and neither more doing nor more seeing reaches it, because what is perceived and even offered cannot get past the raised gate. One relation, three states, and three different sites of work, none of which is the right site in the other two states. There is no single prescription, because the principal contradiction migrates, and the whole art of the method is the reading of which season the field is in.

4.2.5 The sharpest consequence: the inherited error of aesthetic education

The generative dialectic yields a verdict on the tradition of aesthetic education that the rest of the paper will develop, and it is sharp enough to state here as the section's edge. The tradition has largely mistaken a secondary contradiction for the principal one. Its characteristic labour, the cultivation of taste through the appreciation of masterworks, addresses the contradiction between a refined and an unrefined individual sensibility, the making of a person who perceives the beautiful finely where before he perceived it coarsely. This is a real contradiction and its resolution a real good, but it is a secondary contradiction, the refinement of an individual perception, and the tradition has treated it as the principal business of aesthetic education, as though to refine the individual's taste were the whole of the task. The principal contradiction, on this paper's account, is not the refinement of an individual sensibility but the generation of the good cycle in the relational field, the building of fields that accumulate, and against this the cultivation of individual taste is subordinate, a means at best and a distraction at worst.

The tradition of aesthetic education has largely mistaken a secondary contradiction for the principal one. Its central labour, the refinement of individual taste through the appreciation of masterworks, addresses the secondary contradiction between a refined and an unrefined individual sensibility, while the principal contradiction is the generation of the good cycle in the relational field. To treat the refinement of individual taste as the principal business of aesthetic education is to elevate a secondary contradiction to the place of the principal one, and it produces an education of the solitary connoisseur in place of an education in the building of generative fields. The reorientation this paper proposes is, in dialectical terms, the restoration of the principal contradiction to its place.

This verdict is the methodological form of the paper's whole reorientation, and stating it through the dialectic shows that the reorientation is not a mere change of emphasis but a correction of which contradiction governs. The masterwork-appreciation that the tradition placed at its centre is not condemned; it is relocated, recognised as the resolution of a secondary contradiction and subordinated to the principal one, so that the refinement of individual taste takes its proper place as a possible aid to the building of generative fields rather than as the end of aesthetic education. What the paper proposes, in the language of this section, is the restoration of the principal contradiction to its governing place, and everything that follows, the chain, the coupling, the four-step cultivation, is the working-out of an aesthetic education organised around the principal contradiction the tradition mislaid, the generation of the good cycle in the field that two people build between them.

4.2.6 The generative dialectic and dialectical materialism

The generative dialectic has been distinguished from the struggle-dialectic, the synthetic dialectic, and the negative dialectic, and it remains to state its positive relation to the dialectical materialism that this paper, throughout, declares its allegiance to, since the reconstruction might seem to have departed so far from the dialectic of struggle as to have left materialism behind with it. It has not, and the relation is worth stating positively, because the generative dialectic is not a rejection of dialectical materialism but its application to a domain the classical applications neglected, the domain of the intimate

relational field.

Dialectical materialism, in the sense the paper affirms, holds two things that the generative dialectic preserves exactly. It holds that the real is material and developing, that what there is is not a fixed order of things nor an unfolding of spirit but a material world in process, whose development proceeds through the working-out of real contradictions in real conditions; and it holds that thought must follow this development rather than legislate it, grasping the contradictions as they really stand in their real conditions and not imposing upon them a schema decided in advance. The generative dialectic preserves both. It takes the relational field to be a real material structure in development, whose generativity or degeneration is a real material process proceeding through the working-out of a real contradiction, between the good cycle and the bad, in real conditions; and it takes the reading of which contradiction is principal to be a following of the field's real development rather than an imposition upon it, the discernment of where the accumulation really stands rather than the application of a predetermined schema. The generative dialectic is dialectical materialism applied to the relational field, materialist in taking the field to be real and developing and conditioned, dialectical in grasping its development as the working-out of a real contradiction.

What the generative dialectic adds, and what required the reconstruction, is the recognition that the contradiction proper to the relational field is not antagonistic in the way the contradictions of the classical applications were. The contradiction between the good cycle and the bad is not a contradiction between two parties one of which must defeat the other, but a contradiction within a coupling between its generative and its degenerative tendency, and the resolution proper to it is not the victory of a side but the tending of the coupling toward its generative tendency. This is why the struggle-dialectic, appropriate to antagonistic contradictions, had to be reconstructed for this domain, not because struggle is never the right form, but because the contradiction of the intimate field is not of the kind that struggle resolves. A dialectical materialism faithful to its own principle, that thought must follow the real character of the contradiction rather than impose a schema, is required to recognize that the contradiction of the relational field is non-antagonistic and to adopt accordingly the generative rather than the agonistic form, and so the reconstruction is not a departure from dialectical materialism but its faithful

application, the following of the real contradiction's real character into a generative form that the antagonistic form would have falsified.

This is also why the paper refuses, throughout, to crown any theory as the final rationality, and the refusal is itself a materialist commitment rather than a sceptical reticence. To hold that the real is material and developing is to hold that no theory framed at one moment of the development can be its final truth, since the development exceeds any theory's grasp of it, and that every theory grasps a real aspect of a real process while none grasps the whole. The layered syntheses that the paper performs at each battlefield, assigning each theory its level and its limit, are the methodological form of this commitment, the refusal to let any account of a real and developing process stand as its complete and final truth. The generative dialectic is thus of a piece with the paper's treatment of every theory it gathers: it follows the real development rather than legislating it, grasps the real contradiction in its real character, and refuses to any single account, including its own, the status of the final rationality, which is the materialist dialectic practised not only as a method of analysis but as a discipline of intellectual honesty about the limits of method itself.

4.3. The Ontology of the Field

The reduction chain that organises this paper begins from a claim carried over from the immediately preceding work, that relational production requires a field. The companion paper established relational production as the process by which the relational subject is generated, and it established that this generation does not occur in a void but within a condition, an openness it named under the figure of spaciousness. This section takes up that condition and gives it a general form, because the chain's first link, relational production requires a field, needs the field to be specified before the links that follow can carry weight. What is a field, such that relational production requires one, such that its construction will turn out to be an aesthetic rather than an engineering matter? The answer given here is that a field is a conditional environment of coupling, and the section's work is to make that definition precise, to distinguish it from the physical space that is only its carrier, and to relate it to the spaciousness from which it descends without collapsing into it.

4.3.1 The field: a conditional environment of coupling

A field, in the sense this paper requires, is the conditional structure within which two predictive-valuing systems can couple in the generative direction. It is not a place but a condition, or more exactly it is the set of conditions under which the coupling that produces relational value can occur and accumulate: the rhythm of a shared life, its atmosphere, the distribution of attention within it, the arrangement of things insofar as that arrangement bears on whether the coupling gains or spins. These conditions are what a field is, and they are conditions of possibility for accumulation, not the accumulation itself and not the subjects that accumulate. A physical space, a kitchen or a room, is a field only derivatively, as the carrier of such conditions, the place in which the rhythm is kept and the attention distributed and the things arranged; the space is where the field is held, but the field is the conditional structure the space carries, and the same space carries different fields as its conditions change, while the same field can be carried, imperfectly, across different spaces.

A field is a conditional environment of coupling: the structure of conditions under which two predictive-valuing systems can couple in the generative direction and accumulate holonomy. It is not a physical space but a condition that physical space may carry; rhythm, atmosphere, the distribution of attention, and the arrangement of things are conditions of the field insofar as they bear on whether coupling gains or spins. The field is therefore neither the subjects nor their accumulated value but the conditional structure that makes their generative coupling possible, and to build a field is to shape those conditions.

The reason the definition must be pitched at the level of conditions, and not of physical space, is that everything in the chain depends on it, and the dependence can be stated now even though its payoff comes later. If the field were simply physical space, its construction would indeed be an engineering matter, since physical space can be designed, optimised, and standardised, and the chain's second link, that field-building is aesthetic rather than engineering, would fail at once. It is because the field is a structure of conditions, whose appropriateness is state-dependent and cannot be standardised, that

its construction escapes engineering, and the next section's whole argument rests on the field being conditional in this way. The ontology is thus not a preliminary nicety but the load-bearing specification on which the chain's most contested link stands or falls, and it is set out here so that the link can be argued there without re-litigating what a field is.

An illustrative case — [The same room, and the field that is not the room] A kitchen is a kitchen, the same cabinets and the same light, and yet the field it carries is not constant. On one evening the kitchen holds a generative field, the two moving in a rhythm that gains, the room thick with a coupling that accumulates; on another, after a quarrel, the identical kitchen holds a flattened field, the same cabinets and light carrying now a silence that spins. The room has not changed; the field has, which shows the field to be not the room but a condition the room carries, able to change while the room stays fixed. And the converse holds: a couple who move to a new house carry the field with them, imperfectly, the rhythm and atmosphere and distribution of attention re-established in a different space, so that the same field, or nearly the same, is borne by a new room. The field travels though the room cannot, and the room changes its field though it cannot change itself, and these two ordinary facts together show what the definition asserts, that the field is the conditional structure and the physical space only its carrier, the two able to vary independently because they are not the same thing.

4.3.2 The field and the subjects it couples

A field couples subjects, and the relation between the field and the subjects it couples must be stated carefully to avoid two errors. The first error would make the field a third thing alongside the two subjects, a container in which they sit, as though the conditions of coupling existed independently of the coupling they condition. They do not. The conditions of a field are sustained by the very coupling they make possible, in the way that the rhythm of a shared life is kept by the partners whose sharing it conditions, so that the field is not a container prior to its occupants but a structure they hold up by inhabiting it, a condition that is maintained in being by what it conditions. This circularity is not vicious; it is the ordinary structure of a sustained relation, in which the conditions of coupling and the coupling are mutually holding, each keeping the other in existence, and it is why a field can decay when the coupling lapses and can be rebuilt

when the coupling resumes.

The second error would make the field nothing over the subjects, a mere name for their interaction, with no structure of its own to be built or damaged. This too is false, because the conditions of coupling have a structure that outruns any single interaction and shapes interactions yet to come: a field whose rhythm has been established, whose atmosphere has been tended, whose attention is well distributed, makes generative coupling easier for the next interaction, and a field whose conditions have been damaged makes it harder, regardless of the good will brought to the particular moment. The field is thus real enough to be built and damaged, to make coupling easier or harder, to be the standing result of past coupling that conditions future coupling, while not being a thing apart from the subjects whose coupling sustains it. It is, in the framework's terms, the accumulated condition of a relation, the settled structure within which the next cycle of perception, reception, sharing, and reproduction will be easier or harder to turn, and this is exactly why its construction is the proper object of an aesthetic education: the field is what the cultivation builds.

4.3.3 The field and spaciousness

The field descends from the spaciousness of the companion work but is more general than it, and the relation should be made exact so that this paper extends rather than repeats. Spaciousness was the openness, the room left for what is not yet determined, the condition under which contingency could be met and the relational subject generated in the field of travel; it was a particular condition of the field, the condition of openness, given prominence because travel is the domain in which openness is most plainly the generative condition. The field, as this paper defines it, is the more general structure of which spaciousness is one possible state. A field can be open, spacious, full of room for contingency, and then spaciousness is its condition; but a field can also be settled, dense, repetitive, with little room for the new, and such a field is not therefore no field, but a field in a different state, whose generativity must be secured by means other than openness. This generality is what lets the present paper move where the companion could not, into the dense and repetitive and unspacious conditions of the most ordinary shared life, the conditions under which there is no room to travel and the field must accumulate by repetition rather than by openness. The field is the genus; spaciousness is one of

its states; and the cultivation this paper describes is the building of generative fields across all their states, including the dense and repetitive ones in which spaciousness is not available and the good cycle must be turned in the narrow room that the everyday affords.

4.3.4 The depth of a field

A field has not only a direction, whether it gains or flattens, but a depth, and introducing the notion completes the ontology in a way the later sections will draw on. The depth of a field is the magnitude of the accumulation it can sustain, the difference between a shallow field that gains a little and a deep one that gains greatly, between a coupling that accumulates a thin holonomy and one that accumulates a thick one. Two fields may both be generative, both gaining rather than flattening, and yet differ in depth, the one a pleasant and slight accumulation, the other a profound one, and the difference is not in the direction, which is the same, but in the magnitude, the depth of the gain. This is why a relation can be good, genuinely accumulating, and yet shallow, and why the deepening of a field is a distinct achievement from the establishing of its generative direction; one first builds a field that gains, and then, over time, deepens the gain, the cultivation of maintenance being in large part the deepening of a field already generative, the thickening of an accumulation already underway.

The depth of a field is built by time and by the four-step cycle turned many times, and this connects the ontology to the account of reproduction. A field deepens as its cycle is turned, each turn that gains adding to the depth, so that the deep field is the one whose cycle has been turned many times well, the accumulation thickened by long good repetition. This is why depth cannot be rushed and why the deep field is characteristically the long one, the relation that has accumulated over years of good cycles, its depth the sediment of a thousand small gains. It is also why the loss of a deep field is felt as a greater loss than the loss of a shallow one, since what is lost is not only a present accumulation but the depth built by all the past cycles that thickened it, the long accumulation that cannot be quickly rebuilt because it was the work of long repetition. The depth of a field is thus the dimension along which the temporal achievement of maintenance registers, the thickness of accumulation that long good repetition builds, and the ontology must include it because the cultivation aims not only at the generative direction of a field but

at its depth, not only at building a field that gains but at deepening the gain over the time that a shared life affords.

4.4. The Construction of a Field Is Not an Engineering Problem

This is the hardest link in the chain and the one on which the move to aesthetics depends. The field has been defined as a conditional environment of coupling, and the claim now to be argued is that the construction of such a field is an aesthetic and not an engineering matter. The claim is contested because it appears to deny something obvious, that conditions can be designed, that a person can arrange rhythm and atmosphere and the placement of things deliberately and skilfully, which sounds like exactly the sort of optimisation engineering performs. The section's task is to show why this appearance misleads, what it is about the construction of a field that escapes the engineering it superficially resembles, and it will do so by isolating the feature of field-building that no engineering can capture, the state-dependent appropriateness that cannot be standardised, and then by meeting the strongest objection, the one that points to architecture and design as disciplines that are at once engineering and aesthetic.

4.4.1 The nature and the requirements of engineering

To argue that field-building is not engineering, one must say what engineering is, sharply enough that the contrast is real and not a caricature. Engineering, in the sense relevant here, is the discipline that solves problems by means that are repeatable, standardisable, and separable into ends and means. Its characteristic achievement is the specification: a procedure, a design, a set of parameters that, applied to a recurring type of situation, reliably produces a desired type of outcome, and that can be transmitted, taught, and applied by another without the transmitter present. An engineering solution to a problem of rhythm or arrangement would be a specification of the right rhythm, the right arrangement, the right distribution of attention, such that following the specification would build the field, as following a blueprint builds the bridge. The power of engineering lies exactly in this separability and repeatability: the bridge does not need the engineer to have a relationship with the river, and the specification works the same for every river of the relevant type. Engineering succeeds where the appropriate is a property of the type of

situation, capturable in a rule that applies to all situations of that type.

4.4.2 The state-dependence that escapes specification

Field-building is not like this, and the reason is the state-dependence of appropriateness established in the section on the coupling mechanism. The appropriateness of a gesture, a rhythm, an arrangement is not a property of the type of situation but of its effect on the holonomy of this field in this state, and the same gesture that builds the field in one state flattens it in another. There is no specification of the right placement of a thing, because the right placement depends on the state of the coupling it enters, and the state of the coupling is not a parameter that can be read off and fed into a procedure but a condition that must be perceived, freshly, in the concrete. What would be appropriate this evening, given how the day has gone, given the particular weather between the two, is not derivable from a rule about evenings, because the rule about evenings cannot contain the state of this evening's field, and the state is precisely what determines the appropriate. Engineering requires that the appropriate be a property of the type; field-building confronts an appropriate that is a property of the token, the particular field in its particular state, and a property of the token is exactly what no specification over types can reach.

Field-building escapes engineering because the appropriateness it must achieve is state-dependent and cannot be standardised. Engineering solves problems by specifications that apply to types of situation; the appropriateness of a field-building act is a property not of the type but of the act's effect on the holonomy of this field in this state, and the same act builds the field in one state and flattens it in another. No specification over types can capture a property of tokens, and so no engineering procedure can determine the appropriate placement, rhythm, or arrangement. What determines it can only be perceived in the concrete, by a sensibility resolved upon the state of the field, which is to say that field-building requires the very perceptual discrimination that distinguishes the aesthetic.

This is the argument's core, and it can be stated as a general principle that the rest of

the section will defend and qualify.

An illustrative case — [. The dinner that an optimiser would get wrong] Imagine an engineer of the shared evening, equipped with the best specification a study of evenings could yield: the optimal time to eat, the arrangement of the table that maximises ease, the rhythm of conversation that the data show to be most satisfying, the lighting calibrated to the mood that surveys report as ideal. Apply the specification faithfully, evening after evening, and it will sometimes build the field and sometimes flatten it, and the specification cannot tell which, because what it cannot contain is the state of this evening. Tonight one of the two needs the meal early and quiet, the day having emptied her, and the specification's ideal rhythm of lively conversation is exactly wrong; another night the same liveliness is exactly right, the day having left them both with more to say than the evening can hold. The optimal lighting deflates an evening that wanted dimness for a grief being carried and lifts one that wanted brightness for a thing to celebrate. No refinement of the specification reaches this, because the specification is over types of evening and the appropriateness is a property of this evening's state, which the partners must perceive and the optimiser cannot encode. The engineer of the evening fails not because his specification is too coarse but because the thing he is trying to specify is not the kind of thing a specification can reach, a property of the token and not the type.

Wherever appropriateness cannot be exhausted by rules and can only be discerned by a trained perception of the concrete, the domain is aesthetic in the broad sense the genealogy recovered, the sense in which taste was a discernment of the fitting where no rule applies. Field-building is such a domain, because its appropriateness is state-dependent, and so field-building is aesthetic in this broad sense, not because it produces pretty results but because the discernment it requires is the discernment of the fitting where no rule decides, which is what aesthetic perception, at its root, has always been. The move from the field to aesthetics is therefore not an analogy or an ornament; it is the recognition that field-building has the formal mark of the aesthetic, the irreducibility of its appropriateness to rule.

4.4.3 The strongest objection: architecture and design

The strongest objection points to disciplines that seem to be engineering and aesthetic at once. Architecture and design build conditional environments, arrange space and rhythm and atmosphere, and do so with a body of transmissible knowledge, patterns and principles and standards, that looks like engineering, while also exercising and demanding aesthetic judgement. If these disciplines combine engineering and aesthetics in the building of environments, then perhaps field-building is likewise a hybrid, partly specifiable and partly discerned, and the claim that it is aesthetic rather than engineering is overstated. The objection deserves to be met at its strongest, and meeting it requires looking at what the best reflection within these disciplines has itself said about the limits of specification, because the answer is not that architecture is merely engineering after all, but that architecture, rightly understood, has confronted the same irreducibility this paper describes and has named it.

The most searching account of design within the tradition arrived precisely at a quality that its own patterns could not specify, a quality without a name that the patterns could point toward and prepare for but never guarantee (Alexander 1979), present in the buildings and places that are alive and absent from those that are dead, and recognisable only to a perception that the patterns could train but not replace. The reason the quality is nameless repays attention, because it is the same reason field-building escapes engineering. The quality is nameless not because no word has yet been found for it but because it is not a property of the kind that words for properties name; it is not symmetry or proportion or any feature a building has in itself, since a building can have all the nameable virtues and be dead, and another can lack them and be alive. What the quality tracks is whether the place is alive, whether it accumulates rather than merely sits, whether being in it gains or flattens, and this is a feature of the relation between the place and those who live in it, in the same way that appropriateness is a feature of the relation between a gesture and the field it enters. The quality is nameless because it is relational and state-dependent, because it cannot be read off the building any more than appropriateness can be read off the gesture, and the deepest design thought reached this and named the namelessness rather than pretending to a specification it could not have.

The patterns, on this account, are not specifications that produce the quality; they are

aids to a perception that must still discern, in the concrete case, whether the quality is present, and they work by cultivating that perception rather than by substituting for it. This is not the refutation of the present claim but its confirmation from within the discipline that seemed to threaten it. The deepest design thought reached the same conclusion the present section argues, that the appropriateness of a built environment cannot be specified and can only be discerned, that the transmissible knowledge of patterns serves to train a perception rather than to replace it, and that the quality the building must have is nameless precisely because it is not a property capturable in a rule. Architecture does not show that field-building is engineering. It shows that the building of living environments, pursued to its depth, becomes the cultivation of a perception of the unspecifiable fitting, which is what this paper says field-building is. The convergence is striking and worth marking: a tradition that set out to specify the building of good places, equipped with every tool of design, arrived by its own most rigorous path at the namelessness of the quality that matters, which is the same namelessness this paper finds in appropriateness, reached from the other side. Two disciplines, design and the philosophy of intimacy, pressing toward the conditions of a living environment, meet at the same recognition, that the quality of a place or a field is relational, state-dependent, and discernible only by a trained perception, never specifiable in advance.

4.4.4 The transmissible and the discerned

The architecture objection, met, yields a refinement the account needs, concerning what can and cannot be transmitted in the cultivation of field-building. It is not that nothing about field-building can be taught, that there are no patterns, no transmissible knowledge, no aids to perception; there are, and the four-step model and its practices are themselves such aids. The claim is narrower and exact: what can be transmitted are aids to a perception that must still discern the concrete case, and what cannot be transmitted is the discernment itself, the perceiving of whether this field in this state is being built or flattened, which no aid can perform on the perceiver's behalf. This is the structure of every aesthetic cultivation, and it is why such cultivation is an education and not an instruction, a raising of a perceptual power by exercise rather than a transmission of a code by telling. The patterns prepare the perception; the perception does the discerning; and the gap between the prepared and the discerned is the gap between engineering

and aesthetics, the gap that the state-dependence of appropriateness opens and that no quantity of transmissible knowledge can close. Field-building, then, has exactly the structure the rest of the paper requires: it is cultivable, since perception can be trained, and it is not specifiable, since the trained perception must still discern the token, and a capacity that is cultivable but not specifiable is the proper object of an aesthetic education, which is the name for the cultivation of a discerning perception of the fitting where no rule decides.

4.5. The Pattern and the Nameless Quality: A Design-Theoretic Support

The previous section met the architecture objection by showing that the deepest design thought arrived at the namelessness of the quality that matters, which confirmed rather than threatened the claim that field-building escapes engineering. This section develops the support, because the design tradition offers more than a confirming conclusion; it offers a worked model of how a perception of the unspecifiable can nonetheless be cultivated, transmitted, and disciplined, and that model is directly useful to a paper whose central difficulty is how to cultivate a perception that no rule can capture. The pattern language is the relevant achievement, and it is worth examining as a model for aesthetic education rather than merely citing as an ally.

4.5.1 Patterns: aids to perception, not specifications

A pattern, in the design sense, is not a specification that produces a result but a recurrent relation between a problem and a resolution in a context (Alexander et al. 1977), stated generally enough to be applied and loosely enough to require judgement in the applying. The pattern does not tell the builder exactly what to do; it directs attention to a recurrent structure and leaves the builder to discern how, in this context, the structure should be realised. This is precisely the relation between an aid to perception and the perception it aids, and it solves a problem that the present paper faces acutely. The paper has insisted that the appropriate cannot be specified, that field-building requires a trained perception and not a rulebook, and this insistence threatens to leave the cultivation of the perception mysterious, as though nothing could be said to aid it. The pattern language shows that

this does not follow, that a great deal can be said in aid of a perception without any of it amounting to a specification of what the perception must discern. Patterns aid the perception of the nameless quality by directing attention to the recurrent structures in which it tends to appear, without ever specifying the quality itself, which remains to be discerned in the concrete case. They are, in the paper's terms, a transmissible knowledge that trains an untransmissible perception, and they model exactly what the four-step practices aspire to be.

4.5.2 The discipline of a perception that no rule captures

The design tradition offers a second lesson, concerning how a perception that no rule captures can nonetheless be disciplined, held to a standard, kept from collapsing into mere subjective preference. The worry is natural: if the appropriate cannot be specified and must be discerned, what distinguishes a discernment from a whim, a trained perception of the fitting from an untrained assertion of the preferred? The design tradition answers by the test of life, the question whether the result is alive, whether the place generates or deadens, and this test, though it cannot be reduced to a rule, is not subjective, because whether a place is alive is something competent perceivers converge on, something the place either does or does not do to those who inhabit it. The discipline of the perception is the test of life, and it is a discipline without a rule, an answerability to whether the thing generates that holds the perception to a standard while specifying nothing. This is exactly the discipline the paper's sensibility needs, the answerability of the perception of appropriateness to whether the field actually accumulates, a test that disciplines without specifying, that distinguishes the trained discernment from the mere preference by the question whether the field it builds gains or flattens. The design tradition, having faced the same worry about the same kind of perception, supplies the model of a discipline that the paper's account requires, the holding of an unspecifiable perception to the standard of whether what it builds is alive.

The convergence can be pressed one step further, to the point where the design tradition's central term and the paper's central term illuminate one another. The quality without a name was characterised, in the design thought, as the quality of being alive, and aliveness was glossed in terms the paper can recognise: a place is alive when it is whole, when its parts cooperate to a self-sustaining vitality, when being in it makes one more alive rather

than less, and dead when its parts war or when being in it drains rather than feeds. This gloss of aliveness, as a self-sustaining vitality that feeds rather than drains, is recognisably the good cycle in the framework's terms, the field that accumulates rather than flattens, that returns to its root raised rather than closing on its origin. The nameless quality of the design tradition and the holonomy of the present framework are, the convergence suggests, two approaches to one thing, the self-sustaining gain of a living environment, named once for how it shows itself to the perception of a builder and once for how it stands in the dynamics of a field. The design tradition could name the quality only by its absence of a name, because it lacked the dynamical vocabulary that would let it say what aliveness is; the present framework supplies that vocabulary, the holonomy that a good cycle accumulates, and so can say what the nameless quality is, the perceptible signature of a field that gains. The two traditions, meeting at the building of living environments, complete one another: the design tradition's long and careful description of the nameless quality gives the framework's holonomy a rich phenomenology, an account of how the gain of a field shows itself to perception, and the framework's holonomy gives the design tradition's nameless quality a name at last, not a name that specifies it, which remains impossible, but a name that says what kind of thing it is, the accumulation of a path that returns to its root raised.

4.5.3 The convergence and its significance

That two disciplines as distant as architectural design and the philosophy of intimacy converge on the same structure, an unspecifiable quality, perceptible but not codifiable, cultivated by aids that train rather than replace the perception, and disciplined by the test of whether the result is alive, is itself significant, and the section closes on the significance. The convergence is evidence that the structure is not an artefact of either field's peculiarities but a feature of the building of living environments as such, whether the environment is a building or a relational field. Both are conditional environments; both are alive or dead according to whether they generate; both are built by a perception of the unspecifiable fitting that aids can train but not replace; and both discipline that perception by the test of life. The philosophy of intimacy thus finds, in the most rigorous design thought, not merely an ally but a sister discipline that has independently mapped the same terrain, and the map drawn there, of patterns that aid perception and the

test of life that disciplines it, transfers directly to the cultivation of the capacity to build generative fields, which is the cultivation this paper is about. The kitchen and the building turn out to pose the same problem, the building of a living environment by a perception no rule can capture, and the long labour of design thought to map that problem is available, transposed, to the aesthetic education of the everyday.

4.5.4 The limit of the analogy

The analogy with design must be bounded, however, because it can mislead if pressed past the point where the two disciplines diverge, and naming the divergence sharpens what is proper to the field of intimacy. The building is, for all its life, a passive environment; it does not perceive the one who builds it, does not answer his placement of a wall with a placement of its own, does not co-constitute the field that the two of them build. The relational field is otherwise, because its material is a second perceiving subject who builds the field as much as the first does, who answers each gesture with a gesture, who co-constitutes the very environment the first is trying to build. This is the decisive divergence: the architect builds for inhabitants whose perception he anticipates but who do not build the building back, whereas the field-builder builds with a partner who builds the field back, so that the relational field is built by two perceptions and not one, two responsivenesses meeting and co-constituting the environment that neither builds alone. The design analogy holds for everything that concerns the unspecifiable quality, the perception that no rule captures, the test of life, the patterns that aid without replacing; it breaks exactly where the relational field's second subject enters, the partner who is not the passive material of the field but its co-builder.

This divergence is not a weakness of the analogy but the mark of where the field of intimacy exceeds even its closest sister discipline, and it returns the account, as everything in the paper returns, to the irreducibly relational. The building of a relational field is harder than the building of any passive environment, however alive, because its material answers, because the field is co-constituted by a second perception that the first cannot control and must instead couple with, and because the quality the field-builder seeks is not a quality the field has in itself, as a building has its aliveness, but a quality of the coupling between two who build it together. The design tradition mapped the building of living environments as far as a passive environment can be living; the field of intimacy takes up

the map where the environment becomes a second subject, and the aesthetic education of the everyday is, in the end, the cultivation of a perception that builds not a living place but a living coupling, with a partner who is building it too. The sister discipline takes the account to the threshold; the threshold is where the second subject enters, and beyond it the field of intimacy goes alone, into the building of a living environment that builds itself back, which no design tradition, however deep, has had to map.

4.6. The Genealogy of the Aesthetic Grounding of Ethics

兴于诗，立于礼，成于乐。

Analects

The reduction chain reaches, at its third link, a claim that is easy to state and easy to mistake for a stipulation. The construction of a field, the chain says, is an aesthetic matter; the aesthetic and the ethical are coupled at their root; therefore the cultivation of the field-building capacity is an aesthetic education that is at the same time an ethical one. The danger is that this coupling, the joint of aesthetic and ethical on which the whole chain turns, will look like something the paper has simply defined into being, by christening a single sensibility that judges both the appropriate and the good and then announcing that the two are therefore one. A coupling asserted by definition is worth nothing, since one may define as one pleases and the world is not obliged to agree. This section exists to show that the coupling is not the paper's invention. It is a recognition that a long line of thinkers, working in different centuries, idioms, and traditions, have arrived at independently and from opposite directions, the recognition that when ethics is pressed to its ground it discovers aesthetics beneath it, that value is in the first place perceived rather than inferred, and that the appropriate overflows every rule that would contain it. The paper's own contribution, set out after the witnesses, is not the coupling but a mechanism for it; the coupling itself is an inheritance, and the genealogy is the proof of inheritance.

4.6.1 Confucius: the person is completed in the aesthetic

The oldest witness is also the most direct, and it belongs to the roots this series has drawn on throughout. The formation of a person, the *Analects* says, is begun in poetry, established in rite, and completed in music (Confucius 1979): the sequence does not end in knowledge or in action but in an aesthetic accomplishment, and the completion is not decorative but constitutive, the final forming of the ethical person in and as a refinement of feeling. The tradition that follows does not treat this as a metaphor. Music, in the rite-and-music teaching, is the means by which the dispositions are tuned, by which a person and a people are brought into accord, so that the cultivation of feeling and the cultivation of virtue are one undertaking carried out in one medium. What is striking, set against the later Western quarrels the section will reach, is that this tradition never had to discover the coupling of the aesthetic and the ethical, because it never divided them; the good and the beautiful were given together, and the labour was not to join them but to keep them joined. The Confucian witness therefore stands at the head of the genealogy not as the first to argue the coupling but as the tradition for which the coupling was never in question, the place from which the later discoveries look like the recovery of something that had been forgotten.

4.6.2 Schiller: the moral problem is first an aesthetic one

The founding modern witness made the coupling into a programme. Confronting the political and moral wreckage of his age, he argued that the way to the moral condition does not run directly through the moral, that one cannot make people good by commanding goodness or by perfecting their reason, because a humanity split between sensuous compulsion and rational compulsion is incapable of the freedom that morality requires (Schiller 1795). The route to the moral runs through the aesthetic, because it is beauty, and the play it awakens, that releases the person from both compulsions at once and restores the wholeness in which moral agency becomes possible. The moral problem, on this account, must first be solved as an aesthetic problem, which is precisely the direction of reduction this paper follows. The witness is founding because it is the first to say, as a thesis and not an aside, that aesthetic education is not one province of education among others but the condition of the ethical, the cultivation without which the ethical cannot be reached. Where this paper parts from it is marked and not hid-

den: the founding account locates the reconciliation within the individual, the play that unifies one person's faculties, whereas the field-building this paper describes is relational from the start, the aesthetic that grounds the ethical between subjects and not within one. The genealogy takes the thesis and relocates its site, from the single psyche to the coupling.

4.6.3 Wittgenstein: ethics and aesthetics are one

The sharpest witness is a single line, and its sharpness is worth the section's care. Ethics and aesthetics are one, the early work says (Wittgenstein 1922), and the unity is not a slogan but a consequence of the work's deepest commitment, that value does not lie within the world among the facts and so cannot be stated in propositions that picture facts. Both the ethical and the aesthetic belong to what cannot be said but only shown, to the domain of how the world is regarded rather than what is the case within it, and they are one because they are the same standing-outside-the-facts, the same way of looking upon the world as a whole rather than describing its contents. This is the most exact possible statement of the joint this paper needs, and from an unexpected quarter, since it arrives not from a philosophy of feeling but from the most austere logic. What it gives the genealogy is the claim that appropriateness, the thing the field-builder must perceive, cannot be captured in propositions and rules precisely because it shares its nature with value as such, which is shown and not said. The line is the genealogy's keenest blade because it makes the coupling not a psychological observation about how the good and the beautiful happen to feel alike, but a structural claim about where both lie, outside the sayable, in the showing.

4.6.4 Scheler: value is felt before it is reasoned

If the previous witness placed value outside the sayable, the next says how it is nonetheless apprehended, and the answer feeds directly into this paper's account of perception. Moral value, on this witness's account, is not concluded from premises but felt, grasped in a feeling-of-value that is a mode of perception in its own right, prior to and independent of intellectual inference; there is an ordering of values given to the heart that the understanding does not establish but discovers (Scheler 1913). This is the philosophical charter for the claim, central to this paper's coupling, that the sensibility which perceives

appropriateness is the same one that perceives the good, because on this account the good is in the first place something perceived, a value felt in an act of value-perception rather than derived in an act of reasoning. The witness matters most to the section on perception, where the seeing of the field's appropriateness is described, because it establishes, independently of this paper, that value-apprehension is perceptual at its root, that to know the good is first to feel it as one feels a quality, and so that a sensibility trained to perceive appropriateness is not metaphorically but literally a moral organ. The coupling, on this witness, is grounded in the structure of value-apprehension itself: the good is felt, and what feels it is a perception, and a perception refined upon the appropriate is thereby refined upon the good.

4.6.5 Gadamer: taste was a moral power before it was an aesthetic one

The next witness recovers a history that the section's own key term has half-forgotten. Before taste was narrowed into a category of art appreciation, it named a power of the common sense, a capacity of judgement that found the right and fitting in matters where no rule could be applied, a moral and social discernment of what is appropriate to a situation (Gadamer 1960). Judgement of this kind, the capacity to see what fits where no rule determines the fitting, was understood as continuous with moral judgement and not separate from it, and the narrowing by which taste became a purely aesthetic affair, severed from the discernment of the appropriate in conduct, is diagnosed by this witness as a loss, a forgetting of taste's original breadth. The relevance to this paper is exact and double. The recovered concept of taste, the discernment of the fitting where no rule applies, is almost word for word the appropriateness this paper says the field-builder must perceive and the engineering account cannot capture; and the diagnosis of taste's narrowing tells this paper that to return aesthetic education to ethics is not an innovation but a restoration, the undoing of a forgetting. The witness thus gives the genealogy its sense of recovery: the coupling the paper asserts was once common knowledge, lodged in the very word taste, and was lost when aesthetics was sealed off as a domain of its own.

4.6.6 Williams and Murdoch: the analytic recovery of perception over theory

The genealogy's final witnesses come from within the analytic tradition itself, which matters because they show the recognition is not the property of one philosophical school

but is reached, independently, even by those least disposed to mysticism about value. The first of them mounted a sustained case against the ambition of moral theory, the project of capturing ethical life in principles and decision procedures, arguing that this ambition mistakes the nature of ethical life, which depends on perceptions and judgements in the concrete situation that no theory can anticipate or replace, so that the very drive to a moral theory is a kind of error (Williams 1985). This is direct analytic support for the link in this paper's chain that says appropriateness cannot be reduced to rules, and it arrives from the tradition most committed to rules and arguments, which is why it carries the weight it does. The second of these witnesses gave the recognition its most beautiful form, making attention the centre of the moral life: to act well is first to see well, to attend to the other and the situation justly and without the self's distorting interference, and this just attention is described in frankly aesthetic terms, modelled on the selfless looking that art demands (Murdoch 1970), so that the moral gaze and the aesthetic gaze are shown to be one kind of seeing. This last witness is the most direct ancestor of this paper's claim that the perception of the field is at once aesthetic and moral, since it says, as plainly as the paper could wish, that to see justly is the moral act and that such seeing is of a piece with the contemplation of beauty. With these two the genealogy reaches the present, having shown the coupling recognised across the whole breadth of philosophy, from the oldest Eastern teaching to the most recent analytic ethics, by thinkers who shared almost nothing except this.

4.6.7 The dissenting witness and the danger it marks

The genealogy would be dishonest if it gathered only the witnesses who support the coupling and suppressed the one who turns it against the paper's purpose, and the suppressed witness is instructive enough to be admitted. There is a line of thought that affirms the coupling of the aesthetic and the ethical and draws from it exactly the opposite of what this paper draws, that takes the priority of the aesthetic to mean the subordination of the ethical to it, the justification of life as an aesthetic phenomenon in which the demands of justice are dissolved into the demands of beauty, the strong and the beautiful released from a morality recast as the resentment of the weak. This witness agrees that ethics finds aesthetics at its bottom and concludes that ethics is therefore to be overcome in the name of the aesthetic, that the fine life is beyond the categories of the good and the just,

that beauty is the highest value and answers to nothing above it. The genealogy must admit this witness because it shares the premise the genealogy draws on, the priority of the aesthetic, while drawing from it a conclusion the paper must refuse, and the refusal is not a matter of preferring the agreeable witnesses but of showing that the dissenting conclusion does not follow from the shared premise.

It does not follow, and the orthogonality the next section establishes is exactly why. The dissenting witness moves from the priority of the aesthetic to the supremacy of the aesthetic, from the claim that value is perceived before it is reasoned to the claim that the perception of beauty is the whole of value and the just a mere constraint to be transcended. But the priority of the aesthetic, as this paper understands it, is the priority of one perception, the perception of the field's generative direction, and that perception, the orthogonality will show, is silent on justice, on who is rendered fuel for the accumulation it perceives. To make the aesthetic supreme, to release the beautiful life from the demands of justice, is precisely to commit the error the orthogonality guards against, the elevation of the perception of accumulation over the question of who pays for it, the aestheticism that the exquisite cruelty exemplifies. The dissenting witness is therefore not a counter-authority that the genealogy must defeat but an illustration of the danger the whole paper is built to meet, the danger that the real coupling of the aesthetic and the ethical, misunderstood as the supremacy of the aesthetic, licenses the fine and the unjust. The genealogy includes the dissenter to mark this danger at its source, and to show that the paper's coupling, bounded by the orthogonality, yields the opposite of the dissenter's conclusion: not the transcendence of justice by beauty but the insistence that beauty, even the deepest relational beauty, is necessary and not sufficient for the good, and that the perception which finds the appropriate must be joined by the separate regard that asks who is consumed.

4.6.8 The disagreements among the witnesses

Before the convergence is claimed it must be made honest, because the witnesses disagree about almost everything except the one thing the genealogy draws from them, and a convergence asserted over suppressed disagreement would be worth no more than a stipulation. They disagree about the nature of value: for one it is felt in an objective order given to the heart, for another it is shown and cannot be said at all, for another it

is recovered as a social judgement sedimented in a tradition, for another it is the selfless attention that art teaches. They disagree about method: the austere logician and the phenomenologist of value and the analytic critic of theory would each find the others' procedures suspect, and the Confucian completion of the person in music belongs to a form of life the modern witnesses do not share and might not recognise. They disagree about whether there is a moral knowledge at all, about whether value is in the world or in the regard brought to it, about nearly every question a philosophy of value can raise. The genealogy does not paper over this. It claims convergence on one point only, and the value of the convergence depends on its being convergence from genuinely different places, since a point reached independently by thinkers who agree on nothing else is far better evidenced than a point on which a single school insists. The disagreement is not the genealogy's embarrassment but its strength: that so many, sharing no method and no metaphysics, were nonetheless driven to the same recognition about value and rules is precisely what makes the recognition hard to dismiss as the artefact of one school's commitments.

This is the method of the series applied to the genealogy itself, the seeking of common ground while the differences are kept. The differences among the witnesses are kept, named rather than dissolved, and the common ground is sought within them, the one recognition they share across everything that divides them. To force them into a single doctrine would be to reduce the many to one in exactly the way the paper has refused throughout; to leave them merely juxtaposed, a list of opinions about value, would be to miss the convergence that is the genealogy's whole point. The genealogy holds the two together, the kept differences and the sought common ground, and what it finds in the common ground is set out next.

4.6.9 The limit of each witness, and the critiques they have drawn

The genealogy gathers the witnesses for the one recognition they share, but it would flatter them to present each as simply correct, and the dialectical-materialist commitment that governs this paper requires that each be given its limit and that the critiques each has drawn be registered, since a recognition is better held when one knows the failures of those who reached it. The witnesses are connected not only by their shared recognition but by a shared liability, the liability of taking the priority of perceived value to license

an inattention to the material and political conditions under which perception is formed, and this liability takes a specific form in each.

The Confucian completion of the person in music has drawn the critique that its harmony is the harmony of a hierarchical order, that the rite-and-music tradition tuned the dispositions to a settled social arrangement and called the tuning virtue, so that its seamless union of the beautiful and the good can sanctify a domination as easily as a flourishing. The critique is just to this extent, that the tradition did not by itself supply the orthogonality that distinguishes a generative concord from a beautiful subjection, and the paper supplies what the tradition lacked, the question of who is rendered fuel for the harmony, which the rite-and-music tradition did not systematically raise. Schiller has drawn the critique of an aestheticism *avant la lettre*, that his aesthetic state, by reconciling the faculties in play, risks a withdrawal from the political struggle whose conditions it claims to prepare, a beautiful soul cultivated while the unjust order stands; and the critique bites against any reading of aesthetic education, including this paper's, that would let the cultivation of the field substitute for the change of the conditions, which is why the political economy of the field was necessary. Wittgenstein's identification of ethics and aesthetics, placing both outside the sayable, has drawn the critique that it removes value from rational discussion altogether, consigning the good and the beautiful to a showing that cannot be argued, and the paper parts from him exactly here, supplying the mechanism that brings the coupling back within reasoned articulation, since the holonomy of a field is a structure about which one can reason, not only a value that can be shown.

Scheler's intuition of a given order of values has drawn the critique of a material *a priori* that no two cultures share, the objection that the values felt as given differ across forms of life, so that the feeling-of-value cannot ground a universal ethics; and the paper accommodates the critique by grounding value not in a given order felt by intuition but in the generative direction of a real field, which is variable in its content across relations and constant in its form, the accumulation of holonomy. Gadamer's recovery of taste as moral judgement has drawn the critique that the tradition whose *sensus communis* he restores is itself a particular and exclusionary inheritance, that the common sense of the fitting is the common sense of a class and a culture, and the paper registers this in its political economy, where the conditions of the sensibility's cultivation are shown to be

unequally distributed. Williams's case against moral theory has drawn the critique that, in refusing theory, it leaves ethics without the critical leverage that principles provide against a corrupt practice, that a perception trained within an unjust order will perceive its injustice as fitting; and the paper answers with the orthogonality, the deliberate question of justice that the trained perception does not contain and must be made to ask. Murdoch's attention has drawn the critique that just attention, however pure, can attend lovingly to a scene whose injustice it does not register, that the selfless gaze is not by itself a just one; and this is the orthogonality again, met now as the limit of even the most morally serious of the witnesses, that fineness of attention is not justice of direction.

What this accounting shows is that the witnesses converge not only on a recognition but on a shared limit, the limit at which the priority of perceived value, unguarded, becomes an inattention to the conditions and the justice that perception alone does not deliver. The paper inherits the recognition and corrects the limit, supplying at the level of mechanism what the witnesses left at the level of intuition, and supplying through the orthogonality and the political economy the attention to justice and condition that the witnesses, severally, neglected. This is the materialist completion of the genealogy: the recognition that ethics finds aesthetics at its bottom is preserved, and the idealist temptation that has shadowed every witness, the temptation to let the priority of the aesthetic excuse an inattention to material conditions and to justice, is refused.

4.6.10 The common structure

The witnesses share almost nothing in method, idiom, or century, and the worth of the genealogy lies precisely in that they nonetheless converge. Drawn together, their convergence has two strands. The first is a claim about where value lies: that the good is not in the first place inferred from principles but perceived, felt, discerned, apprehended in an act more like seeing than like reasoning, whether named the feeling-of-value, the just attention, the taste that finds the fitting, or the music in which the person is completed. The second is a claim about rules: that the appropriate, the fitting, the right-in-this-situation, overflows every rule that would contain it, so that ethical life cannot be captured in a theory or a procedure and depends instead on a discernment exercised in the concrete, a discernment continuous with the discernment of beauty. These two strands are the two halves of one recognition. If value is perceived rather than inferred, then the faculty of

value is a perceptual one; and if the appropriate overflows rules, then that perceptual faculty is needed exactly where rules give out, which is the domain the witnesses agree to call, in its widest sense, the aesthetic. When ethics is pressed to its ground, it finds beneath it not a deeper rule but a way of perceiving, and a way of perceiving the fitting where no rule decides is what aesthetic discernment has always been. That is the inheritance, and it is not one school's property but a recurrence across the whole field of reflection on value.

4.6.11 The asymmetry of East and West in the genealogy

A feature of the genealogy deserves remark before its contribution is stated, the asymmetry between how the coupling appears in the Eastern and the Western witnesses, because the asymmetry is instructive about the coupling itself. In the Western witnesses the coupling appears as a discovery or a recovery, something arrived at against a prevailing separation, won back from a tradition that had divided the aesthetic from the ethical and needed to be shown their unity. Schiller argues for the coupling against a moralism that would reach the good directly; Wittgenstein states it as a hard-won consequence of a difficult logic; Gadamer recovers it against the narrowing that had severed taste from moral judgement; the analytic witnesses reach it against a theory-driven ethics that had forgotten perception. In each the coupling is the conclusion of a struggle against a separation, the reunification of what the Western tradition had put asunder. In the Eastern witnesses the coupling appears otherwise, not as a discovery or recovery but as an inheritance never lost, a unity that was never divided and so never needed to be won back. The Confucian completion of the person in music, the seamless joining of the beautiful and the good in the rite-and-music tradition, present the coupling as simply the way things are, never having been separated, never requiring an argument to reunite them.

This asymmetry is not a defect of the genealogy but a clue to the coupling's status, and reading it correctly strengthens rather than weakens the case. That the Western tradition had to win the coupling back, against its own separation of the aesthetic from the ethical, shows the separation to be a contingent achievement of that tradition and not a feature of the things themselves; the West divided what need not have been divided, and its best thinkers spent their effort recovering the unity its division had obscured. That the Eastern tradition never divided them shows the unity to be available without the division,

a way of holding the aesthetic and the ethical together that some traditions simply kept. The two together make the strongest possible case for the coupling: the tradition that divided them found, at its most rigorous, that it had to put them back together, and the tradition that never divided them shows that the division was never necessary. The coupling is thus confirmed both by those who recovered it against their separation and by those who never lost it, and the asymmetry between recovery and inheritance, far from weakening the genealogy, doubles its force, since a unity reached by recovery in one tradition and held as inheritance in another is better evidenced than one attested in only a single way. The paper's own contribution, the mechanism, is offered to both: to the West it gives the structure that explains why the division it recovered from was always artificial, and to the East it gives the formal articulation of a unity it held without needing to formalize, the holonomy and the field that say, in the language of mechanism, what the rite-and-music tradition knew without saying.

4.6.12 The gift and the reservation of the genealogy

The genealogy gives this paper its licence and withholds its mechanism, and the distinction between the two is what the paper's own contribution turns on. What the witnesses establish is that the coupling of the aesthetic and the ethical is real, recurrent, and independently arrived at, so that to assert it is to recover a recognition rather than to stipulate a definition. This is the licence, and it is what the reduction chain's third link needed, since a link that merely defined its coupling would have carried no weight, whereas a link that recovers a coupling recognised from Confucius to the present carries the weight of the whole tradition behind it. What the witnesses do not give is an account of how the coupling works, by what mechanism the perception of appropriateness and the perception of the good are one perception, in what medium a sensibility refined upon the fitting becomes thereby a moral organ. They report the coupling; they do not explain it. Each names the fact from his own side, the feeling-of-value, the just attention, the completing music, but none supplies the structure that would say why value is perceptual and why the appropriate overflows rules, why these two strands belong together rather than merely co-occurring.

The coupling of the aesthetic and the ethical is an inheritance, recognised independently across traditions from the Confucian completion of the person in music to the analytic recovery of perception over theory; it is not this paper's stipulation. What the tradition reports but does not explain is the mechanism of the coupling. The contribution of this paper is to supply that mechanism: appropriateness is the perceptible signature of accumulating holonomy in a relational field, and value is that accumulation, so that to perceive the appropriate and to perceive the good are one perception because the appropriate is what the good looks like to perception. The genealogy supplies the licence; the framework supplies the mechanism; neither alone would suffice.

The next section sets out that mechanism, reading the coupled sensibility as the resolution of a relational field and the perception of appropriateness as the registration of its accumulating holonomy, so that what the witnesses reported from the outside is given an inside. One guard must be carried forward into that account, and it is the guard the following section is built around. To say that the perception of the appropriate and the perception of the good are one perception is not to say that refinement of the sensibility guarantees the good, for a sensibility can be exquisitely refined and exquisitely unjust, and the genealogy's witnesses, who attended to the fineness of perception, did not all attend to its direction. The coupling of the aesthetic and the ethical is a coupling of one perception to one register of value, not a guarantee that the perceptive are the just; and the orthogonality of refinement and justice, which the next section but one must establish, is what keeps this genealogy from becoming the aestheticism it might otherwise be mistaken for. The recognition that ethics finds aesthetics at its bottom is the beginning of the account and not its end, because what is found there must still be shown to have a direction, and a fineness without a direction is precisely the danger the whole of this paper is built to meet.

4.7. The Coupling Mechanism: Sensibility and Moral Resolution

The genealogy left a debt. It established that the aesthetic and the ethical are coupled, recognised as coupled across traditions that shared nothing else, and it established that the tradition reported the coupling without explaining it, naming the fact from the outside as a feeling-of-value, a just attention, a completing music, but never saying by what

structure the perception of the appropriate and the perception of the good are one perception. This section pays that debt. It gives the coupling an inside, reading the sensibility that the witnesses described as a single resolving power and showing why a perception refined upon appropriateness is thereby refined upon the good. The account proceeds in three moves: first, what appropriateness is, in the framework's own terms; second, why its perception is a matter of resolution rather than rule; and third, why that resolution is at once aesthetic and moral, which is the coupling itself.

4.7.1 Appropriateness: the signature of accumulating holonomy

Begin with the thing perceived. Throughout the paper the field-builder has been said to perceive appropriateness, the fittingness of this gesture, this placement, this word, in this relational state, and the term has been left to its ordinary sense while the argument was built. It can now be given its framework meaning. Appropriateness is the perceptible signature of a field accumulating holonomy in the generative direction. A gesture is appropriate, in a given relational state, when it is one that lets the coupling gain rather than spin, when it moves the field along a path that returns to its root raised rather than closing on its origin flat; and it is inappropriate when it flattens the field, extracts from it, or turns it toward the wheel. This is why appropriateness cannot be read from the gesture in isolation, the point the engineering section pressed: the same gesture, the same placement, the same word accumulates in one relational state and dissipates in another, because what makes it appropriate is not a property it carries but its effect on the holonomy of the field it enters, and that effect depends on the state of the field. Appropriateness is relational and state-dependent because holonomy is a property of a path and not of a step, and the appropriate step is the one that, in this state, sends the path the generative way.

An illustrative case — [. One sentence, two states] The sentence is ordinary: you look tired today. In one state of the field it is appropriate, and its appropriateness is palpable. The day has been long, the other is in fact worn, and the sentence lands as an act of attention, a noticing that says I see how you are, and it sends the field the generative way, the other met and accompanied, the coupling gaining by the small accurate care. In another state of the field the identical sentence is inappropriate, and its inappropriateness is equally

palpable. The other has dressed with care for an occasion that matters to her, and the same words land as a deflation, a noticing that says you do not look as you hoped, and they flatten the field, the occasion's small lift punctured, the coupling spinning where it might have gained. The words are identical; the appropriateness is opposite; and nothing in the sentence itself decides which it is, because what decides is the sentence's effect on the holonomy of this field in this state, which is a feature of the path and not of the words. No rule about the sentence, no etiquette of what to say, can capture this, because the rule would have to specify the words and the appropriateness is not in the words. Only a perception of the field's state discerns it, which is why field-building needs perception and not a rulebook.

This already says something the genealogy could not. The witnesses reported that the appropriate overflows every rule, but they did not say why, and the framework now does. The appropriate overflows rules because a rule specifies a step, a type of gesture to be performed under a type of condition, whereas appropriateness is a feature of what a step does to a path, and no specification of steps can capture a feature of paths, since the same step does opposite things to different paths. The over-spilling of rules by the appropriate is not a mysterious surplus of the ethical over the codifiable; it is the ordinary consequence of holonomy being path-dependent, of value living in the trajectory and not in the move. A rule-follower performs the right type of act and still flattens the field, because the rightness of the act was never a property of its type. This is the framework's explanation of the very over-spilling the genealogy could only report.

An objection of circularity must be met here, because the account has defined appropriateness as the signature of accumulating holonomy and holonomy, elsewhere in the series, partly in terms of the generative direction that appropriateness was to track, and a critic may charge that the two are defined in a circle, each by the other, so that nothing has been explained. The charge would hold if the account claimed to define appropriateness and holonomy independently and then to discover their connection. It claims no such thing. Appropriateness and accumulating holonomy are not two things whose correspondence is asserted but one thing under two descriptions, the generative direction of the field named once for how it appears to perception, as the fitting, and once for how it stands in the dynamics, as the gaining of the path. There is no circle because there is no inference from

one to the other; there is a single feature given two names appropriate to two interests, the perceiver's and the analyst's. The appearance of circularity comes from expecting a reduction, a definition of the aesthetic term by a prior dynamical one or the reverse, and the account offers no reduction in either direction. It offers an identification: what the perceiver calls fitting and what the dynamics calls gaining are the same direction of the same field, and to say so is not to define each by the other but to say they were never two. The test of an identification is not non-circularity, which is the test of a definition, but fruitfulness, whether seeing the two as one explains what seeing them as two could not, and the account earns its identification by explaining, as the next moves will show, why value is perceptual and why the appropriate overflows rules, neither of which a mere asserted correspondence could explain.

4.7.2 Perception by resolution, not by rule

If appropriateness is the signature of accumulating holonomy, then to perceive it is to register, in the concrete field, whether what is occurring sends the path the generative way, and this registration cannot be the application of a rule for the reason just given, that no rule over steps captures a feature of paths. What it is, instead, is a matter of resolution, in the sense the word carries for an instrument that discriminates finely. A coarse sensibility registers only gross differences in the field, the obvious harmony and the obvious rupture, and is blind to the small deviations that are the early signature of a path beginning to spin; a fine sensibility registers these, perceives the subtle inappropriateness before it has become a gross one, discriminates the slight flattening that a coarse perception would miss until it had compounded. The cultivation the paper is about is the raising of this resolution, the refinement of the sensibility so that it discriminates the accumulating or dissipating character of the field at finer and finer grain, catches the path turning toward the wheel while the turn is still small enough to correct. This is why the matter is one of training rather than instruction: a rule can be taught by telling, but a resolution can be raised only by exercise, by the repeated perceiving that sharpens the discrimination, which is exactly why aesthetic education is an education and not a doctrine, a raising of a perceptual power and not a transmission of a code.

4.7.3 The resolution, at once aesthetic and moral

Now the coupling itself. The sensibility that perceives appropriateness has been described as a power that discriminates, finely, whether a relational field is accumulating holonomy in the generative direction. But this is, in the framework's terms, exactly what it is to perceive the good. The good, throughout this series, has been the generative, the accumulation of holonomy along a path that returns to its root raised, the value that a coupling produces when it continues itself rather than closing or extracting; and the bad has been the flattening, the spinning, the extraction, the turn to the wheel. To perceive whether the field is accumulating generatively just is to perceive whether it is moving toward the good or away from it, because the accumulation and the good are, on this account, the same thing seen once as dynamics and once as value. And to perceive whether a gesture is appropriate just is to perceive whether it sends the path the generative way, which is to perceive whether it is good. The one sensibility, discriminating the accumulating character of the field, perceives the appropriate under its aesthetic description and the good under its ethical description, and these are not two perceptions that happen to coincide but one perception under two descriptions, because the appropriate and the good are one feature of the field, its generative direction, named once for how it appears to perception and once for how it stands to value.

The coupling of the aesthetic and the ethical is one perception under two descriptions, not two perceptions in correspondence. The sensibility perceives the generative direction of the field, registering whether it accumulates holonomy or dissipates it. Described as the perception of the fitting, this registration is aesthetic; described as the perception of the good, it is ethical; but it is a single act of discrimination upon a single feature of the field, the generative direction, which is the appropriate seen by perception and the good seen by valuation. To refine the sensibility upon appropriateness is therefore to refine it upon the good, not as a fortunate side effect but because they were never two targets. This is the mechanism the genealogy reported and could not supply: value is perceptual because the good is a perceptible direction of the field, and the appropriate overflows rules because that direction is a feature of paths, which rules over steps cannot reach.

This is the inside the genealogy lacked. What the witnesses felt from the outside, that to know the good is first to feel it, that just attention is moral action, that the person is completed in the tuning of feeling, the framework now exhibits from within: value-apprehension is perceptual because value is the generative direction of a relational field, and a direction is the kind of thing that is perceived rather than inferred. The feeling-of-value is the registration of accumulating holonomy; the just attention is the fine resolution upon the field's generative direction; the completing music is the cultivation of that resolution to the point where the person perceives the good as readily and immediately as a trained ear perceives a discord. The coupling is no longer a reported coincidence. It is a structural identity of target, one feature of the field perceived under two of its aspects, and the sensibility that the whole paper proposes to cultivate is shown to be a single moral-aesthetic organ, refined upon one thing, the direction in which a shared life is moving.

4.7.4 The direction of grounding

A question about the direction of the account must be answered, because the coupling could be read as grounding the aesthetic in the ethical or the ethical in the aesthetic, and the paper's title and argument commit it to one direction that must be defended. The paper grounds the ethical in the aesthetic, holds that the perception of the good is at bottom a perception of the fitting, that value is apprehended aesthetically before it is reasoned ethically, and this direction might seem arbitrary, a choice that could as well have gone the other way, grounding the aesthetic in a prior ethical apprehension. It is not arbitrary, and the reason is the priority the genealogy established and the mechanism this section supplied. The good is grounded in the aesthetic, and not the reverse, because the good is a perceptible direction of a field, and perception is the mode in which a direction is first apprehended; one does not first reason that the field ought to gain and then perceive that it does, but first perceives the gaining or the flattening and only then, if at all, articulates it as a principle. The aesthetic perception is prior because the apprehension of the field's direction is prior, and the ethical articulation is posterior because it is the putting-into-principle of what was first perceived. To ground the aesthetic in the ethical would reverse this, would make the perception of the fitting depend on a prior grasp of a principle of the good, and that reversal is refuted by the genealogy's central finding,

that value is perceived before it is reasoned, the finding the witnesses reached from every direction. The direction of grounding follows the order of apprehension, the perceived before the reasoned, the fitting before the principled, and so the ethical is grounded in the aesthetic and not the reverse, because the aesthetic perception of the field's direction is the apprehension on which any ethical articulation of it must draw.

This direction has a consequence worth drawing out, because it explains why the cultivation of the moral life must pass through the cultivation of perception and cannot be accomplished by the teaching of principles alone. If the good is perceived before it is reasoned, then a moral education that taught only principles, only the articulated rules of the good, would be building on a foundation it had not laid, teaching the articulation of a perception it had not cultivated, and its principles would be empty in those who could not perceive what the principles articulate. This is the deep reason the paper has insisted that aesthetic education grounds moral formation, that to cultivate the perception of the fitting is to cultivate the apprehension on which all moral articulation draws, and that a moral education neglecting this perception would be teaching the names of a good its students could not see. The direction of grounding is thus not a technical choice but the source of the paper's central practical claim, that the cultivation of the moral life must begin in the cultivation of perception, because the good is perceived before it is reasoned and the perception is what the reasoning articulates, so that to neglect the perception is to articulate into a void.

4.7.5 The predictive reading, kept to its level

One clarification keeps this account honest about its own machinery. To say that perceiving appropriateness is a matter of resolution invites the predictive reading developed in the perception section, on which the sensibility is the precision-weighted apparatus that registers deviation in the field, and that reading may be carried here, but only at the level it was assigned. The resolution of the sensibility may be read alongside the precision with which a predictive system weights the evidence of the field against its priors, and the raising of resolution by cultivation may be read alongside a learned change in that weighting; these are legitimate implementation-level glosses, and they leave an observable signature, as the interface section set out. What they do not do is constitute the perception of the good. The good is the generative direction of the field, a feature

in the relational world, and the precision-weighting is the implementation-level trace of a sensibility tuned to it, not the good itself and not the perception of it. The coupling holds at the level of what is perceived, the generative direction under two descriptions, and the predictive machinery is the mechanism by which a brain participates in that perception, kept firmly to its station so that the moral-aesthetic organ is not quietly reduced to a precision parameter it merely leaves its traces in.

4.7.6 The philosophical position of the identification

The identification at the heart of this section, that appropriateness is the perceptible signature of accumulating holonomy and that value is that accumulation, is the paper's most consequential claim, and it would be evasive to leave its philosophical position unstated, since it appears to take sides in the oldest dispute in metaethics, the dispute over whether the good is a natural property. The position must be stated carefully, because it is neither of the two stances the dispute usually offers, and its difference from both is exactly what the dialectical-materialist commitment requires.

The identification is naturalistic in a definite sense: it locates value in a feature of the natural world, the accumulation of holonomy along the path of a real relational field, and not in a non-natural property apprehended by a special faculty nor in an attitude projected onto a valueless world. Value, on this account, is the generative direction of a real field, and a direction of a real field is as natural as the field, so that the good is a natural feature and its perception a natural process. This places the account against non-naturalism, which would make the good a property of a wholly different order from the natural facts, and against the projectivism that would make value a stain the valuing subject casts upon a neutral world, since on this account the accumulation is really there, in the field, before it is perceived, and the perception registers it rather than projecting it.

Yet the identification does not commit the error that the open-question argument was designed to expose, the error of defining the good as some natural property such that it remains always sensible to ask, of that property, whether it is really good. The argument observes that for any natural property proposed as the definition of the good, the question whether that property is good remains open, which it would not if the property were what

good meant, and it concludes that the good is not definable as a natural property. The identification here is not vulnerable, because it does not claim that appropriateness means accumulating holonomy in the way a definition claims synonymy, nor that one could derive, from the bare concept of the good, that it is holonomy. It claims an identification of reference and not of sense, that the feature in the world that our value-perception is of is the generative direction of a field, in the way that water is identified with a certain molecular structure without the word water meaning that structure and without its being a conceptual truth that water is it. The open question remains askable because the identification is not analytic, and its remaining askable is no objection, just as it is no objection to the identification of water with its molecular structure that one can ask, without contradiction, whether water is really that. The identification is synthetic, a claim about what value is in the world and not about what the word means, and the open-question argument touches only the analytic claim it does not make.

This synthetic, referential naturalism is the position the dialectical-materialist commitment requires, and seeing why completes the section. A materialism must hold that value is a feature of the real material world and not a non-natural addition nor a subjective projection, which is the naturalism the identification asserts. But a dialectical materialism must also refuse the reductive naturalism that would identify the good with some simple natural property fixed once and for all, abstracted from the relations and the development in which it is actually found, and the identification refuses exactly this, because the holonomy that value is identified with is not a simple property of a thing but a feature of the path of a relation, variable in its content across relations, developing across time, graspable only in the dynamics of a field and not in any static property of an object. The good is natural, but it is the naturalness of a relational and developing process, not of a fixed property, and this is the difference between the materialist dialectic and the mechanical materialism that would reduce value to a thing's measurable feature. The identification is naturalistic against non-naturalism and projectivism, referential and not analytic against the open-question argument, and relational and developmental against the reductive naturalism that would fix the good as a simple property, and these three differences together locate it as the materialist-dialectical position on the nature of value, the position that value is the real generative direction of a real relational field, natural and relational and developing, perceived and not projected, and reducible to no static

property of any thing.

4.8. Refinement Is Not Direction: The Orthogonality Guard

The two preceding sections are dangerous if left alone. The genealogy showed the aesthetic and the ethical to be coupled across the tradition; the mechanism showed them to be one perception under two descriptions, the sensibility a single moral-aesthetic organ. Taken without what follows, this invites a conclusion the whole paper must refuse, that to refine the sensibility is to become good, that the cultivated perceiver is by his cultivation the just one, that aesthetic education guarantees ethical formation. The conclusion is false, and its falsity is not a minor qualification but a load-bearing part of the account, because a philosophy of aesthetic education that did not face it would be the aestheticism its critics have always, and often rightly, feared, the doctrine that the fine soul is the good soul and that beauty and virtue rise together by nature. They do not always rise together. A sensibility can be exquisitely refined and exquisitely unjust, and any account of aesthetic education that cannot say how owes its readers an explanation it does not have. This section provides it, and the provision is the same orthogonality the series established for cycles in general, brought to bear on the sensibility itself.

4.8.1 The counterexample that will not go away

The objection has a name in the history of the twentieth century, and it should be stated at full strength rather than softened. There were regimes, and there have been smaller cruelties without number, in which a genuine and highly cultivated aesthetic sensibility coexisted with, and even served, atrocity: the commandant who wept at the cello and returned to his work, the refined taste that ordered beautiful things and unbeautiful deaths with the same discriminating hand. This is not the philistinism of the brute who feels nothing; it is the more disturbing case of a real fineness of perception that does not issue in justice and may even lend its fineness to injustice, dressing domination in a beauty that makes it more seductive and not less. The case will not go away because it is real and because it is precisely the case the coupling account seems to rule out. If the sensibility that perceives the appropriate is one with the sensibility that perceives the good, how is the exquisite torturer possible, who perceives the appropriate with such

delicacy and the good not at all? An account that cannot answer has been refuted by the cello.

The case is sharper still at the scale this paper works in, the scale of the intimate field, because there it wears no uniform and commits no atrocity, and so is harder to recognise and more common.

An illustrative case — [. The beautiful house built on one person's disappearance] Consider a shared life of real and perceptible beauty. The mornings are finely made, the rhythms tended, the placement of things exact, the contingencies caught and shared; the field, by every dynamical measure, accumulates, and the perception that builds it is genuinely refined, not a performance of refinement but a true fineness of attention to the state of the field and the appropriate gesture within it. And one of the two is the fuel. The beauty is sustained by her continual small self-erasures, her preferences quietly dropped, her perceptions deferred, her generativity spent entirely on the field's accumulation and never on her own, so that the spiral the other perceives so finely is driven by the steady burning of her. The other's perception is not false; he sees the field's accumulating beauty truly, and he is not a brute who feels nothing but a man of real sensibility who has simply never been made to perceive that the beauty he attends to so finely is paid for by her disappearance. His fineness is real and bears on the field's accumulation; his blindness is real and bears on who fuels it; and nothing in the first supplies the second. This is the exquisite torturer brought home, and he is not rare. He is the refined partner whose refinement has never once turned to ask who pays for the beauty he perceives so well.

This intimate form of the case is the one the paper most needs to meet, because it is the failure its own account of field-building could most easily produce: a cultivation that raised the perception of the field's accumulation to great fineness while leaving wholly untouched the question of who, within the accumulating field, is being consumed to drive it. An aesthetic education that did only what it says it does, refine the perception of the generative direction, would produce exactly this man, fine and unseeing, and it is to forestall him that the orthogonality must be established and built into the cultivation as a separate and standing demand.

4.8.2 Two features of the field, not one

The answer requires distinguishing two features of a relational field that the coupling account, stated baldly, runs together, and the distinction is the one the series has drawn before between the dynamical and the just. The first feature is the field's generative direction, whether it accumulates holonomy or dissipates it, whether the path returns to its root raised or closes on its origin flat. This is what the sensibility, refined, perceives finely, and it is what the previous section called the appropriate-and-good seen as one. The second feature is altogether different: it is the question of who, within the field, is rendered mere fuel for its accumulation, whether the holonomy that the field gains is gained by treating one of its members as material to be consumed, a means whose own generativity is extracted to feed another's. A field can accumulate holonomy beautifully, the path spiralling upward, the perception of its accumulation exquisitely fine, while one of its members is the fuel being burned to drive the spiral. The fineness of the perception bears on the first feature, the accumulating character of the field. It is silent on the second, the justice of who pays for the accumulation.

Refinement of the sensibility and justice of direction are orthogonal. The sensibility, refined, perceives finely the generative direction of the field, whether it accumulates holonomy or dissipates it; this is the aesthetic-and-ethical perception the coupling section established. It does not thereby perceive whether the accumulation is achieved by rendering a member of the field mere fuel, for that is a distinct feature, the justice of the field, which concerns who pays for the accumulation rather than whether accumulation occurs. A field may accumulate beautifully upon the consumption of one of its members, and a sensibility may perceive that accumulation with great fineness while remaining blind, or indifferent, to the consumption. Fineness of perception is therefore no guarantee of justice, and the cultivated sensibility is not by its cultivation the just one.

This is the orthogonality the series proved for cycles, now located in the perceiver. There it was shown that the dynamical criterion, whether a cycle is generative, and the justice criterion, whether someone is rendered mere fuel, are independent, so that a cycle can be generative and unjust at once. Here the same independence is shown to hold for the

sensibility that perceives the cycle: a perception refined upon the generative direction is not thereby a perception of the justice of the field, because the generative direction and the justice are two features, and to be fine upon the one is not to be even awake to the other. The exquisite torturer is possible because his fineness is real and pertains to the first feature, the accumulating character of his field, while his blindness pertains to the second, the fuel his accumulation consumes, and nothing in the refinement of the first supplies the second. The cello is not a fraud. It is a fine perception of a real beauty in a field whose justice the perceiver has never been made to see.

4.8.3 The survival of the coupling under the orthogonality

It might seem that the orthogonality destroys the coupling the previous two sections built, that if fineness does not deliver justice then the aesthetic and the ethical have come apart after all. They have not, and seeing why is essential. The coupling was always a coupling of one perception to one register of value, the generative direction perceived as appropriate and as good; it was never the claim that this one perception exhausts the ethical. Justice, the question of who is rendered fuel, is a further ethical matter, not captured by the generative direction and not perceived by the sensibility refined upon it, and the coupling section's good was always the generativity of the field and not the whole of the ethical. So the orthogonality does not break the coupling; it bounds it. The aesthetic and the ethical are one at the level of the generative direction, which the sensibility perceives under both descriptions; they are two at the level of justice, which the sensibility does not perceive at all. The coupling holds within its domain and is silent outside it, and the orthogonality marks exactly where its domain ends, at the line between whether the field accumulates and who pays for the accumulation.

This is why aesthetic education, as this paper conceives it, requires a second cultivation that it does not itself supply, and why the paper has never claimed that the refinement of the sensibility is the whole of moral formation. The refinement makes the perceiver fine upon the generative direction, able to build fields that accumulate and to perceive the accumulation at fine grain; it does not make the perceiver attend to who, in the accumulating field, is being consumed. That attending is a separate discipline, the cultivation of a regard for whether the members of one's field are treated as ends generating their own value or as fuel feeding another's, and the field-builder who has only the first cultivation is

the dangerous figure the counterexample named, fine and unjust, the more dangerous for being fine. The paper's account of aesthetic education is therefore deliberately incomplete as an account of moral formation, and the incompleteness is honest rather than evasive: it says exactly what aesthetic education does, raise the resolution upon the generative direction, and exactly what it does not do, supply the regard for justice, and it refuses to let the first masquerade as the second.

4.8.4 The guard carried into the practice

The orthogonality is not only a theoretical safeguard but a practical instruction, and it bears directly on the four-step cultivation. At each step the danger has a specific face. A perception refined upon contingency can be a perception that sees, with exquisite delicacy, the accumulating beauty of a field built upon another's consumption. A reception can welcome a beauty whose production rests on rendering the other fuel. A sharing can be a joint attention between two who are accumulating beautifully upon a third who is being burned. A reproduction can thicken, cycle upon cycle, a good cycle that is unjust at its root. The four-step model, left to its dynamical criterion alone, cultivates the generative direction and is silent on the justice, exactly as the sensibility is, and so the model must carry the orthogonality guard within it as a standing question, asked at every step alongside the question of accumulation: not only whether this field is gaining, but who, if anyone, is being made to pay for the gain. This question is not answered by any refinement of perception, because it is orthogonal to refinement; it must be asked deliberately, as a discipline distinct from and additional to the cultivation of the sensibility, and an aesthetic education that did not install it would produce the fine and the unjust with great efficiency. The guard is the paper's insistence that the cultivation of beauty, even relational beauty, even the beauty of accumulating fields, is necessary and not sufficient for the good, and that the gap between the necessary and the sufficient is exactly the place where justice does its separate, unglamorous, indispensable work.

4.8.5 The coexistence of the two cultivations

If the cultivation of the sensibility and the cultivation of the regard for justice are orthogonal, a question arises about how they are to be held together in a single education, since orthogonality might seem to make them two unrelated curricula awkwardly juxtaposed.

The question is fair and the answer shows the orthogonality to be a relation between distinct things rather than a separation of unrelated ones. The two cultivations are orthogonal in that neither delivers the other, the refinement of perception not yielding the regard for justice and the regard for justice not yielding the refinement of perception; but they are not unrelated, because they bear on the same field and are exercised in the same acts, the one asking whether the field gains and the other asking who pays for the gain, both questions about the one field the builder is building. They are therefore not two curricula but two questions asked of one practice, distinct in that the answer to one does not give the answer to the other, joined in that both are asked, at every step, of the same field-building act. The education that installs both is not a juxtaposition of unrelated trainings but a single training in which two distinct questions are made habitual, the question of accumulation and the question of justice, asked together of each act though neither is reducible to the other.

This coexistence has a definite structure, and naming it completes the account. The question of accumulation is the question the sensibility answers, by perceiving whether the field gains, and its cultivation is the raising of the perception's resolution. The question of justice is not answered by the sensibility at all, by the orthogonality, and so its cultivation cannot be the raising of the same perception's resolution; it must be the installation of a distinct habit, the habit of asking, of each accumulating field, who within it is rendered fuel, a habit that does not perceive the answer in the way the sensibility perceives accumulation but raises the question that the perception of accumulation would otherwise never raise. The regard for justice is thus a cultivated interruption of the sensibility's absorption in accumulation, a habit of stepping back from the perception of the gaining field to ask the question the gaining field does not pose, and the education that installs it is the cultivation of this stepping-back alongside the cultivation of the perception it interrupts. The two coexist as a perception and its disciplined interruption, the fine seeing of the field's gain and the habitual question that the fine seeing does not contain, and an aesthetic education worthy of the name cultivates both, the resolution that perceives accumulation and the regard that asks, of every accumulation, whether it is just.

4.9. The Three Beauties and the Beauty of Perception

The reduction chain has reached its terminus, the reframing of field-building as aesthetic education, and the coupling and its orthogonality guard have been set out. What remains, before the four-step cultivation can be developed in detail, is to lay out the structure of the capacity that the cultivation builds, and that structure has three parts. The capacity to build a generative field is at once a capacity to perceive, a capacity to practise, and a capacity to maintain, and these are not three separate skills but three faces of a single trained sensibility, distinguished by what they do in the cycle the field-building enacts. This section introduces the three and develops the first; the two that follow develop the others. The three together are the static anatomy of the capacity, the cross-section of what a field-builder has; the four-step model that comes later is the same capacity in motion, the cycle that the anatomy turns. It is worth holding both pictures, the anatomy and the cycle, because each shows what the other cannot, the parts and their turning.

4.9.1 Three faces of one sensibility

The capacity to build a generative field decomposes into three, by a division that follows the structure of any generative act. To build a field one must first perceive its state, register where it stands and what here would be appropriate; this is the beauty of perception, the input face, the discernment of the field as it is. One must then act upon it, perform the gesture, make the placement, that sends the path the generative way; this is the beauty of practice, the output face, the generation of appropriateness in the concrete act. And one must sustain this across time, keep the field accumulating through repetition rather than letting it dull or spin, return to it and turn it again without flattening; this is the beauty of maintenance, the temporal face, the holding of the good cycle in time. Perception discerns the direction, practice sends the path that way, maintenance keeps it turning, and the three are one sensibility because the same resolution upon the field's generative direction underlies all three, perceiving it, acting to extend it, and sustaining the action across cycles.

These map onto the inference and action of a single generative process, which is why they are faces and not separate faculties. Perception is the inferential moment, the registration of the field's state; practice is the active moment, the intervention that alters

the state toward accumulation; and maintenance is the persistence of the inference-and-action across time, the keeping of the process turning rather than letting it run down. The unity matters because it forbids a mistake the tradition has made, the treating of aesthetic education as the cultivation of perception alone, the refinement of a taste that discerns without building or sustaining. A sensibility that perceived the field finely but could not act to build it, or could build it once but not sustain it, would not be the capacity this paper is about, which is the capacity to build generative fields and not merely to appreciate them. The three faces must be cultivated together, and their cultivation together is what the four-step model, taken up later, organises into a single turning cycle.

The order in which the three are presented, perception then practice then maintenance, is not arbitrary, and saying why it is the right order shows how the three depend on one another. Perception comes first because the other two presuppose it: one cannot act to build a field whose state one has not perceived, since the apt act is apt to a state, and one cannot sustain across time a field one cannot perceive to be flattening or gaining, since maintenance is the correction of a drift that must first be seen. Practice comes second because it presupposes perception and is presupposed by maintenance: it acts upon what perception has registered, and maintenance is the repetition across time of the perceiving-and-acting that practice, in a single instance, performs. Maintenance comes third because it is the temporal extension of the first two, the keeping-turning of a cycle whose single turn is a perceiving and an acting. The order is thus an order of dependence, each face presupposing the one before, and it is also the order of the cycle, perception opening onto practice and practice settling into the maintenance that returns to perception. But the dependence does not make the later faces less important than the earlier, and here the tradition's error must be guarded against from the other side. That perception comes first in the order of dependence does not make it first in importance, as though the others were mere applications of a primary discernment; on the contrary, as the section on practice will argue, in the intimate field it is practice that is dominant, the building on which the field's accumulation actually turns, and perception is subordinate to the practice it serves. The order of presentation follows dependence; the order of importance follows the field's state and is read dialectically; and the two orders must not be confused, on pain of reinstating, as a doctrine of perception's primacy, the very

over-valuation of discernment that the unity of the three faces was meant to correct.

4.9.2 The beauty of perception

The beauty of perception is the discernment of the field's state, the registration of where it stands, whether it is accumulating or spinning, and what here, in this state, would be appropriate. It is the face of the sensibility that the coupling section analysed as resolution: a fine perception discriminates the field's generative direction at fine grain, catches the slight flattening before it compounds, registers the small contingency that a coarse perception would absorb without trace. To perceive the field beautifully is to see it as it is, undistorted by the prior that would pre-sort it and undimmed by the habit that would render it invisible, and the cultivation of this face is the raising of the resolution upon the field's state to the point where its accumulating or dissipating character is perceived immediately, as a trained ear perceives a discord. The detailed account of how this perception is possible, and of the traditions that contend over what seeing the field is, is the work of the section that follows this part; here the task is to place perception within the anatomy of the capacity and to draw the analysis of its principal and secondary aspect that the method requires.

An illustrative case — [. The coarse and the fine perception of one evening] Two partners come home to the same evening, and the difference between a coarse and a fine perception of it can be made plain. The coarse perception registers only the gross states: the other is plainly angry, or plainly happy, or plainly fine, and below the threshold of the plain nothing is seen. To such a perception the evening presents itself as one of a few large categories, and the field is read only when its state has become unmistakable, which is usually too late to do anything but react to what has already compounded. The fine perception registers what the coarse one misses: the small tightness beneath the reported fineness, the slight flatness in a greeting that says the day went harder than the words admit, the faint lift that means something went unexpectedly well, the early and subtle signature of a field beginning to flatten while the flattening is still small enough to meet. The two perceptions face the same evening; one sees three or four states and the other sees a continuous and finely graded field, and the difference is the resolution the cultivation raises. It is the difference between a perception that reads the field only when its state

has become gross and a perception that reads the field while its state is still subtle, which is the difference between meeting a drift while it is small and meeting it only after it has compounded into something no longer easily met.

4.9.3 The principal and secondary aspect within perception

The method announced that each contradiction has a dominant and a subordinate aspect, and that the two can transform into one another, and the analysis applies within the beauty of perception itself, where it concerns the contradiction between perceiving the field's whole state and perceiving the particular contingency within it. These are two moments of perception, the registration of the field as a standing condition and the catching of the singular unplanned thing that occurs within it, and in the perception of an intimate field they are not equally weighted. The catching of the contingency is the dominant aspect, because the field's state is most truthfully revealed in how it meets the unplanned, the contingency being the place where a flattening prior is most exposed and a living perception most tested; a perception that registered the standing state but missed the contingencies would be a perception of the field's surface and not its life. Yet the two transform into one another. When a relation has become so volatile that every moment is contingency and no standing state can be read, the dominant aspect shifts to the registration of the whole, the recovery of a sense of where the field stands beneath the churn, without which the contingencies cannot even be placed. The dominant aspect is the catching of contingency in the ordinary case and the registration of the whole in the volatile one, and which dominates is read from the field, as the method requires, rather than fixed in advance.

This is the first instance, set out in full so that the later instances can be brief, of the aspect-analysis the method promised, and it shows the analysis doing real work rather than decorating the exposition. It tells the field-builder where, within the work of perception, attention now belongs: ordinarily on the contingency, the unplanned thing that reveals the field's life, but in the volatile field on the recovery of the whole, without which the unplanned cannot be read. The same will hold, with different content, for practice and for maintenance, each carrying its own contradiction between a dominant and a subordinate aspect, each transforming as the field's state changes, and each to be

read from the field rather than legislated. The anatomy of the capacity is thus not static after all, even in cross-section, because each of its faces carries within it a contradiction whose dominant aspect migrates, and the reading of those migrations is the standing exercise of the very sensibility the anatomy describes.

4.10. The Field Becomes Visible: Perception and Its Contending Theories

应无所住而生其心。

Diamond Sutra

The first movement of the cycle was stated almost too gently. To perceive the field is to let appropriateness be seen, to suspend the projection of purpose and leave room for what is there to show itself. Put that way it sounds like a counsel of attentiveness, the sort of thing one nods at and forgets. Underneath the gentle formulation lie several complete and mutually incompatible theories of how perception is possible at all, each with its own mechanism, its own training, and its own metaphysical commitment, and they do not agree. A predictive brain, a mind resting in undivided awareness, and a body absorbed in a world are three different answers to the question of where seeing happens and what it would take to see better. This section sets them against one another rather than gathering them into a comfortable plurality, because the disagreements are real and because the framework of this series is not neutral among them. What looks like a single instruction, leave room for the field to appear, turns out to name at least three distinct operations, and the work of the section is to show how they stand to one another and where the present account must take sides.

4.10.1 The problem: why appropriateness goes unseen

Begin with the phenomenon the instruction addresses. In the ordinary conduct of a shared life most of what passes goes unregistered. The table is set, the greeting returned, the cup placed, and none of it is seen, in the sense that none of it presents itself as bearing appropriateness or its lack. This is not a failure of the eyes. It is the normal condition of competent absorption in a familiar world, and it has a function: a life in

which every placement of every cup demanded fresh appraisal would be unlivable. The cost of the function is that the field becomes invisible exactly where it is most lived in. Appropriateness goes unseen not because it is hidden but because seeing it requires the interruption of a fluency that exists precisely in order not to be interrupted.

So the instruction to leave room is an instruction to interrupt something, and the disagreements among the traditions can be located with some precision once we ask what, exactly, is to be interrupted. One tradition says the thing to be loosened is the grip of the prior, the top-down expectation that flattens the field into what was predicted. Another says the thing to be loosened is conceptual division itself, the movement by which awareness, the instant it arises, is overlaid with names and with the split into a seer and a seen. A third says the thing to be loosened is the absorption of the thing into its use, the readiness-to-hand in which the cup disappears into the drinking. These are not three names for one operation. They cut at different joints, they prescribe different trainings, and whether they are aspects of a single thing seen from three sides is a question to be argued rather than assumed. The remainder of the section states each in turn and then asks where they conflict.

To keep the contest concrete, it helps to fix a single ordinary case and to ask of each tradition what it would say about the same small event, since the disagreements are easiest to feel when they are disagreements about one thing rather than three.

An illustrative case — [. A morning, and a sentence that was not foreseen] Two people share a morning that has its shape. The coffee is made in the order it is always made, the table laid as it is always laid, and into this familiar shape the one says something the other did not expect, a remark slightly off the rhythm of the mornings before it, carrying a small weight that the routine did not predict. The remark is a contingency, a thing that need not have been said and was. It can pass entirely unregistered, absorbed into the morning's fluency as though it had been one more expected motion; or it can be seen, registered as bearing something, a slight shift in the field that asks to be met. The whole question of perceiving the field is the question of what divides the morning in which the remark is absorbed without trace from the morning in which it is seen, and each of the traditions that follows gives that division a different name.

4.10.2 The predictive route

On the first account, perception is not the reception of a given but the brain's active construction of its best hypothesis about the causes of its input, continually corrected by the error between what was predicted and what arrived (Clark 2013; Friston 2010). Seeing is inference. To see appropriateness in the field is, in this language, to keep the weight assigned to incoming evidence from being overwhelmed by the weight assigned to the prior, so that the small deviation, the unplanned thing, the way the light fell or the way the answer came, is not silently explained away by what was expected. The relevant variable is the balance of precision: how much the system trusts its prediction relative to its evidence. A strong prior, heavily weighted, flattens the field, because it can account for almost anything in advance and so registers almost nothing as surprising. Training, on this account, is the modulation of that balance, a learned refusal to let expectation suppress the senses, and it has the great advantage of being measurable, since the system's responsiveness to deviation leaves traces that can be looked for.

This route is powerful and it is the one the implementation section will lean on, but its metaphysical commitment must be marked, because it is the commitment that will later force a choice. The predictive account is naturalistic and representational. Perception is inference performed by an internal model, and the model is housed in a single cranium, building its estimate of an external world from sensory evidence. Seeing the field, on this account, is one organism's improved estimate of its surroundings. That is a coherent and fertile picture, and it sits in tension with the claim of relational aesthetics that the perception in question has its proper site in the coupling rather than in either pole alone. A theory on which seeing is what one brain does to its input cannot, without modification, be the whole theory of a seeing whose object is an event between. The tension is not yet a refutation. It is a debt, and the section records it now in order to discharge it later.

On this account the morning's remark is absorbed or seen according to the precision the hearer's system assigns. Where the prior is heavily weighted, the morning has been so thoroughly predicted that the remark is explained away before it can register, folded into the expected shape of every prior morning, its small deviation absorbed by a model confident enough to account for it in advance; the hearer has, in the literal sense the account intends, predicted the remark out of existence. Where the weight on evidence is

kept high enough, the deviation survives, the remark arrives as a genuine surprise that the model did not anticipate, and the prediction error it raises is the signal that something in the field has shifted. The training the account recommends is the learned lowering of the prior's weight, the cultivated refusal to let the confident model of the morning suppress the evidence of this morning, and its great strength is that this lowering should be visible, a measurable change in how much the system responds to the deviation it once would have absorbed. What the account cannot say, and does not pretend to say, is anything about the two who share the morning as two; the remark is, for it, an input to one hearer's model, and the seeing of it is that model's improved estimate, which is precisely the limitation that will force the account to its proper level later.

4.10.3 The Buddhist route

The second account stands in the sharpest opposition to the first, and it is the one most consonant with the roots this series has drawn on. Its diagnosis is that appropriateness goes unseen because perception, the instant it arises, is covered over by conceptual division: by names, by the sorting of what appears into kinds already held, and above all by the split into a perceiving subject set over against a perceived object. The single-practice absorption named in the early sutras and reread by the Chan tradition, 一行三昧 (*yix-ing sanmei*), is not a withdrawal from the ordinary into a special state but a sustained, undivided directness maintained through walking, standing, sitting, and lying, in which moment after moment no discrimination is raised. Alongside it the contemplative analysis of 止观 and the Yogacara category of direct perception, 现量 (*pratyaksa*), the immediate apprehension that precedes the imposition of name and concept, point together at one thing: what obscures the field is not a deficit of representation but the very activity of representing, the reflex by which bare awareness is instantly furnished with a subject, an object, and a label binding them.

To see appropriateness, on this account, is therefore not to represent the field more accurately but to relax the structure of representation as such, to let what appears appear before the split that would set a viewer over against a viewed. The training is neither the modulation of a parameter nor the disruption of habit but a kind of keeping: to let awareness rest, undivided, so that when discrimination arises it is noticed and not followed. The metaphysical commitment is non-dual and anti-representational, and it is

for this reason that the Buddhist route cannot simply be folded into the predictive one. Where predictive processing says perception is the inference of a subject about an object, this tradition says that the subject-object structure is itself the obscuration, and that the deepest seeing is the one in which that structure has gone quiet. Held together, the two accounts do not describe the same operation at different levels. They make incompatible claims about whether the seer-seen structure is the apparatus of perception or the veil over it, and the section will have to say how that incompatibility is to be borne.

The Chan rereading of the single-practice absorption sharpens this and removes a likely misunderstanding. When the Platform Sutra glosses the practice, it refuses the picture of a special seated state cut off from ordinary life, the picture of one who would sit fixed and empty and call that the practice; the single practice is rather the maintaining of a direct and undivided heart in all the ordinary postures, walking and standing and sitting and lying, throughout every activity of the day (Huineng 2012). The point is exactly that the practice belongs to the morning and the coffee and the laid table and not to a withdrawal from them, which is what makes it a candidate for an aesthetic education of the everyday rather than an escape from the everyday into contemplation. To rest undivided is not to cease the morning's activity but to conduct it without raising, at each step, the grid of name and verdict and the split of a self against its world; awareness stays direct, and when the dividing reflex arises it is seen and not followed. This is a discipline performed in the midst of the daily and not beside it, and that is the feature the section will need when it asks how any of these trainings could be available in a life with no leisure to withdraw.

Returned to the morning, the Buddhist account locates the obscuration not in a heavily weighted prior but in the reflex that, the instant the remark arrives, overlays it with a verdict and a position: the hearer's instantaneous sorting of the remark into a kind already held, the silent placing of it as the sort of thing she says, the constitution of a hearer set over against a speaker who is thereby fixed as an object understood. On this account the remark goes unseen not because it was predicted but because it was immediately known, captured by a discrimination so fast it feels like perception itself, and what is needed is not the lowering of a weight but the quieting of the dividing reflex, so that the remark may be met before it has been placed, in a directness that has not

yet split into a knower appraising a known. The difference from the predictive reading is not a matter of emphasis. The predictive account would have the hearer weight the evidence of the remark more heavily; the Buddhist account would have the hearer stop performing, for a moment, the very act of knowing-as that the predictive account takes perception to be.

4.10.4 The phenomenological route

The third account lies between the other two and shares the anti-representational instinct of the second without its renunciation of the subject. In the analysis of everyday existence the world is encountered first as ready-to-hand: things are absorbed into their uses, the cup into the drinking, the door into the passing-through, and in this absorption they precisely do not appear as objects with properties. What is most used is least seen. It is when the familiar is broken, when the tool fails or the routine is interrupted, that the thing comes forward and is lit up as what it was, so that appropriateness is most often disclosed at the very point where ordinary fluency is broken off. To this the phenomenology of perception adds that seeing is never in the first place the operation of a mind upon a representation; it is the bodily involvement of a perceiver already in the world, prior to the division into subject and object, the flesh of the perceiver and the flesh of the world caught in a single reversible fold (Merleau-Ponty 1945).

The training that follows from this account is neither the inward keeping of the Buddhist route nor the parameter-tuning of the predictive one. It is the cultivation of a wakefulness to fallen fluency, a practice of letting the familiar grow strange so that what has sunk into use can come forward again and be seen. Art does this, and so does the simple discipline of stopping before a thing one uses every day and looking at it as though for the first time. The metaphysical commitment is anti-representational but retains the perceiver's embodiment and being-in-the-world, and this is why the route sits between the others. It refuses, with the Buddhist account, the picture of a mind representing an external world; it retains, against that account, a perceiving body that is genuinely a subject, though a subject already mingled with what it perceives. The figure of the flesh, the reversible belonging of perceiver and perceived, is very nearly the relational coupling this paper needs, and it is no accident that of the three routes this is the one from which the bridge to relational aesthetics will be shortest.

On this third account the morning's remark goes unseen for a reason different again from the heavy prior and the dividing reflex: it goes unseen because the morning has fallen into use, because the shared breakfast has become a smooth machinery of motions in which each person and each act is absorbed into its function, the other absorbed into her role in the morning as the cup is absorbed into the drinking. In a morning lived wholly as ready-to-hand the remark is not absorbed by a confident prediction nor placed by a fast verdict but simply passed over, because nothing in the fluent machinery comes forward to be seen at all, the other least of all, she having sunk into her use in the morning's smooth running. What lets the remark appear is the small breaking of the fluency, the catch in the machinery where the routine stumbles and the other comes forward, no longer absorbed into her function but standing out as herself, present in a way the fluent morning had kept her from being. The training, accordingly, is the cultivation of a wakefulness that does not wait for the fluency to break of itself but lets the familiar morning grow strange enough that the other can come forward within it, a practised refusal to let the shared life sink so wholly into use that the one who shares it disappears into her role. The bodily accent matters here: the seeing is not a mind's better estimate but the perceiver's whole embodied involvement in the morning catching, for a moment, on the other as a presence and not a function, and that catching is already half of the reversible fold in which the relational coupling will be found.

4.10.5 A Daoist second voice

Before turning to the conflicts, one further voice should be admitted, close to the Buddhist route but not identical with it, and belonging to the same roots. The fasting of the heart in the Zhuangzi, the injunction to attain utmost emptiness and hold to stillness in the Laozi (Zhuangzi 2013; Laozi 1963), describe a receptivity that meets things by first emptying the self of the formed mind that would meet them with a verdict already prepared. Where the Buddhist route emphasises the breaking of discrimination, this Daoist voice emphasises the emptying of the self so that the thing may present itself of its own accord, 虛而待物, vacant and awaiting the thing. The difference is one of accent rather than of doctrine, but the accent matters: the first guards against the imposition of concept, the second against the imposition of the self's prior intent, and the two together mark out, from the Eastern side, both of the impositions that the instruction to leave

room is trying to suspend. The Daoist voice will return when the practical training is described, because emptying-to-await is, of the four, the figure that translates most directly into something one can do before an ordinary act.

4.10.6 A bridge: perceptual expertise

Between the predictive route and the phenomenological one lies a body of empirical work on perceptual expertise that the section should admit, because it occupies the ground the two share and shows the disagreement between them to be narrower, in one respect, than their metaphysical commitments suggest. The study of expert perception, of how the trained radiologist sees the anomaly the novice misses, how the experienced birder identifies in a glance what the beginner cannot resolve, how the chess master perceives the position as a structure where the amateur sees scattered pieces, establishes that perception itself, and not merely judgement downstream of it, is transformed by training. The expert does not reason faster from the same percept; she perceives differently, the relevant structure standing out for her where it was invisible before, and this transformation is the lowering of a threshold, the acquisition of a discrimination that has become perceptual rather than inferential. This is the empirical correlate of what the paper calls the raising of resolution, and it sits between the predictive and phenomenological routes because it can be described in either idiom: as a learned change in the precision-weighting that lets the expert's system register what the novice's predicts away, or as the coming-forward of a structure that for the expert is no longer absorbed into an undifferentiated field. The two idioms describe, here, one well-documented phenomenon, the perceptual transformation wrought by training, and the convergence of the predictive and phenomenological vocabularies upon it suggests that their disagreement, real at the level of ultimate commitment, leaves a wide middle ground where they describe the same thing in different words.

The relevance to the cultivation of the field is direct, and it answers a doubt that might otherwise stand. One might doubt whether the perception of a field's appropriateness can really be trained, whether it is the kind of thing that improves with exercise or merely a sensitivity one has or lacks. The literature on perceptual expertise removes the doubt by establishing, across many domains, that perception of exactly this kind, the discrimination of a structure that no rule specifies, recognised in the concrete and

not derived, is trainable, that exposure and exercise transform it, that the threshold for registering the relevant structure lowers with practice. If the perception of a chess position or a radiograph can be trained from coarse to fine, so, the analogy suggests, can the perception of a relational field, which is a discrimination of the same kind, the recognition of a structure in the concrete that no rule captures. The empirical work does not prove that the field's appropriateness is trainable, since the analogy is not a demonstration, but it establishes that perception of the relevant kind is trainable in general, which removes the doubt that the field might be the one domain where such training is impossible, and lends the paper's central claim, that the perception of appropriateness can be cultivated, the support of a wide body of evidence that perception of its type can be.

4.10.7 Three real conflicts

It would be easy, and false, to arrange these accounts as complementary emphases on a single underlying process. They conflict, and the conflicts are worth stating sharply, because the framework of this series resolves them by taking sides rather than by blending.

The first conflict concerns the site of perception. The predictive route places it inside the cranium, as the inference of an internal model. The phenomenological route places it between, in the bodily fold where perceiver and perceived belong to one another before they are divided. The Buddhist route places it nowhere that the question presupposes, since the very framing of an inside that perceives an outside is, on its account, the obscuration to be undone. These three answers cannot all be true. A seeing that is one brain's estimate of its surroundings is not a seeing that occurs in the reversible fold of flesh, and neither is a seeing in which the inside-outside structure has gone quiet. The framework of relational aesthetics has already committed itself on this point: the perception that matters has its site in the coupling, not in either pole. That commitment is incompatible with taking the predictive account as the whole story, and it leans hard toward the phenomenological and the Buddhist side. The predictive route, on pain of contradicting the concept the paper has built, must be retained as something other than an account of where seeing is. It is retained, as the implementation section will make precise, as the description of an observable trace, not as the ontology of the act.

The second conflict concerns what is to be suspended. The phenomenological route

suspends the usefulness of the ready-to-hand, so that the thing may come forward. The Buddhist route suspends conceptual division, so that the seer-seen split may go quiet. The predictive route suspends nothing in the strict sense; it rebalances, lowering the weight of the prior so that evidence is not overwhelmed. These are different operations with different objects, and a paper that says only leave room for the field has not yet said which suspension it means. The honest answer is that the instruction names all three, pitched at different grains, and that the burden of the present account is to show they are not three unrelated disciplines but three depths of one descent: the rebalancing of the prior is the coarsest and most measurable, the de-automation of use is intermediate, and the quieting of division is the deepest and least capturable. This is a claim, not a definition, and it is argued rather than stipulated. Its argument is that each deeper suspension includes the shallower as a special case: one cannot quiet the seer-seen division while leaving the use-absorption intact, and one cannot de-automate use while leaving a heavily weighted prior to flatten the field in advance. The inclusion runs one way and not the other, which is why the three can be ordered as depths rather than merely juxtaposed as alternatives.

4.10.8 The hardest step: non-division grounds discrimination

The third conflict is the dangerous one, and meeting it is the labour the section exists for. The Buddhist route demands the relinquishing of discrimination; this paper demands that the perceiver *discriminate*, finely, whether the field is accumulating holonomy or spinning in place, what here is appropriate and what is not. On its face the demand for non-discrimination cancels the discriminating power the account needs. If to see well is to let all division go quiet, how can to see well also be to register, with great delicacy, the difference between a coupling that gains and one that merely turns? The objection is not a quibble. It threatens to make the Buddhist route and the framework of this series simply inconsistent, so that one of them must be given up.

The resolution turns on a distinction internal to the Buddhist analysis itself, and it is the same shape as the distinction this series has drawn elsewhere between two kinds of repetition and two kinds of trust. What the practice dissolves is the deluded discrimination, 妄分別, the conceptual, subject-against-object sorting that overlays bare awareness with a grid of prior verdicts. It does not dissolve, and in the developed accounts it positively

makes possible, the subtle discernment that the tradition calls the wisdom of wondrous discernment, 妙观察智, the differentiating knowledge that belongs to the awareness recovered after the deluded grid has gone quiet. The order is the whole point. First the deluded division is let go; only then does appropriateness show itself as it is, undistorted by the prior that would have pre-sorted it; and the fine discrimination of good accumulation from bad is exercised upon what is then disclosed.

Non-division grounds discrimination rather than abolishing it. What contemplative practice quiets is the deluded, conceptual, subject-against-object division that pre-sorts the field; what it makes possible is the subtle discernment of appropriateness, which can be exercised only upon a field that has first been let appear undistorted. The perception of holonomy that this account requires is not the survival of ordinary discrimination through the practice but its refinement on the far side of the practice. Letting go of the deluded grid is the condition of the finer seeing, not its casualty.

A second and harder form of the objection presses past this, and it must be met or the resolution will seem too easy. Grant the distinction between deluded and subtle discrimination; still, the framework asks the perceiver not merely to discern finely but to *care* whether the field gains or spins, to be invested in the difference, to want the coupling to accumulate, and this caring, the objection runs, is exactly the grasping, the abiding, the attachment to an outcome that the contemplative traditions name as the deepest obscuration of all. A perception that wants the field to gain is a perception bent by desire, and a desire-bent perception is precisely what cannot see what is, since it sees what it wishes. On this stronger form, it is not discrimination that the practice and the framework fight over but investment, and the framework's investment in accumulation seems to reintroduce, at the level of caring, the very grasping the practice exists to release.

The answer is given by the line that stands at the head of this section, and it is the most exact possible statement of the resolution: to give rise to the heart that abides nowhere. The teaching does not say to give rise to no heart, to care about nothing, to perceive without investment; it says to give rise to the heart, to let the caring arise, while abiding nowhere, without fixing it upon a possessed outcome clung to against loss. The caring the

framework requires is of this kind, or can be cultivated to be: an investment in the field's gaining that does not grasp at a particular result, a wanting the coupling to accumulate that does not seize the accumulation as a thing to be had and defended. This is the difference between desiring that the field gain and demanding that it gain in a specified way by a specified time, between a care that remains open to what the field actually does and an attachment that has already decided what it must do and sees only its own demand. The non-abiding heart cares and does not grasp, perceives the field's direction with full investment and without the seizure that would bend the perceiving, and it is exactly this heart, caring yet unabiding, that the framework's perceiver must cultivate. Far from reintroducing the grasping, the resolution shows the framework's investment to be the very thing the teaching describes, a heart that arises and abides nowhere, and the strongest form of the objection inverts like the first: the contemplative tradition does not forbid the caring the framework needs but specifies its non-grasping form.

This second inversion is the same movement as the first and belongs with it. The first showed that letting go of deluded division founds the subtle discernment; the second shows that letting go of grasping investment founds the open caring; and both are the one counsel that runs through every step of this paper, to generate without possessing, brought to the conditions of perception. To see the field well is to discriminate finely without the deluded grid and to care fully without the grasping seizure, and these two are not separate achievements but one, the single bearing of a perception that meets the field invested and unattached, discerning and undivided, which is what the cultivation of the beauty of perception finally trains.

If this is right, then the most threatening of the three conflicts inverts into the deepest support. The Buddhist route does not take away the discriminating power the framework needs; it grounds it, by clearing the prior that would otherwise have done the discriminating in advance and badly. This is the same movement that the paper performs at each of the four steps, the movement in which a relinquishing of grasp turns out to found rather than forbid a generation. Here it is the relinquishing of conceptual seizure that founds the finer sight. The shape will recur, at reception as the mirror that meets without storing, at sharing as the union that preserves rather than dissolves difference, at reproduction as the accumulation that does not hoard. Each is one face of the same ancient counsel,

to generate without possessing and to act without holding, read into the conditions of perception, of welcome, of the between, and of time.

4.10.9 A layered synthesis

The three routes can now be placed, each at the level where it speaks without overreaching, and the placement uses no equals sign, because none of the relations among them is an identity and none survives being asserted as one. The phenomenological route is taken at the level of ontology: it gives the best available picture of what perceiving the field is, a bodily belonging of perceiver and perceived prior to their division, and it is from this picture that the bridge to the coupling of relational aesthetics is shortest, since the reversible fold of flesh is already a between. The Buddhist route is taken at the level of cultivation and of metaphysical guard: it gives the discipline by which the prior is quieted and the field let appear, and it holds the anti-representational line that keeps the whole account from collapsing back into one brain estimating an outside, while its internal distinction between deluded and subtle discrimination secures the discriminating power the framework cannot do without. The predictive route is taken at the level of implementation: it corresponds to the observable rebalancing of precision, and an account on which seeing the field leaves a measurable signature in a system's responsiveness to deviation may be read alongside the ontological and cultivational accounts without claiming to be either. The Daoist voice runs through all three as the figure of emptying-to-await, the posture that the practical training will name.

What holds the synthesis together is not a doctrine common to the three but the shape of their cooperation, which is itself relational. The traditions are incommensurable in their commitments and are not made commensurable here; they are each given their proper place and asked to do only what they can, which is the seeking of common ground while the differences are kept, the method this series has named and practised. The synthesis is therefore not a higher theory that absorbs the three. It is an arrangement in which each is preserved as itself and none is rendered mere material for another, and that, by the paper's own lights, is the only kind of synthesis that would not contradict what the paper is about.

One might object that the assignment of levels is convenient rather than principled, that

calling the phenomenological account ontological, the Buddhist account cultivational, and the predictive account implementational is a way of avoiding their conflict by fiat rather than resolving it. The objection deserves an answer, and the answer is that the assignment follows from what each account is best at and worst at, not from the convenience of the paper. The predictive account is assigned the implementation level because it is there that it is strongest and there that its representational commitment does no harm: as an account of the observable machinery by which a brain participates in perception, it is precise, measurable, and fertile, and its picture of an internal model housed in a cranium is exactly right as a description of the implementing mechanism, becoming false only when it is promoted to the ontology of the act, which is why it is kept below the ontology. The phenomenological account is assigned the ontological level because its picture of the reversible fold is the one that correctly describes what perceiving the field is, a bodily belonging prior to the subject-object split, and because that picture is the one continuous with the relational ontology the series requires; it is weakest as an implementation account, having little to say about mechanism, which is why it is kept above the implementation. The Buddhist account is assigned the cultivational level and the office of metaphysical guard because its strength is the discipline it describes and the anti-representational line it holds, and because its claims about the deepest structure of awareness, while they cannot be made the paper's official ontology without committing the paper to more than it can defend, must be honored as the guard that keeps the ontology from collapsing into representation. The levels are thus assigned by the fit between each account's strengths and the work of each level, and the assignment is principled in exactly this sense, that each account is placed where it does its best work and kept from the level where its commitments would mislead.

4.10.10 The reach and the defeat of each route

The layered arrangement just defended can seem, stated as an assignment of levels, to settle the contest too smoothly, as though each tradition were simply handed a province and sent away content. It is worth being blunt, then, about what each route explains that the others cannot, and about what defeats each taken alone, because the arrangement earns its authority only if it is built on a frank accounting of strengths and failures rather than on a diplomatic distribution of honours. The accounting also discharges a debt the

paper owes its own commitments: holding, as it does, to a dialectical and materialist refusal to crown any theory as the final rationality, it must show in each case why the theory cannot be the whole, and not merely assert that it occupies a level.

The predictive route explains what neither of the others can, the graded, trainable, measurable character of perceptual sensitivity, the fact that the registration of the field improves with exercise in ways that leave physical traces and admit of degrees. It is the only one of the three that connects the perception of the field to a mechanism that could be studied, perturbed, and measured, and to discard it would be to sever the account from the empirical altogether. What defeats it, taken alone, is the betweenness of the object it would explain. A theory on which perceiving is one brain's inference about its input has no resources for a perceiving whose object is a coupling between two subjects, and when it is pressed to account for the shared perception that relational aesthetics requires, it must either deny that the betweenness is real, which contradicts the concept the paper has built, or smuggle in a relational structure its own terms do not contain. Its representationalism, which is its strength as a mechanics, is its defeat as an ontology, because the relational event it would have to represent is not in the single head where it locates all representing. This is the precise sense in which the materialist commitment bites: the predictive route is retained for the real work it does at the level of mechanism and refused at the level where its representationalism would dissolve the relational reality into a fact about one nervous system.

The phenomenological route explains what the predictive route cannot, the lived structure of perceiving as a bodily belonging to a world prior to the division of subject and object, and it is from this structure that the bridge to the coupling is built, since the reversible fold of perceiver and perceived is already a between. It is strongest exactly where the predictive route is weakest, at the ontology of the act, and its account of fallen fluency and the coming-forward of the broken-from gives the phenomenology of perception a precision the other routes lack. What defeats it, taken alone, is its silence about mechanism and its difficulty with cultivation. It describes beautifully what perceiving is and says little about how a perception is trained from coarse to fine, offering no account of the graded improvement that the predictive route and the literature on expertise document, and a philosophy of aesthetic education cannot rest on an account that illuminates the structure

of perception while leaving dark the very trainability that makes education possible. Its strength is description and its defeat is the silence of description before the question of cultivation.

The Buddhist route explains what neither of the others addresses at all, the obscuration that perception inflicts upon itself, the way the registering of the field is veiled not by a deficit but by the very reflex of representation, and it alone offers a discipline aimed at that obscuration, together with the distinction between deluded and subtle discrimination on which the paper's hardest step turned. What defeats it, taken as the whole truth rather than as a discipline and a guard, is its tendency, pressed to its metaphysical limit, to dissolve the very field whose appropriateness the paper needs perceived. A doctrine on which the subject-object structure is wholly an obscuration to be quieted threatens, at its term, to quiet also the discrimination of the field's generative direction that the cultivation requires, and although the paper argued that non-division founds rather than abolishes the subtle discernment, that argument holds the Buddhist route at a determinate point and does not follow it all the way to the dissolution of all distinction. The route is honoured as cultivation and as the guard against representationalism, and it is not adopted as a final metaphysics, because a final non-dualism would take with it the discriminated field the paper cannot do without. Here the materialist commitment bites from the other side: the contemplative route is refused the status of ultimate ontology not because its discipline is doubted but because its metaphysical terminus would dissolve the differentiated material field in which alone the good cycle is built.

4.10.11 The materialist resolution and its philosophical position

These three accountings, set together, do not yield a synthesis that absorbs the three into a higher theory, and the refusal of such a synthesis is not a failure of nerve but the paper's considered position, which is worth naming for what it is. The position is dialectical and materialist. It is materialist in that it takes the field, the coupling, the bodily belonging, and the trainable mechanism to be features of a real world that perception is of, not constructions of a transcendental subject nor moments of an absolute idea unfolding, and it treats the perception of the field as a real material process with a real material object, the relational field whose accumulation is as real as any other material accumulation. It is dialectical in that it refuses to let any one of the three accounts stand as the whole

truth, holding instead that each grasps a real aspect, the mechanism, the lived structure, the self-obscuration, and that the truth is the articulated relation of these aspects rather than any one of them, an articulated relation in which each is determinately placed and determinately limited. This is not eclecticism, the indifferent borrowing of whatever is convenient from each, because the placement is principled, each account assigned the level where it grasps a real aspect and refused the level where its commitments would distort, and the principle of the placement is the materialist insistence that the relational field is real and the dialectical insistence that no single account of a real thing is its whole truth.

The position can be located against the alternatives it refuses. It refuses the reductive naturalism that would make the predictive account the whole, dissolving the relational field into a fact about nervous systems, because that reduction loses the betweenness that is the field's reality. It refuses the transcendental idealism that would make the structure of the subject's faculties the ground of the perceived, because that idealism loses the materiality of the field, making the coupling a construction of the perceiving subject rather than a real relation the subject enters. And it refuses the contemplative absolutism that would make non-division the final truth, dissolving the differentiated field into an undifferentiated awareness, because that dissolution loses the discriminated direction the cultivation requires. Against all three the paper holds that the relational field is a real material structure, perceived by a real material process, graspable in its mechanism and its lived form and its liability to self-obscuration, and reducible to none of these. This is the materialist dialectic applied to the theory of perception, and it is the same refusal of any theory's claim to be the final rationality that governs the paper throughout, here issuing not in a synthesis of the three routes but in their determinate articulation, each doing the real work it can and none permitted to be the whole.

4.11. The Beauty of Practice

Perception discerns the field's direction; practice sends the path that way. The beauty of practice is the output face of the sensibility, the generation of appropriateness in the concrete act, the gesture or placement or word that, in this state of the field, makes the coupling gain rather than spin. If perception is the registration of where the field stands, practice is the intervention that alters where it stands, and the two are distinct

enough that a person may have one without the other, may perceive the field's flattening with great fineness and be unable to act so as to arrest it, or may act effectively without perceiving finely what the action does. This section develops the beauty of practice and draws, as the method requires, the analysis of the contradiction between perception and practice, which is the contradiction this face most directly carries, and which has a definite dominant aspect in the intimate field.

4.11.1 Practice: the generation of appropriateness

To practise beautifully is to generate appropriateness in the act, and this is a different accomplishment from perceiving it. Appropriateness, the section on the coupling mechanism established, is the signature of a field accumulating in the generative direction, and to generate it is to perform the act that, in this state, sends the field that way. The accomplishment is concrete and particular, since the appropriate act is a property of the token field in its token state, and so practice cannot be the application of a known technique any more than perception could be the application of a rule; it is the production, in the concrete, of the gesture this field now requires, which must be found freshly because the state is fresh. This is why practice is a beauty and not a skill in the engineering sense, why it is cultivated by exercise rather than learned by instruction: what is raised is not a repertoire of techniques but a responsiveness, the capacity to produce, in the concrete and unrepeatable case, the act that builds this field now. The cultivation of practice is the cultivation of that responsiveness, the training of the hand and the word to find the appropriate act as the field presents itself, and it is beautiful in the same broad sense the whole paper has used, the sense in which the production of the fitting where no rule specifies it is the work of an aesthetic rather than a technical power.

The point bears comparison with the acquisition of any embodied skill that meets unrepeatable situations, the improviser's, the physician's, the craftsman's, because the comparison shows both what practice shares with skill and where it exceeds the engineering sense of the word. The expert improviser does not apply a rule for the next phrase; she has, through long exercise, acquired a responsiveness that produces the apt phrase as the music presents its state, and if asked for the rule she followed she could give none, because there was none, only a trained capacity to meet the concrete moment with the fitting act. This is practice in the sense the section means, and the analogy holds far.

But it must be qualified in one respect that marks where the beauty of practice exceeds skill: the improviser's responsiveness is to a musical state, a thing without a face, whereas the field-builder's responsiveness is to a relational state that includes another generative subject, and the apt act is apt not to a passive material but to a person whose own perception and reception answer it. The training of practice is therefore the training of a responsiveness to a state that answers back, a skill whose material is a second freedom, and this is why its cultivation cannot be the cultivation of a craft upon an inert medium but must be the cultivation of a responsiveness within a coupling, learned only in the exercise of coupling and not in any practice upon a material that does not answer. The improviser trains alone with the instrument; the field-builder can train only with the other, because the state her practice must meet is a state the other co-constitutes, which returns the cultivation of practice, like everything in this paper, to the irreducibly relational.

This has a consequence for how practice fails, distinct from how perception fails, and worth marking because the dialectical analysis will turn on it. Perception fails by not seeing, the field's state going unregistered; practice fails by not reaching, the field's state seen but the apt act not produced, the responsiveness lacking or misfiring so that what is perceived to be needed is not delivered. The two failures are independent, and their independence is the content of the perception-practice contradiction the next part analyses. A partner may see with perfect clarity that the other needs a particular meeting and yet be unable to produce it, the hand or the word failing where the perception succeeded; another may produce apt acts readily while perceiving only coarsely what they are for. The cultivation of practice addresses the second failure specifically, the failure to reach, and it is a cultivation distinct from the cultivation of perception, the training of a responsiveness rather than a resolution, the raising of the capacity to deliver the apt act and not only to discern it.

4.11.2 Practice is the dominant aspect, and its transformation

The contradiction between perception and practice is the secondary contradiction the method named first, and within it, in the intimate field, practice is the dominant aspect. The reason is that a relation is built by what is done and not by what is seen; the holonomy of a field accumulates through the acts that send its path the generative way, and a

perception however fine that issues in no act adds nothing to the field's accumulation. A breakfast made with full attention builds the field; a fine perception of the other's state that produces no answering act leaves the field where it was. Perception matters, but it matters as it issues in practice, its value finally cashed in the act it informs, and so in the contradiction between them practice is dominant, the side on which the field's accumulation actually turns. This is a correction the tradition needs, since the tradition's emphasis on the cultivation of perceptive taste can leave the impression that to perceive finely is the whole of the aesthetic accomplishment, whereas in the building of a relational field the perceiving is subordinate to the doing, the discernment a preparation for the act in which alone the field is built.

In the contradiction between perception and practice, practice is the dominant aspect in the intimate field, because a relation accumulates through what is done and not through what is perceived. A fine perception that issues in no act leaves the field where it was; the holonomy accumulates in the gesture that sends the path the generative way. Perception is subordinate in the precise sense that its value is cashed in the practice it informs. This dominance transforms, however, when much is done and done wrongly: in a field where action is copious but blind, where the partners act constantly and constantly mis-act for want of perceiving what their acts do, the dominant aspect shifts to perception, the recovery of the seeing that would let the abundant action find its mark.

The transformation is as important as the dominance, and it is the instance the method anticipated when it said the dominant and subordinate aspects reverse as the field's state changes. Ordinarily, in the intimate field, practice dominates, and the cultivation should weight the doing, the production of the appropriate act, over the refinement of a perception that risks becoming a connoisseurship of the relation's states without intervention in them. But when a field is full of action that misses, when the partners do much and build little because they act without perceiving what their action does to the field, the dominance reverses, and the work shifts to perception, since here the limiting factor is not the will to act but the sight to act well. A field of blind copious action is not helped by more action; it is helped by the perception that would let the action find its mark,

and the dialectical reading is what tells the field-builder which case obtains, whether the field wants more doing or better seeing, a question answered not by a rule but by reading which aspect of the perception-practice contradiction now dominates the field's failure to accumulate.

4.11.3 Against the over-correction toward doing

The claim that practice dominates carries a risk of over-correction that the section must guard against, lest the correction of the tradition's over-valuation of perception install the opposite error, an over-valuation of doing that mistakes mere activity for field-building. The dominance of practice is the dominance of the apt act, the gesture that, in this state, sends the path the generative way, and not the dominance of activity as such; a field is built by the right doing and not by much doing, and a partner who responds to the claim of practice's dominance by simply doing more, by multiplying gestures without the perception that would make them apt, has not built the field but only crowded it. The dominance of practice presupposes the perception that practice is subordinate to in the order of dependence, since the apt act is apt to a perceived state, and so the dominance of practice is not the license to dispense with perception but the insistence that perception be cashed in apt action rather than hoarded as connoisseurship. This is the fine point the dialectical reading must hold: practice dominates because the field is built by doing, and yet the doing that builds is the apt doing that perception informs, so that to weight practice is not to abandon perception but to insist that perception issue in the act where the field is actually built. The over-correction toward mere doing is as much a failure as the tradition's over-valuation of mere perceiving, and the beauty of practice is neither, being the production of the apt act in which a perceived state is met by a gesture that builds, the doing informed by seeing and cashed in the field's accumulation.

This guards, too, against a misreading of the cultivation that the worked example might otherwise invite, the misreading on which to cultivate practice is to drill a repertoire of helpful gestures, to learn the things one does to build a field as one might learn a set of techniques. The beauty of practice is not a repertoire, because the apt act is a property of the token state and no repertoire of types reaches it, and a partner armed with a repertoire of field-building gestures would apply them to states they do not fit, doing the helpful thing at the unhelpful moment, the repertoire substituting for the responsiveness that

alone produces the apt act. The cultivation of practice is the cultivation of responsiveness and not the acquisition of a repertoire, the training of the capacity to produce the act this state requires and not the stocking of a kit of acts that worked before, and the dominance of practice is the dominance of this responsiveness, the trained capacity to do the apt thing, over a perception that would discern without doing, and not the dominance of a repertoire over a responsiveness or of activity over perception.

4.12. The Beauty of Maintenance: The Metaphysics of Repetition

Perception discerns the field's direction and practice sends the path that way, but a field is not built once. It is built and rebuilt, turned and turned again, and the third face of the sensibility is the capacity to keep it accumulating across this turning rather than letting it dull into routine or spin in place. The beauty of maintenance is the temporal face, the holding of the good cycle in time, and it is the face on which the metaphysics of repetition bears, because to maintain a field is to repeat, and everything depends on what kind of repetition the maintaining is. This section develops maintenance and brings the metaphysics of repetition to the point the earlier parts prepared, the distinction between the repetition that gains and the repetition that turns in place, which is the distinction on which the difference between a sustained relation and a dead one rests.

4.12.1 Maintenance, repetition, and the two repetitions

To maintain a field is to repeat: the same field is returned to, the same kinds of act performed again, the same shared life lived another day. This is why maintenance is the face on which repetition's metaphysics bears, and why the tradition's suspicion of the everyday, its association of the daily and the repetitive with the dull and the dead, must be met here. The suspicion has a basis, since one kind of repetition is exactly the dull and the dead, the mechanical re-enactment in which nothing is added and the same is merely done again, the wheel that turns without gaining. But this is one kind of repetition and not repetition as such. The other kind, the kind maintenance at its best performs, is the repetition that gains, in which the field is returned to and turned again with a difference, each turn carrying a finer perception and a more apt practice than the last, so that the repetition accumulates rather than recurs. The two are indistinguishable in any single

return, since the same field is returned to in both, and they are told apart only across returns, by whether the field gains altitude or stays flat, which is the holonomy criterion brought to the temporal face of the sensibility.

Maintenance is repetition, and there are two repetitions. The bad repetition is the mechanical re-enactment in which the same is done again and nothing accumulates, the wheel whose holonomy is zero. The good repetition is the return that gains, in which the field is turned again with a difference, each turn carrying finer perception and apter practice, so that the field accumulates across returns. The two are indistinguishable within a single return and are told apart only across returns, by whether the field gains altitude. The beauty of maintenance is the capacity to make the return the gaining kind, to repeat so that the field accumulates rather than recurs, which is the holding of the good cycle in time.

This distinction redeems the everyday from the tradition's suspicion without denying the suspicion its truth. The everyday is repetitive, and its repetition can be the dull mechanical kind that the suspicion fears; the dishcloth and the daily meal can be the wheel. But the repetitiousness of the everyday is not its condemnation, because the same daily return can be the gaining kind, the meal made again with a perception thickened by every previous making, the greeting repeated with a difference that accumulates. The everyday does not have to be escaped into the exceptional to become generative; it has to be repeated well, turned so that it gains, and the capacity to do this is the beauty of maintenance. This is why an aesthetic education of the everyday is possible at all, why the most repetitive and least spacious life is not excluded from generative cultivation: because the repetition that fills such a life can be the gaining kind, and the cultivation of maintenance is precisely the cultivation of the power to make it so.

4.12.2 The craft tradition and the conditions of good repetition

An old craft text states the conditions under which repeated making produces the good rather than the merely repeated, and it bears directly on the metaphysics of maintenance, because maintenance is a kind of making repeated. The text names four conditions that

must meet for a made thing to be fine: the season has its times, the ground its airs, the material its beauty, and the craft its skill (Anonymous 2020), and only when these four are joined can the work be good. The list is not a recipe but a statement of what good making depends on, and two of its features are exactly what the beauty of maintenance requires. The first is that good making is the meeting of a skill with conditions it does not control: the season and the ground and the material are given, not made, and the craft's skill consists in meeting them rightly, not in overriding them. This is the structure of maintenance as the paper has described it, the meeting of a trained perception with the state of a field it does not control, the skill lying in the apt response to given conditions rather than in their imposition. The maintainer of a field is the craftsman whose material is the field's state, whose skill is the perception of what that state affords, and whose good work is the meeting of skill with conditions rather than the forcing of conditions to a plan.

The second feature is that good making, on this account, is repeatable without being mechanical, because each making meets its own conditions of season and ground and material, which are never twice identical. The craftsman repeats the making, but the repetition gains rather than recurs, because each instance is the fresh meeting of the skill with conditions that have changed, the material this time not quite the material last time, the season turned. This is the good repetition stated as a craft ethic: the repeated making is not the mechanical reproduction of an identical object but the renewed meeting of a constant skill with varying conditions, which is exactly the gaining repetition of maintenance, the constant trained perception meeting the varying state of the field, each evening's walk a fresh meeting of the same skill with a season slightly turned. The craft tradition thus gives the beauty of maintenance an ancient model, the craftsman whose repeated making gains because it meets, each time, conditions it does not control, and whose skill is precisely the perception of what those conditions, this time, afford. To maintain a field well is to be such a craftsman, repeating the making of the field with a skill that meets its changing state, and the good repetition is the craftsman's repetition, gaining because it meets rather than imposes.

4.12.3 Alienation and the ownership of the cycle's yield

The metaphysics of repetition must face the strongest case for the tradition's suspicion, which is not the dullness of the daily but its alienation, the condition in which repetition is genuinely deadening because it is not the repeater's own. The case is real and the section on the reproductive act met it from one side; it bears restating here as the limit of maintenance. There is a repetition that deadens not because it is repetition but because its yield is captured, the gesture repeated endlessly so that the holonomy it generates is siphoned to a power outside the relation, the worker's motion repeated for another's accumulation, and this repetition no cultivation of maintenance can redeem from within, because what deadens it is not the repeater's failure to turn the field well but the ownership of the field's yield by an order that takes the accumulation away. The beauty of maintenance presupposes that the holonomy the maintained field accumulates returns to the field, to the coupling that generates it, and where that presupposition fails, where the yield is captured, the failure is not aesthetic but structural, and its remedy is not a finer maintenance but a change in who owns the cycle's yield.

The repetition that genuinely deadens is the one whose holonomy is captured by an external power, not the one that is merely daily. A maintained field accumulates only if its yield returns to the coupling that generates it; where the yield is siphoned to an order outside the relation, the repetition deadens regardless of how well it is turned, and no cultivation of maintenance can redeem it, because what deadens it is structural and not aesthetic. The beauty of maintenance presupposes the return of the cycle's yield to the field, and the political economy of the field, taken up later, is the examination of when that presupposition holds and when it fails.

This guards the metaphysics of repetition against a sentimentality it could otherwise fall into, the sentimentality of telling those whose repetition is captured that they need only turn their daily labour more beautifully to redeem it. They do not, and cannot, because the deadening of their repetition is not in their turning but in the ownership of its yield, and to tell them otherwise would be to ask them to find beauty in their own consumption. The beauty of maintenance is real and it is available in the everyday, but

its availability presupposes a structural condition, that the field's yield returns to those who generate it, and where that condition fails the failure is to be named structurally and remedied structurally, not papered over with an exhortation to repeat more beautifully. The metaphysics of repetition thus carries its own political limit, the line past which the aesthetic question of how to repeat well gives way to the structural question of who owns what the repetition produces, and the honesty of the account requires marking that line rather than aestheticising across it.

4.12.4 The dominant aspect within maintenance

Within the beauty of maintenance, as within the other two faces, a contradiction carries a dominant aspect that transforms with the field's state, and here the contradiction is between the freshening of the return and the steadiness of the return. To maintain a field well requires both that the return be fresh, carrying a difference that lets it gain, and that it be steady, reliable enough to be a return at all and not a series of unrelated novelties; a maintenance that was all freshness would not be the repetition of a field but its perpetual reinvention, and a maintenance that was all steadiness would be the mechanical wheel. In the ordinary case the dominant aspect is freshness, because the standing danger of maintenance is the slide into the mechanical, the dulling of the return into recurrence, and the work that matters is the keeping of the difference that lets the field gain. But the dominant aspect transforms: in a field thrown into disorder, where steadiness has been lost and the return itself is in doubt, the dominant aspect shifts to steadiness, the re-establishment of a reliable return without which no freshening has anything to freshen. Which aspect dominates is read from the field, the freshening in the field grown dull and the steadiness in the field grown chaotic, and the reading is once more the exercise of the sensibility whose temporal face maintenance is.

The interplay of freshness and steadiness repays one further observation, because it explains a feature of sustained relationships that is otherwise puzzling, the way the most enduring couplings often combine a deep reliability with a continual small surprise, and the way the loss of either is felt as a kind of death. A relation that has kept only its steadiness, that has become wholly reliable and wholly unsurprising, is felt to have died even though nothing is wrong, the death of the merely predictable, the wheel that turns so smoothly it is no longer felt to turn; this is the death by excess of steadiness, the

dominant aspect having swung too far from freshness. A relation that has kept only its freshness, that is all surprise and no reliability, is felt to be exhausting and groundless, a series of novelties with no accumulated ground beneath them, unable to settle because nothing in it is steady enough to be returned to; this is the death by excess of freshness, the dominant aspect having swung too far the other way. The beauty of maintenance is the holding of the two in a balance that the field's state determines, steady enough to be a return and fresh enough to gain, and the art of it is the continual small adjustment of the balance as the field drifts toward one death or the other, adding freshness when the return dulls and adding steadiness when the return grows chaotic. This is why maintenance is the most temporally extended of the three faces and the one most easily mistaken for mere persistence: its work is invisible when it succeeds, felt only in its absence, the quiet continual rebalancing that keeps a long coupling from either of the deaths that threaten it, and that shows itself not as event but as the enduring aliveness of a relation that has been, though it does not announce it, continually maintained.

4.13. Relational Aesthetics and the Cultivation of the Field

The preceding parts established a chain of grounding. Relational production requires a field; the construction of a field is an aesthetic rather than an engineering matter; the aesthetic and the ethical are coupled at their root. The chain terminates in a single reframing: the cultivation of the capacity to build a generative field is what the word *aesthetic education* properly names. What remains is to say what that capacity actually is, finely enough that it can be practised. This section supplies the two instruments the rest of the paper will use. The first is a concept, *relational aesthetics*, which locates beauty neither in the object nor in the subject but in the coupling event between subjects. The second is a model, a four-step cycle of perception, reception, sharing, and reproduction, which is not a procedure laid over experience from outside but the minimal form a good cycle takes when it is enacted between two people in the course of an ordinary day.

4.13.1 Beauty is produced relationally

The history of aesthetics has largely been a quarrel between two parties. One party locates beauty in the object: there are proportions, harmonies, or formal properties that a thing

possesses, and to find a thing beautiful is to register a feature already there. The other party locates beauty in the subject: beauty names a state of the perceiver, a pleasure that claims universality without resting on a concept, so that the judgement of taste says more about the structure of our faculties than about the rose. The first party cannot explain why competent perceivers disagree without lapsing into a doctrine of error. The second cannot explain why the judgement feels answerable to the thing, why it can be corrected, why two people leaning toward the same evening light feel they are tracking something rather than comparing private weather.

Each party should be granted its strongest form before the third position is proposed, since the third position earns its place only by explaining what defeats the other two. The objectivist is strongest where beauty seems plainly to reside in the thing, in the proportion that holds whoever looks, the interval that sounds whoever hears, and the strength of the position is its account of answerability, of why the judgement of beauty can be right or wrong, corrected, taught, why it is not a mere report of private pleasure. Its weakness is disagreement: if beauty is in the object, the persistent, competent, irreducible disagreement of fine perceivers must be error, and a doctrine that convicts half its best practitioners of error wherever they disagree has misdescribed what they are doing. The subjectivist is strongest exactly where the objectivist is weak, in the account of disagreement, which becomes no error but the natural variety of differently constituted perceivers, and in the account of why beauty moves us, why it is bound up with pleasure and feeling rather than standing as a cold property. Its weakness is answerability: if beauty is a state of the perceiver, the felt sense that the judgement is answerable to the thing, correctable, shared, becomes an illusion, two people who lean toward the same light only seeming to track a common object while in truth comparing private states. Each party is strong exactly where the other is weak, which is the signature of a missing third term that both have approached from opposite sides and neither has reached.

The framework of this series forces a third position, and forces it not as a compromise between the first two but as a consequence of the relational ontology that the series has carried throughout. If the subject is itself generated in relation, and value is the holonomy accumulated along a relational path, then the aesthetic, which we have argued is the perception of appropriateness in a field, cannot be a property of an isolated object

or an isolated subject, because neither an isolated object nor an isolated subject is where appropriateness lives. Appropriateness is a feature of a coupling. The same gesture, the same placement of a thing, accumulates good holonomy in one relational state and bad holonomy in another, and there is no reading of the gesture or the thing alone that fixes which. Beauty, on this account, is the felt registration that a coupling is accumulating in the generative direction. It is an event between, and it is produced there, in the between, when it is produced at all.

The third position explains what defeated the other two, which is the test it must pass to deserve the name of a resolution. It explains answerability, the objectivist's strength and the subjectivist's failure, because the coupling is a real event with a real direction, and a judgement about it can be right or wrong about whether the field accumulates, answerable to the coupling though not to the object alone. And it explains disagreement, the subjectivist's strength and the objectivist's failure, because the coupling is between these two in this state, and a perceiver outside the coupling, or the same coupling in another state, may truly find otherwise without error, the variety being the variety of couplings and states rather than of private weather. The two leaning toward the evening light are neither registering a property of the light nor comparing private pleasures; they are, if the moment is real, a coupling accumulating upon the light, and their sense of tracking something together is exactly right, the something being the coupling event their joint attention produces. Relational aesthetics is thus not a third opinion beside two others but the position that locates beauty where both the others were reaching, in the between that the object-party mistook for the object and the subject-party mistook for the subject.

Relational aesthetics. Beauty is not a property of the object and not a state of the subject. It is a coupling event between subjects, produced relationally. The aesthetic perception of appropriateness is the registration that a relational field is accumulating holonomy in the generative direction; such registration has its proper site in the coupling, not in either pole taken alone.

This is a strong claim and it should be stated at its strongest, because its strength is

what does the work later. It does not say that beauty has a relational dimension, or that beauty is enhanced by being shared. Both of those are weak claims compatible with locating beauty in the object or the subject and then adding a social supplement. The claim here is constitutive. The supplement is the thing. A beauty that has not entered the relational register is not yet a beauty that this account recognises, in the way that a vow not yet spoken to anyone is not yet the kind of vow whose causality the series has studied. This has an immediate consequence that the four-step model will make concrete: a beauty perceived and kept inside one subject is incomplete, and the labour of completing it, of carrying it across into the between, is not optional adornment but the act by which beauty becomes what relational aesthetics says it is.

One clarification protects the claim from a fast objection. To say beauty is produced in the coupling is not to say it is produced by agreement, or by two parties happening to report the same pleasure. Coupling is not consensus. Two people can agree, in words, that a thing is beautiful while no coupling event occurs between them; the agreement is then a pair of private judgements laid side by side, the very side-by-side arrangement the second party to the old quarrel mistakes for relation. What relational aesthetics requires is not concord of report but the actual event in which a field, attended by both, accumulates in the generative direction and is felt to do so. The later section on sharing (§4.15) is wholly occupied with the difference between these two things, because the difference is where the concept earns its keep.

A second objection is more serious and must be answered, because it concerns the very cases that the tradition of aesthetics took as paradigmatic. Surely, the objection runs, the masterwork is beautiful whether or not anyone is in a coupling with anyone; the painting in the empty gallery, the symphony with no one in the hall, are beautiful in themselves, and a theory that locates beauty in the coupling between subjects cannot account for the beauty of the artwork that no coupling attends. The objection is forceful, and the answer is not to deny the beauty of the artwork but to locate it correctly. The artwork is beautiful, on this account, because it is the occasion and the trace of couplings, made to produce them and bearing the marks of the ones that made it. The painting is not beautiful in the way a proportion is a property of a triangle; it is beautiful in that it reliably occasions a coupling between itself and a perceiver, and between perceivers

who attend to it together, a coupling the painter built it to occasion and built out of the couplings of his own making. The beauty we ascribe to the artwork in the empty gallery is the beauty of its disposition to occasion such couplings, its standing readiness to produce the event when a perceiver comes, in the way that we call a thing soluble when no one is dissolving it, ascribing to it the disposition though the event is not now occurring. The artwork is a crystallised invitation to coupling, and its beauty is real, the real disposition to occasion the event in which beauty proper is produced.

This locates the museum correctly within the account and reconciles the paper's relational aesthetics with the tradition it displaces. The museum is not the home of a beauty that contradicts the relational account; it is a place full of crystallised invitations to coupling, objects made to occasion the event between a perceiver and the work and between perceivers who share it. The tradition that located beauty in the museum object was not simply wrong but partial: it perceived the object's real disposition to occasion coupling and mistook the disposition for a property complete in the object, the way one might mistake solubility for a property the salt has in itself rather than a disposition it has toward water. Relational aesthetics corrects the partiality without denying what the tradition perceived, and in doing so it earns the right to move aesthetic education from the museum to the kitchen, since the kitchen is where the coupling the museum object only occasions is actually built, the living event of which the artwork is the crystallised invitation. The artwork invites the coupling; the everyday is where the coupling is lived, and the aesthetic education of the everyday is the cultivation of the capacity to build the events that the museum object could only, in its beautiful stillness, invite.

4.13.2 The grounds for a model, and for these four steps

If beauty is produced relationally, then the capacity to participate in its production can be cultivated, and a cultivation needs a structure fine enough to be practised against. The structure proposed here has four movements. They are not chosen for symmetry or for the convenience of exposition. They are the decomposition of a single good cycle into the smallest sequence of distinguishable acts by which such a cycle is enacted between two people, and the claim that there are exactly these four, in this order, is a claim that the paper must earn rather than assume.

The first movement is *perception*: the registration of what is occurring in the field, whether it is accumulating or spinning in place, what here would be appropriate. This is the input face, the inferential moment. The second is *reception*: the perceived must be let in, allowed to alter the one who perceives, rather than held off at the level of cognition or intercepted by defence. The third is *sharing*: the received must be carried back into relation, attended by another, for only there does it become the coupling event that relational aesthetics says beauty is. The fourth is *reproduction*: the shared does not dissipate but settles as a raised starting point, so that the next perception begins higher, finer, more able to register what before went unseen.

The four movements form a cycle that closes without returning to its origin. Perception, reception, sharing, and reproduction return the practitioner to perception, but because reproduction has raised the starting point, what is returned to is the root and not the origin. The cycle is therefore not a wheel but a spiral, and its non-return is exactly the anholonomy that the series has named as the geometric signature of a good cycle.

This is why the model is not arbitrary and not merely didactic. Its form is the form of the thing it cultivates. A reader who has followed the series will recognise the closing-without-return as the figure that ran through the account of poetry, the figure of coming back to the root yet not to the origin, the Berry phase read as the formal correlate of a cycle that gains rather than conserves. The four-step model instantiates that figure at the most intimate scale, the scale of a single returned gesture between two people. It follows that the model can fail in exactly the ways a good cycle can fail. If reproduction merely repeats the same, the spiral collapses to a wheel and the holonomy goes to zero; the practice has become the bad repetition whose metaphysics §4.12 examines. If sharing does not occur, the cycle never leaves the single subject and beauty is never produced in the sense that matters; the practice has become the cultivation of private taste, which is the old refuge of an aesthetic education that mistook a secondary contradiction for the principal one. The model is thus not a recipe whose steps one performs in order to succeed. It is a diagnosis of where, in a given relation at a given moment, the accumulation has stalled.

4.13.3 The four steps under the generative dialectic

The model does not stand apart from the method announced earlier. The four steps are subject to the same analysis of principal and secondary contradiction, and this is what keeps the model from hardening into a fixed list of things one ought to do. At any moment in a relation, the four steps are not equally weighted; one of them is the principal site, the place where the accumulation is currently stalling and where generative attention should therefore be directed. Which step is principal is not fixed by the model but read from the state of the field, and it migrates as the state changes.

- When a relation has grown estranged, the principal site is *sharing*. Beauty is still perceived and even received within each subject, but it no longer crosses into the between; the field has lost the coupling event, and the labour that matters is the carrying-across, however small.
- When a relation has grown dull, the principal site is *perception*. The partners still act, still share by habit, but no longer see; the contingency that would refresh the field goes unregistered, and the labour that matters is the recovery of sight.
- When a relation has lately been wounded, the principal site is *reception*. Defence is highest after injury, and what is perceived and even offered cannot get in; the labour that matters is the lowering of the gate, which no amount of perceiving or sharing can substitute for.
- When a relation has stalled in plenty, the principal site is *reproduction*. Beauty is perceived, received, and shared, but consumed rather than thickened, each sharing a re-enactment of the last; the labour that matters is the turning of consumption back into accumulation.

The point of this analysis is not to issue four rules but to refuse the single rule. There is no posture that is always the right one, no step that is always the one to work on, because the right labour is a function of which contradiction is currently principal, and that is something to be discerned in the particular field rather than legislated for fields in general. The discernment is itself an exercise of the trained sensibility the paper is about. To read which step is principal is already to perceive the field, which means the

dialectical analysis is not applied to the model from outside but is the first movement of the model turned upon the relation as a whole. The method and the object meet here, and their meeting is one more instance of the form enacting its claim.

The relation between the four-step model and the three beauties set out earlier should be made explicit, since the two articulations of the one capacity might otherwise seem to compete. The three beauties, perception and practice and maintenance, are the anatomy of the capacity, its cross-section, the three faces a field-builder has; the four steps, perception and reception and sharing and reproduction, are the same capacity in motion, the cycle the anatomy turns. The two are not rival lists but the static and dynamic descriptions of one thing, and they map onto each other in a definite way. The beauty of perception is the first movement of the cycle, the perceiving that opens it. The beauty of practice spans the middle movements, reception and sharing, since to receive the contingency and to carry it into the between are the doing in which the apt act is performed, the practice that builds the field. The beauty of maintenance is the fourth movement, reproduction, the sustaining across time that keeps the cycle turning and the field deepening. The anatomy has three faces and the cycle has four movements because the middle of the cycle, the doing, divides into the receiving and the sharing that the static anatomy gathers under the single face of practice, the cycle resolving into four what the anatomy holds as three. Neither articulation is more correct; the anatomy shows the capacity's parts and the cycle shows their turning, and the paper needs both, the cross-section to exhibit what the field-builder has and the cycle to exhibit how what she has is exercised, the two descriptions of the one capacity that the whole paper is devoted to cultivating.

This double articulation is itself a small instance of the paper's method, the holding of two true descriptions without forcing one to subsume the other. The anatomy and the cycle are both true of the capacity, and neither is the description of which the other is an application; to insist that the capacity is really three faces, with the four steps a derivative regrouping, or really four steps, with the three faces a crude simplification, would be to settle into a single governed description the plurality that the paper has everywhere refused to settle. The capacity is both, a thing with three faces and a cycle with four movements, and the two articulations illuminate it from different angles, the static and the dynamic, neither exhausting it. That the one capacity admits two true

and non-competing articulations is not a defect of the account but a feature of the thing, which is rich enough to be truly described in more than one way, and the paper's holding of both, without subordinating either, is the same fidelity to plurality that its polyphonic close will perform at the scale of the whole.

4.13.4 The work of the following sections

Each of the four movements carries a body of theory, and in two of them the theory is dense enough, and the traditions that converge on them divergent enough, that the movement requires a section of its own. Perception (§4.10) gathers predictive processing, the Buddhist account of undivided awareness, and the phenomenology of the everyday, and asks how the field becomes visible at all. Reception (§4.14) gathers the ethics of welcoming the other, the psychoanalytic account of containment, and the Daoist figure of the mirror that meets without storing, and asks what it is to let beauty and the other in. Sharing (§4.15) gathers joint attention, witnessing, and the dialogical generation of meaning, and asks how the relational is born. Reproduction (§4.16) gathers the philosophy of repetition and the political economy of the reproductive act, and asks how a cycle thickens in time without either hoarding or dulling. A fifth section (§4.17) gives the implementation-level interface, the observable signatures each movement should leave if the account is true, with the restraint that an interface is not an identity. None of these sections is a separate doctrine. Each is one movement of a single cycle, and the cycle is the form of the good cycle itself.

4.14. The Ethics of Reception

至人之用心若镜，不将不迎，应而不藏。

Zhuangzi

Of the four movements, reception is the one most easily passed over with a phrase. One says: do not defend, let it in. Yet reception is the step without precedent in the older forms of aesthetic education, and it is the step in which this paper's account is most its own. The reason the older forms lack it is instructive. Where beauty is a property of

an object, there is nothing to receive; the masterwork stands there to be appraised, and the appraiser need not be altered by it. Reception becomes a distinct and demanding act only once beauty is relational, fragile, and passing, the registration of a coupling that gains, for such a beauty must be let into the one who perceives it or it does not survive the perceiving. To receive is to allow what has been seen to alter the valuation it enters, rather than to hold it at the level of cognition or to turn it back at the gate of defence. Stated so, reception looks passive. It is not. It is among the most strenuous things a relational subject does, and the traditions that have studied it disagree, as sharply as those that studied perception, about what kind of act it is.

4.14.1 The semantic pivot: to receive beauty is to receive the other

Reception has two senses that must be separated before their unity can be claimed. In the first sense, what is received is the perceived beauty or appropriateness itself: the fragile, passing thing is let in, allowed to enter and to alter the one who perceives, rather than intercepted by defence or held off as mere information. This is reception as a matter of aesthetic psychology. In the second sense, what is received is the other: since the beauty of relational aesthetics is a coupling event, to receive the beauty is at root to receive the one with whom the beauty is jointly produced, together with that one's irreducibility, unpredictability, and refusal of the perceiver's control. This is reception as a matter of ethics.

The framework of this series does not let these two senses fall apart. Within relational aesthetics they are one act under two descriptions, because the beauty is produced precisely in the coupling with the other, so that to let the beauty in is to let the other in, and to defend against the other is to lose the beauty at its source. This is why an account of reception cannot remain in aesthetic psychology but slides of necessity into ethics, and the slide is not a digression. It is one more instance of the chain the whole paper has followed, the descent in which the aesthetic, pressed to its ground, discloses the ethical beneath it. Reception is the step where that descent is felt most directly, because here the thing one must let in has a face.

An illustrative case — [. The same remark, and what is done with it once it is seen] Return to the morning and suppose the remark has been seen, registered as bearing something,

a slight weight the routine did not predict. Seeing it is not yet receiving it. The hearer may, having seen, hold the remark off: note it as information, file it as the sort of thing she says, decide how to handle it, and in all of this keep it from entering and altering the morning, met at the level of management and not let in. Or the hearer may let it in: allow the remark to change, however slightly, the valuation of the morning it entered, let what was not foreseen revise what was planned, receive the small weight as a thing that may rewrite the next hour rather than as an obstacle to it. The difference is not in whether the remark was perceived, since both hearers perceived it, but in whether it was admitted, and the whole question of reception is the question of what divides the hearing that manages from the hearing that lets in. When the remark carries not delight but difficulty, an unforeseen need or a small reproach, the difference becomes the difference between defence and welcome, and the face in the remark is most plainly what is being kept out or let in.

4.14.2 Levinas: the welcome of the other

The account that takes reception most seriously is the one that made the welcome of the other into first philosophy. On this account the other is encountered not first as an object of knowledge but as a face that breaks the perceiver's self-enclosed totality and addresses a claim that cannot be anticipated or absorbed into the categories already held. To welcome the other is to receive what exceeds every concept I would use to receive it, and the welcome is therefore not an act I perform from a prior freedom but a responsibility that precedes and constitutes my freedom (Levinas 1961). The deepest temptation, on this account, is to reduce the other to the same, to take the face as one more item to be known and placed, and in that reduction the otherness of the other, which was the whole of what addressed me, is lost.

This gives the reception step its most exacting articulation. The injunction not to put the unexpected back in its place, which the four-step model stated almost casually, is here given its philosophical depth: to put back in place is precisely the reduction of the other to the same, the violence by which what exceeds my categories is forced to fit them. Reception, on this reading, is the refusal of that violence, the holding-open in which the other is let be as other, not assimilated and not mastered. The commitment is that the

ethical precedes the ontological and that the other is absolutely prior, and the route gives the paper something it needs and could not get from psychology alone: an account of why reception is hard that locates the difficulty not in a deficit of the perceiver but in the structure of the encounter itself, in the irreducible excess of the one received over every means of receiving.

4.14.3 Psychoanalysis: defence, containment, holding

If the welcome of the other says why reception is exacting, a second tradition says why it fails, and what would have to be developed for it to succeed. Here the obstacle to reception is named with clinical precision: the mechanisms of defence, denial and projection and isolation, are exactly the apparatus by which what is unbearable is kept from entering and altering the self. Against this stands a developmental account of the capacity that defence forecloses. In the figure of containment, one who is able takes in the raw, unmetabolised distress that another cannot yet bear, holds it, transforms it into a form that can be borne, and returns it (Bion 1962); in the figure of the holding environment, a sustaining presence makes it safe enough for what is vulnerable to come forward (Winnicott 1965) without being either annihilated or expelled. To receive, in this language, is to be able to contain what is not yet digested, what may disturb the one who receives it, without immediately defending against it or discharging it back out.

The commitment of this route is that reception is a psychological capacity, developed rather than given, and capable of being damaged. This matters to the paper in a way that is not merely illustrative. It supplies the mechanism behind the claim, made when the four steps were placed under the dialectic, that reception is the principal site after a relation has been wounded: injury raises defence, and raised defence forecloses the very containment that reception requires, so that what is perceived and even offered cannot get in. The route also introduces, against the most exalted reading of the welcome of the other, a needed note of mercy. A subject whose capacity to contain has been damaged by injury is not simply refusing the other; the gate is shut by a mechanism that the subject did not choose and cannot open by being commanded to. The tension between this and the ethical absoluteness of the welcome is real, and it is held for the section on conflicts rather than dissolved here.

4.14.4 Gelassenheit: the posture of letting be

A third figure describes not the ethics of reception nor its psychology but its posture, the bearing of the one who receives well. It is named as a releasement, a letting-be that is neither activity nor passivity in the ordinary sense, a comportment in which one steps out of the stance of representing-and-calculating, the stance that frames whatever it meets as a standing reserve to be ordered, and lets beings be the beings they are (Heidegger 1959). Reception, under this figure, is the withdrawal from the posture of mastery, the loosening of the grip by which the will would seize and arrange what comes, so that the beauty and the other may arrive of themselves rather than be procured. The figure does not add a fourth mechanism so much as describe the disposition that the other routes presuppose: the welcome of the other and the capacity to contain both require that the one who receives has stepped out of the will to master, and releasement is the name for that step. It connects, as well, to the phenomenological route of the perception section, but its accent is different. There the letting-be served seeing, the coming-forward of the thing; here it serves keeping, the allowing of what has come forward to stay and to alter, without being seized.

A further phenomenological account refines the posture by describing what reception receives, and it is worth admitting because it names a structure the other accounts presuppose. On this account some phenomena give themselves, arrive as gifts that exceed what the receiver could have constituted from her own resources, saturating her capacity to receive rather than fitting neatly within it (Marion 1997); the face of the other, the event of beauty, are given in this way, arriving with more than the receiver brought, overflowing the concepts that would contain them. Reception, under this description, is the receiving of what gives itself in excess of the receiver, and its difficulty is the difficulty of receiving a gift too large for the hands held out, of letting in what cannot be reduced to what one already had. This sharpens the welcome of the other and the mirror alike: the other is received well when she is let arrive as the gift she is, in excess of the receiver's prior concepts, and badly when she is cut down to fit them, received only insofar as she matches what was expected. The reception step, on this account, is the holding-open of a capacity to receive more than one brought, a readiness for the given that does not pre-limit it to the constitutable, and the failure of reception is the reduction of the given to

the receiver's prior measure, the refusal to be given more than one had. This is the same structure the welcome named as the refusal to reduce the other to the same, described now from the side of what is received rather than the side of the one who receives, and the two descriptions together fix the reception step as the admission of an excess, the letting-in of what arrives larger than the room prepared for it.

4.14.5 The mirror that does not store: an Eastern principal voice

The principal Eastern voice on reception belongs to the same roots as the perception section's contemplative routes but speaks to a different moment, and it should not be confused with them: there the question was how to see, here it is how the heart may meet things without being snagged by them. The figure is the mirror. The heart of the realised person is used like a mirror, the Zhuangzi says, neither seeing things off nor going out to greet them, responding and yet not storing (Zhuangzi 2013), 应而不藏. The mirror receives all that comes before it, perfectly and without resistance, and retains nothing when it passes; the teaching of non-abiding in the Diamond Sutra, that one should give rise to the heart that dwells nowhere, names the same bearing from the other tradition. To receive, on this figure, is to meet what comes without defending against it and without grasping after it, neither pushing away nor holding on.

The value of this voice is that it names, in a single image, both of the ways reception fails, and they are not the same way. One failure is defence, the pushing-away, the refusal to let the beauty or the other in; against this the mirror does not see things off. The other failure is possession, the grasping-after, the seizing of the beauty as a thing to be had and hoarded; against this the mirror does not go out to greet, and responds yet does not store. The Western accounts tend to foreground the first failure, defence, and the apparatus against it. The mirror holds defence and possession in one figure and refuses both at once, and in doing so it supplies the term the section most needs, because the second failure, possession, is the one that connects reception forward to reproduction. A reception that grasps and stores is a reception that has begun to hoard, and the metaphysics of hoarding is exactly what the reproduction section must keep the good cycle clear of. The mirror, responding yet not storing, is the figure in which reception is already turned toward a reproduction that accumulates without possessing.

The figure repays being read clause by clause, because each of its three phrases names a distinct discipline of reception. Not seeing off: the mirror does not push away what comes before it, does not refuse the unwelcome image or distort the unflattering one, and the receiver who does not see off is the one who does not defend against the remark that carries difficulty, does not turn it back at the gate because it was unwelcome. Not going out to greet: the mirror does not reach toward what has not yet come, does not anticipate or solicit or project the image it would prefer, and the receiver who does not go out to greet is the one who does not seize the remark and make of it more than it was, does not grasp the beauty and clutch it as a possession. Responding yet not storing: the mirror answers perfectly to what is before it and keeps nothing when it passes, and the receiver who responds yet does not store is the one who lets the remark fully in, lets it alter the morning completely while it is present, and does not hoard it afterward as a held thing to be kept against loss. The three phrases are three refusals, of defence, of grasping, and of hoarding, and together they describe a reception that is total in the moment and possessive in no moment, which is exactly the reception relational aesthetics requires, a full admission of the other that seizes nothing.

Returned to the morning, the mirror sorts the failures the case left open. The hearer who manages the remark, holds it off as information to be handled, is seeing it off, defending against an image she will not let alter her; she fails by the first refusal. The hearer who seizes the remark, makes of a small unforeseen weight a large significance she clutches, who takes the difficult remark as a wound to be nursed or the warm one as a possession to be hoarded, is going out to greet and storing; she fails by the second and third. The mirror's receiver does neither: she lets the remark in fully, lets it revise the morning while it is present, and keeps nothing of it as a held grievance or a hoarded treasure, so that when the next moment comes she meets it as freshly as she met this one, undistorted by what she is carrying from before. This is the bearing that the reception step cultivates, and the case shows it to be a narrow path between two failures that the Western accounts, fixed on defence alone, do not jointly see.

4.14.6 Two real conflicts

The accounts of reception conflict at two points, and as with perception the framework resolves them by taking sides rather than by averaging.

The first conflict sets the ethical absoluteness of the welcome against the developmental contingency of the capacity to contain. On the one reading, to receive the other is an unconditioned demand, prior to my freedom and admitting no excuse; to plead that I lack the capacity is very nearly to evade the responsibility that constitutes me. On the other reading, the capacity to contain is a fragile achievement that injury can damage, and to issue an unconditioned demand for reception to a subject whose containment has been wounded is not exalted but cruel, since it commands an opening that the mechanism of defence has shut and that no command can reopen. The conflict is real and it carries a practical stake the paper will face directly when it asks, in the political economy of the field, what may be required of those whom relentless bad repetition has worn down. The resolution is not to choose one description and discard the other but to assign them to different offices. The welcome of the other states the norm of reception, what reception is when it succeeds, the direction in which the good lies; it is the account of the end. The developmental capacity states the condition of reception, what must be intact or repaired for the norm to be met; it is the account of the ground that the end requires. The series has held this couple before, the end that orients and the condition that constrains, and has insisted that an ethic which protects the conditions of reception is more just than one which demands the end while the conditions lie in ruins. Mercy toward the wounded gate is not a relaxation of the norm. It is the recognition that the norm is reached by way of the condition, and that to attend to the condition is to serve the norm rather than to excuse its abandonment.

The assignment to different offices can seem too neat, and a sharper form of the conflict resists it. Suppose the wounded subject's defence is not a damaged capacity awaiting repair but a settled refusal dressed as incapacity, the gate held shut by a will that finds in the language of woundedness a permission never to open. The developmental account, pressed this way, threatens to supply an alibi: any failure to receive can be redescribed as an injury that has foreclosed containment, and the unconditioned demand, which alone would expose the refusal, is silenced in advance by the plea of incapacity. If every closed gate is a wounded one, the ethical absoluteness of the welcome has no purchase, and reception becomes optional for anyone willing to call their refusal an injury. This is a real danger and the framework does not escape it by fiat. What it offers is a mark of the difference, drawn from the framework's own terms: a genuinely wounded capacity

shows the signature of a capacity under repair, a gate that lowers as the injury heals, a reception that returns as the field is tended, whereas a refusal dressed as incapacity shows no such trajectory, the gate staying shut regardless of how the conditions improve, the incapacity invoked anew at each occasion without ever being worked through. The difference is legible over time, in whether the condition, attended to, yields a reception that grows, or whether the plea of incapacity is a fixed point that no improvement of conditions moves. Mercy toward the wounded gate is owed to the gate that is healing; it is not owed indefinitely to a gate that uses the name of woundedness to stay shut, and the framework's insistence on reading the field over time, rather than accepting a single moment's plea, is what keeps the developmental account from becoming the alibi it could otherwise supply.

The second conflict is the dangerous one, and it is the structural twin of the hardest step in the perception section. The mirror responds yet does not store; the Daoist heart meets things without abiding in them. Yet the fourth movement of the model requires that beauty be *reproduced*, that the relational memory thicken, that the threshold of joint perception be lowered by what has gone before. To thicken, to lower a threshold by accumulation, looks exactly like storing, like the abiding that the mirror forbids. If reception must not store, and reproduction must accumulate, the model appears to demand at one step what it prohibits at another.

4.14.7 The hardest step: responding-yet-not-storing grounds healthy reproduction

The resolution turns on what kind of thing is accumulated, and it is the same distinction the series has drawn between value that is held as a possessed stock and value that is the changed curvature of a field. What the mirror forbids is possessive retention, the seizing of the beauty or the other as a thing to be had, kept against loss, hoarded as a private holding. This is the imaginary register of value, the idolised possession whose nature is to be clung to and whose clinging exhausts what it clings to. The accumulation that healthy reproduction requires is not of this kind. It is not a stock laid up somewhere but the raising of the next cycle's starting point, the changed disposition of the field, the lowered threshold at which the partners can jointly perceive what before went unseen. Nothing is held; the curvature has changed. Holonomy accumulates not as a thing retained but as a property of the path, and a property of the path is precisely what cannot be stored,

because it is not the sort of thing that occupies a place from which it could be kept or lost.

Responding-yet-not-storing grounds healthy reproduction rather than forbidding it. What the mirror prohibits is possessive retention, the hoarding of beauty or the other as a held stock, which belongs to the imaginary register and exhausts what it grasps. What reproduction accumulates is not a stock but a changed curvature of the field, a raised starting point for the next cycle, which is a property of the path and not a thing in a place. Because such accumulation is not storing, it is the only kind of accumulation a non-grasping reception can sustain; the mirror's refusal to store is therefore the condition of an accumulation that does not exhaust, not an obstacle to it.

So the second conflict, like the third conflict of the perception section, inverts. The mirror's refusal to abide does not forbid the thickening that reproduction needs; it founds the only thickening that can go on without exhausting its source, the accumulation that gains because it does not possess. This is the ancient counsel once more, to generate without possessing and to bring to maturity without lording over, read now into the conditions of reception and carried forward into time. A reception that grasped would feed a reproduction that hoarded, and a reproduction that hoards is the bad cycle, the spiral collapsed into a clutching wheel. A reception that responds and does not store feeds a reproduction that accumulates as curvature, and that is the good cycle continuing itself. The mirror, it turns out, was already a teaching about time.

4.14.8 A layered synthesis

The accounts of reception take their places without identification, each at the level where it is true. The welcome of the other is taken at the level of ethics: it states the norm of reception, the direction of the good, the refusal to reduce the other to the same, and it supplies the reason reception is exacting that no psychology could supply, the irreducible excess of the received over the means of receiving. The figures of containment and holding are taken at the level of implementation and development: they describe reception as a capacity that can be built and damaged, they ground the claim that injury makes

reception the principal site, and they may be read alongside an observable account of how unexpected events are integrated rather than defended against. The mirror that responds yet does not store is taken at the level of contemplative cultivation and of metaphysical guard: it names both failures reception must avoid, defence and possession, and it holds the non-possessive line that keeps reception from feeding a hoarding reproduction, and through its internal distinction between retaining a stock and changing a curvature it secures the accumulation the framework needs. Releasement runs through all three as the posture they presuppose, the withdrawal from mastery without which neither welcome nor containment nor non-abiding is possible.

The arrangement uses no equals sign, because the welcome of the other is not the capacity to contain, and neither is the mirror, and to write them as equal would be to claim an identity that none of them would accept and that the framework does not need. What is claimed instead is an arrangement in which each is preserved as itself and asked only for what it can give, which is once more the seeking of common ground while the differences are kept. Reception, gathered this way, is shown to be the step at which the aesthetic discloses the ethical most plainly, because the thing that must be let in is not a sensation but a face, and the discipline of letting it in without defence and without seizure is, at one and the same time, the discipline of a beauty that is produced only between.

4.14.9 The reach and the defeat of each account

The arrangement of reception's accounts, like that of perception's, should rest on a frank accounting of what each grasps and what defeats it, rather than on a tidy distribution of levels, and the accounting is owed especially here because the accounts of reception differ not only in what they explain but in what they take reception fundamentally to be, an ethical relation, a psychological capacity, a contemplative bearing.

The ethics of the welcome explains what no psychology can, why reception is exacting in principle and not merely difficult in fact, locating the difficulty in the irreducible excess of the other over every means of receiving her, and it supplies the norm without which reception would have no direction, the refusal to reduce the other to the same. What defeats it, taken alone, is its silence about capacity and its consequent harshness. By making reception an unconditioned demand prior to the subject's freedom, it has no

place for the subject whose capacity to receive has been damaged, and pressed to the letter it convicts the wounded of evasion when they plead an incapacity the welcome cannot acknowledge. Its strength is the norm and its defeat is the absence of any account of the conditions under which the norm can be met, which is why it cannot be the whole and must be joined to an account of capacity it cannot itself provide.

The psychoanalytic account explains exactly what the welcome cannot, the capacity to receive as something developed and damageable, and it grounds the paper's most humane claims, that injury raises defence and that reception can be cultivated and repaired. It is the account that can be operationalized, that connects reception to observable integration and gating, and that gives the wounded gate a mechanism and a path to healing. What defeats it, taken alone, is its silence about the norm. It describes the capacity and its vicissitudes without telling us what reception is for, toward what it is exercised, and a complete account of reception cannot rest on a description of capacity that is silent about the good the capacity serves. Its strength is the mechanism of capacity and its defeat is the absence of the norm that the welcome supplies, the two being complementary in exactly the way that a level-account requires, the one giving the end and the other the condition.

The contemplative figure of the mirror explains what neither of the others foregrounds, that reception fails in two opposite ways and not one, by defence and by possession, and it holds the non-possessive line that keeps reception from feeding a hoarding reproduction. What defeats it, taken as a complete account rather than as a discipline and a guard, is the same limit that defeated the contemplative route in perception, its tendency at the metaphysical limit to a non-attachment so complete that it would empty reception of the investment the paper requires, the caring that the non-abiding heart must still, as the perception section argued, sustain. The mirror is honoured as the discipline that names both failures and the guard against possession, and it is not adopted as a final doctrine of non-attachment, because a reception wholly without abiding would be a reception without the caring investment that distinguishes it from indifference.

The materialist resolution here is the same in form as in perception and different in content. It refuses to crown any of the three, the ethics of the welcome, the psychology of capacity, the discipline of the mirror, as the whole truth of reception, holding instead

that reception is a real relation with a real other in a real field, possessing at once a norm, a condition, and a discipline, none of which is reducible to the others. It is materialist in taking the other received to be a real other, irreducible and unconstructed, and the capacity to receive her to be a real and damageable feature of a material subject, not a transcendental structure nor a moment of spirit; it is dialectical in holding that the norm, the condition, and the discipline are aspects of one real relation whose truth is their articulation and not any one of them. Against the idealism that would make the other a moment in the subject's self-relation, the paper holds the other's material irreducibility; against the reductive psychology that would make reception merely a regulation of arousal, it holds the norm that the regulation serves; against the contemplative absolutism that would make non-attachment the whole, it holds the caring investment that reception requires. Reception is a real relation to a real other, normed and conditioned and disciplined, and reducible to none of its aspects, which is the materialist dialectic applied to the ethics of letting in.

4.15. The Birth of the Relational

独乐乐，与人乐乐，孰乐？

Mencius

Sharing is the hinge of the whole model, the step at which beauty passes from an experience within a subject into an event between subjects. The two steps before it, perception and reception, could in principle be completed by a single person alone, and a tradition of aesthetic education has in fact stopped there, cultivating a refined private taste and calling the cultivation complete. If the model stopped where they stop, it would be one more such tradition, an education of the solitary connoisseur. What forbids the stopping is the concept the model serves. If beauty is produced in the coupling, then a beauty perceived and received but never carried into the between is a beauty that has not yet become what relational aesthetics says beauty is, and the carrying-across is therefore not an optional generosity laid over a beauty already complete but the act in which beauty is completed, in which the relational is born. This section asks what that act is, and it finds, as the two before it found, that what looks like a simple thing, telling another what

one has seen, is the meeting-point of several traditions that disagree about what sharing does and whether, at its limit, it preserves or dissolves the two who share.

4.15.1 The semantic pivot: sharing generates rather than transmits

Everything in this section turns on a distinction that must be drawn at the outset, because the wrong reading of sharing quietly undoes the concept the paper has built. On one reading, sharing is transmission: I have a beauty, complete in me, and I convey it to you, so that afterward we both possess the same thing, as one might copy a file. On this reading beauty is presupposed as prior, private, and portable, a stock I hold and then duplicate. On the other reading, sharing is generation: the beauty is not conveyed from me to you but produced, then and there, in the act of joint attention, so that before the sharing there was a perception in me and an appropriateness in the field, but the beauty as a coupling event did not yet exist and comes to be only in the between. The first reading keeps beauty in the subject and adds a social act afterward; it is the second party to the old quarrel with a postal service attached. The second reading is the one relational aesthetics requires, on which beauty is born in the sharing and not merely delivered by it.

Sharing generates beauty rather than transmitting it. The act of joint attention does not convey a beauty already complete in one subject to another; it is the event in which beauty, as a coupling between subjects, first comes to be. What precedes the sharing is a perception within a subject and an appropriateness in the field; the beauty proper, the relational event, is produced in the sharing and has no prior existence to be transmitted.

The distinction is not verbal. The transmission reading makes the third step dispensable in principle, a convenience for spreading a good that could have remained whole in one head; the generation reading makes it constitutive, the step without which beauty in the relevant sense never occurs at all. And the generation reading sets the section's central problem, because if beauty is generated in joint attention then we must say what joint attention is and how it differs from two people merely reporting the same pleasure side by side, the side-by-side arrangement that the concept section already warned is not coupling

but its counterfeit. The traditions gathered below are gathered to answer exactly this, what makes the between an event and not a coincidence of two privacies.

An illustrative case — [. The light on the wall, seen alone and seen together] In the late afternoon a particular light falls on the wall of the room the two share, a contingency of weather and season that will not fall in quite this way again. One of them sees it and is moved, registers its passing appropriateness, receives it. Here the cycle could stop, and often does: the one who saw keeps it, a private beauty appreciated alone, and the other never knows the light was there. Or the one who saw says, simply and at once, look, and the other looks, and for a moment the two hold the light in a focus each knows the other shares. The claim of this section is that something is produced in the second case that does not exist in the first, and that it is not merely the first beauty now had by two. Before the saying, there was one person's perception of a light. After the looking-together, there is a beauty that belongs to neither alone, a thing the two now hold between them, which will enter the memory of the room and the relation in a way the privately appreciated light would not. Whether this is real, and what it is if it is real, is the question the traditions below are summoned to answer; the case is only to fix what is at stake, the difference between a light seen alone and the same light made, by the saying, into something shared.

4.15.2 Joint attention and the structure of the between

The first account comes from the study of how two consciousnesses come to share a single attended world. Joint attention is not two people happening to look at the same thing; it is the recursive structure in which each attends to the thing and to the other's attending, so that the object is held in a common focus that each knows to be common. The developmental literature treats this triadic structure, the two subjects and the shared object bound by mutual awareness of the sharing, as the achievement on which the distinctively human capacity for shared intentionality is built (Tomasello 2008); the phenomenological analyses of pairing and of the relation in which two are addressed as we describe the same structure from within, the lived sense in which the object is not mine-then-also-yours but ours from the start. To share a beauty, on this account, is to bring the field into a common focus of this recursive kind, in which what is attended is constituted as common in

the very act of attending.

This gives the section the structural answer it needs to the problem of coincidence. Two people reporting the same pleasure side by side have not entered joint attention; each has a private focus that happens to fall on the same object, and the recursive layer, each attending to the other's attending and knowing the focus to be shared, is absent. Joint attention is precisely the presence of that layer, and it is the layer that makes the difference between an event rather than a coincidence. The account also reaches forward to the implementation section, since joint attention, unlike a private judgement, is the kind of thing that should leave a signature in the coordination of two nervous systems, and the synchrony that hyperscanning studies look for is at least a candidate trace of the recursive common focus this account describes. The account is strong on structure. What it does not by itself supply is the dimension of weight, the sense in which sharing is not only a coordination of attention but a matter of consequence between the two, and for that a second tradition is needed.

4.15.3 Witnessing: the ethical weight of the shared

The second account has run quietly through this series from the beginning, in the reading of poetry as a showing that witnesses and in the practice of witnessing that the series proposed for its own community. Its claim is that sharing, at its depth, is mutual witnessing: you witnessed that this beauty, this contingency, this passing appropriateness, occurred in me, and your witnessing gives it a reality it could not have had alone. The point is not that two observations are more accurate than one. It is that being witnessed changes the standing of what is witnessed, lifts it from a private occurrence that one bears alone into a shared reality that two now hold. The literature on the witnessing of suffering shows the structure at its starkest: an experience that is not witnessed remains, for the one who underwent it, strangely unreal, hard to integrate, and the arrival of a witness is what allows it to become an experience that can be borne and woven in. Carried over to beauty, the structure says that a beauty witnessed becomes a common reality of the relation in a way a beauty unwitnessed does not, and the witnessing carries an ethical weight, the weight of not being left alone with what one has undergone.

This raises the account from coordination to consequence, and it supplies what joint atten-

tion alone could not. Joint attention says how the common focus is structured; witnessing says why it matters, what is at stake between the two in the sharing, namely whether each is left alone with experience or accompanied in it. The two are not rivals. Joint attention is the structure within which witnessing occurs, and witnessing is the ethical dimension of that structure, the reason the recursive common focus is not a cognitive curiosity but a thing that bears on how two people stand to one another. Together they begin to say what the between is. What they have not yet said is how the between moves, how the shared beauty does not merely sit, jointly attended and mutually witnessed, but grows in the exchange, and for that a third tradition is required.

4.15.4 Dialogue and resonance: the movement of the shared

The third account insists that meaning is not held but made, and made only in the back-and-forth of address and answer. On the dialogical view, meaning lives in responsivity; an utterance that meets no answer is not yet fully meaningful (Bakhtin 1981), and a meaning monologically held, never answered, is a meaning dying. Sharing, under this account, is the answering exchange in which the shared beauty does not stay fixed but increases, each response altering what it responds to, so that what passes between the two is not conserved but multiplied. To this the sociology of resonance adds a contrast that the political economy section will need: resonance names a relation in which subject and world answer and alter one another, mutually moved, and it is opposed to reification (Rosa 2019), the relation of unanswered possession in which the world is held mute and used. Sharing that resonates is sharing in which the two are mutually moved and changed; sharing that reifies is the holding of a beauty as a mute possession, attended perhaps, even witnessed, but not allowed to answer back and move.

The value of this account is that it supplies the section's dynamism and so its bridge to reproduction. Joint attention and witnessing, taken alone, might leave the shared beauty static, a common object jointly held and mutually confirmed but unchanging. The dialogical and resonant account makes the sharing itself a movement in which the beauty increases through answering, and an increase through answering is already the beginning of the reproduction the next section studies, the thickening of the shared in the exchange. Its commitment is that meaning and beauty are dialogically generated and non-conserved, born in the answer and multiplied in the back-and-forth, and this

commitment will both feed the account of reproduction and sharpen the conflict the section must now face, the conflict over whether the union that sharing seeks preserves the two or dissolves them.

4.15.5 A sociological voice: the effervescence of the gathered

One further account belongs here, drawn from the sociology of the gathered group, because it describes the production of a shared reality in the assembly with a precision that scales down instructively to the couple. The account observes that when people gather and attend together, something is generated that none brought and none holds alone, a heightened common reality, an effervescence (Durkheim 1912), in which the gathered feel themselves lifted into a shared life larger than their separate ones, and that the symbols and meanings a community lives by are forged in such moments and carried away from them as the residue of the gathering. The mechanism is the mutual amplification of attention and feeling in co-presence: each sees the others moved, is moved further by seeing it, and the shared movement compounds into a reality that is genuinely collective, located in the assembly and not in any member. This is sharing at the scale of the crowd, and its lesson for the couple is that the production of a common reality in co-present joint attention is not a peculiarity of the intimate dyad but a general feature of gathered attention, observed and analysed at the scale of the festival and the rite, of which the couple's shared moment is the smallest instance. The light on the wall, shared, produces between two what the festival produces among many, a common reality forged in co-present mutual attention and carried away as the residue that thickens the relation, and the sociological account, by exhibiting the mechanism at the large scale, confirms that the small-scale version is no sentimental invention but the dyadic case of a documented social process.

The account also contributes a caution the section will need. The effervescence of the gathered is morally indifferent, as capable of forging a lynch mob's terrible solidarity as a festival's joy, and this is the orthogonality of refinement and justice returning at the scale of sharing: the production of a powerful common reality in joint attention is no guarantee of the justice of what is produced. A couple, like a crowd, can forge in their shared attention a common reality that is generative and just, or one that is generative and cruel, accumulating beautifully upon the exclusion or consumption of a third. The

sociological voice, by showing effervescence to be indifferent to the justice of its product, reinforces the paper's insistence that the cultivation of sharing, like every face of the sensibility, must carry the separate demand of justice, since the mere production of a vivid common reality, however real and however moving, settles nothing about whether what the sharing builds is good.

4.15.6 Music and the common: an Eastern principal voice

The principal Eastern voice on sharing is the oldest technology a civilisation devised for turning private feeling into common accord, and it belongs to the ethical-political heart of the tradition this series draws on. Music, the Record of Music says, is what is held in common, that which makes for union (Anonymous 1967), 乐者为同; it is the harmony of heaven and earth, and its work is to bring hearts into a shared resonance that is concord without uniformity, harmonising and yet not merging. Mencius asks whether the joy of music alone can equal the joy of music shared with others, and the question answers itself, that beauty unshared falls short of beauty that has entered the common. This voice states, more directly than any of the Western accounts, the thesis the whole section serves, that beauty must enter the relational to complete itself, and it states it as an ethical and political truth and not merely an aesthetic one, since the rite-and-music tradition understood the sharing of beauty as the very means by which a common life is tuned and a people's disposition formed.

The voice carries two further gifts. The first is the figure of concord-without-uniformity, harmony that does not flatten the many into one, which is precisely the resource the section needs for the conflict ahead, since it names a union that preserves difference rather than dissolving it. The second is the seamlessness with which it joins the aesthetic to the ethical and the political, so that the sharing of beauty is shown to be, from the start and without strain, the tuning of a shared life. Where the Western accounts arrive at the ethical weight of sharing as a result, this tradition began there, having never divided the beautiful from the good, and it thereby confirms from the Eastern side the descent the whole paper traces, the disclosure of the ethical beneath the aesthetic, here met not as a discovery but as an inheritance.

The contrast the tradition draws between music and rite is worth drawing out, because

it states the structure of sharing with a precision the Western accounts approach only slowly. Rite, in the pairing, is what differentiates, what marks the distinctions of role and station and keeps each in its place; music is what unites, what brings the differentiated into a common accord without erasing the distinctions that rite has marked. The two are held together deliberately, and the holding is the whole teaching: union without differentiation would be a mere fusion, a collapse of the many into an undifferentiated one, and differentiation without union would be a mere separation, a society of parts that never sound together. Sharing, on this model, is the musical moment, the bringing of the differentiated two into accord, and it presupposes rather than abolishes the differentiation that keeps them two; the concord is concord precisely because it is the accord of distinct voices and not the unison of one. This is the figure the section needs against the conflict ahead, and the tradition has held it for two and a half millennia: that the deepest union is the one in which the united remain distinct, that harmony is the sounding-together of difference and not its dissolution.

Returned to the light on the wall, the tradition reads the saying as the musical moment. Before the look, two persons differentiated, each in her own perception; the saying, look, and the looking that answers it, is the bringing of the two into accord upon the light, a concord in which they remain two who attend, the one who first saw and the one who is brought to see, joined in a focus that does not erase which of them first found it or how differently each receives it. The beauty produced is the accord itself, the sounding-together of two distinct perceivings upon one light, and it is real in the way a chord is real, present in the sounding-together and in neither note alone. That the tradition reached this without ever dividing the beautiful from the good is why it can state, as a single thought, what the Western accounts assemble from joint attention and witnessing and resonance: that to share the light is to tune, for a moment, the common life of the two, an act at once aesthetic and ethical because in this tradition those were never two acts.

4.15.7 Two real conflicts

The accounts of sharing conflict at two points, the second of which is the dangerous one and the structural twin of the hardest steps already met.

The first conflict is the milder. Joint attention describes sharing as a coordination of attention, a recursive common focus; witnessing describes it as an ethical event, the lifting of a private occurrence into a held reality. Read as rivals, these would compete for what sharing fundamentally is, a matter of cognition or a matter of consequence. They are not rivals, and the framework declines to choose. The recursive common focus is the structure, and the witnessing is the weight that structure carries; a sharing can have the structure thinly, two attentions coordinated on an object with little at stake, or it can have the structure freighted with the consequence of accompaniment, and the difference between a thin coordination and a weighted witnessing is not a difference of two kinds of sharing but of how much the same structure bears. The framework therefore reads joint attention as the form of the between and witnessing as its ethical charge, and assigns the dispute to a confusion of levels rather than a genuine opposition. This is the easy conflict, recorded so that the hard one stands out.

The second conflict cuts to the concept. The accounts of joint attention, of dialogue, of musical concord all press toward union, the formation of a we, a common focus, a resonance in which two are mutually moved. Yet the reception section, following the welcome of the other, insisted that the other must be received as other and never reduced to the same, and a tradition descending from that welcome will warn that the we is the great solvent of otherness, that shared attention shades into fusion, dialogue into echo, resonance into a chamber in which each hears only a confirmation of self, and that the union sharing seeks may be the very dissolution of the difference on which relation depends. If sharing aims at union, and union dissolves the two, then sharing at its limit destroys what relational aesthetics requires, a beauty produced between two who remain two.

4.15.8 The hardest step: sharing is grounded in the preservation of difference

The resolution requires distinguishing two unions that the word conceals, and it is the same shape as the distinctions that resolved the earlier conflicts. One union is fusion, the collapse of two into one, in which difference is dissolved and what remains is a single enlarged self mistaking its own echo for an other. The other is concord, the harmony named in the musical tradition as union-without-uniformity, in which two remain two and precisely thereby can answer, resonate, and witness one another. Fusion cannot wit-

ness, because there is no longer a second to witness the first; it cannot answer, because answering requires an other who is not already oneself; it cannot resonate, because resonance is the mutual movement of two and not the ringing of one. The very phenomena the accounts of sharing describe, the recursive focus that requires two attendings, the answer that requires an addressee, the resonance that requires two poles, are possible only between two who are not fused. Fusion would abolish the conditions of the sharing it was mistaken for.

Sharing is grounded in the preservation of difference, not in its dissolution. The union that sharing seeks is concord, in which two remain two and thereby can attend to one another's attending, answer one another, and witness one another; it is not fusion, in which two collapse into one and the conditions of the sharing are abolished. To be witnessed confirms that I and the other are two, for a witness is precisely a second who is not the first. Healthy sharing therefore confirms otherness rather than consuming it, and the deepest sharing is the moment at which the difference between the two is most fully held.

An objection arises from the side of love's own self-understanding, because lovers have always spoken of fusion as the height of union, of becoming one, of the dissolution of the boundary between two into a single shared being, and a theory that makes the preservation of difference the condition of sharing seems to deny what lovers most prize, the merging they take to be love's summit. The objection has the weight of a long tradition of erotic and mystical speech behind it, and it cannot be met by simply preferring difference to union. It is met by distinguishing the experience of fusion from its reality. Lovers do experience, in certain moments, something they describe as fusion, a heightened sense of union in which the boundary seems to dissolve, and the experience is real and precious and not to be denied. But the experience of boundary-dissolution is not the actual collapse of two into one, and the account can honor the experience while denying the metaphysics the objection draws from it. What occurs in the prized moment is not that two become one, which would abolish the very relation the lovers are in and leave a single being with no one to love, but that two who remain two reach a concord so

complete that the experience of it feels like dissolution, a union so deep that it is felt as oneness though it remains, in reality, the concord of two. The feeling of fusion is the phenomenology of a profound concord, not the metaphysics of an actual merging, and the account claims only that the reality is concord, however the experience describes itself.

This matters practically and not only theoretically, because the belief that love aims at actual fusion does damage that the distinction prevents. A lover who believes union means becoming one will experience the other's persistent difference, her irreducible otherness, as a failure of love, an obstacle to the fusion that love is supposed to achieve, and will press toward a merging that, were it achieved, would destroy the relation by destroying one of its terms. The belief in fusion as love's aim licenses the absorption of one by the other under the name of love's fulfilment, the swallowing of the other's difference as the overcoming of a barrier, and this is the possessive sharing the section warned against, dressed now in the language of love's highest aspiration. The distinction between the experience of fusion and the reality of concord guards against this, by showing that the prized moment is the depth of concord and not the achievement of merging, so that the other's persistent difference is not the obstacle to union but its condition, the very thing that makes the concord a concord of two and not the solitude of one. To love well, on this account, is to seek the depth of concord that feels like fusion while honoring the difference that fusion would destroy, and the objection from love's self-understanding, met this way, confirms rather than refutes the preservation of difference, since what love prizes is correctly understood as a concord so deep it feels like oneness, and a concord requires the two that fusion would abolish.

So the second conflict, like its twins in the perception and reception sections, inverts. The union sharing seeks does not threaten the otherness the reception section guarded; rightly understood as concord rather than fusion, it requires and confirms that otherness, since every phenomenon that makes sharing an event presupposes two who remain distinct. The seeking of common ground while the differences are kept, which this series has named as its method, is here shown to be not a procedural preference but the very structure of healthy sharing: the common ground is the shared field, and the kept differences are the two who must remain two for the field to be shared at all. The hardest step of this section is therefore the same counsel once more, to bring into harmony without lording

over and to unite without absorbing, read into the conditions of the between. A sharing that fused would be a sharing that possessed, one self swallowing the other under the name of love; a sharing that holds the difference is a sharing that generates, two who remain two producing between them a beauty neither could hold alone.

4.15.9 A layered synthesis

The accounts of sharing take their places without identification. Joint attention is taken at the level of structure: it gives the form of the between, the recursive common focus that distinguishes an event from a coincidence of privacies, and it reaches toward the implementation section as the candidate for an observable trace. Witnessing is taken at the level of ethics: it gives the weight the structure carries, the lifting of the private into a held reality, the consequence of accompaniment against abandonment. Dialogue and resonance are taken at the level of dynamics: they give the movement by which the shared increases through answering, the bridge along which sharing passes into reproduction, and the contrast of resonance with reification that the political economy will need. The musical tradition is taken as the principal voice that states the thesis directly and supplies the figure of concord-without-uniformity, joining the aesthetic to the ethical and political without a seam. None is written as equal to another, because the form of the between is not its ethical charge, and neither is its dynamism, and to assert their identity would claim a structure none of them has.

What the synthesis shows is that sharing is the step at which relational aesthetics passes from a thesis about beauty into a visible event, and at which the method of the whole series, common ground with kept difference, is revealed as the inner structure of that event rather than a stance taken toward it. The between is born when two who remain two bring a field into a focus each knows to be shared, witness in one another the appropriateness that occurs there, and answer one another so that what occurs increases. That is the birth of the relational, and with it beauty becomes, at last, the coupling event the concept named, no longer a perception held in one subject but a thing produced and alive between two.

4.15.10 The reach and the defeat of each account

The accounts of sharing differ in what aspect of the between they grasp, and a frank accounting of their reach and their failure is owed before the layered arrangement can claim authority.

The account of joint attention explains the structure of the between, the recursive common focus that distinguishes a shared event from a coincidence of two privacies, and it alone among the accounts connects sharing to something that could be observed, the inter-brain coupling that a measure spanning two nervous systems might detect. What defeats it, taken alone, is its silence about why the between matters. It gives the form of sharing and not its weight, describing the recursive structure without saying what is at stake in it between the two, and a structure described without its stakes is a cognitive curiosity rather than the consequential event sharing is. Its strength is the form and its defeat is the silence about consequence.

The account of witnessing explains exactly the consequence that joint attention omits, why the between matters, what is at stake in being accompanied rather than left alone with experience, and it raises sharing from a coordination to an ethical event. What defeats it, taken alone, is its thinness about structure and dynamics. It says that being witnessed changes the standing of what is witnessed but says little about the recursive structure that makes witnessing possible or the exchange through which the witnessed beauty grows, and an account of sharing cannot rest on the ethical weight alone, needing the structure that joint attention supplies and the dynamics that the dialogical account supplies. Its strength is the weight and its defeat is the need for the form and the movement it does not provide.

The dialogical and sociological accounts explain the dynamics that the other two omit, the movement by which the shared beauty increases through answering and the mechanism by which co-present attention amplifies into a common reality, and they supply the bridge to reproduction and the caution that the common reality forged in sharing is morally indifferent. What defeats them, taken alone, is their indifference to the justice of what is produced, the effervescence of the gathered being as available to the mob as to the festival, so that they describe the production of a vivid common reality without distinguishing the

just from the unjust production, which is why they must be bounded by the orthogonality the paper insists on. Their strength is the dynamics and their defeat is the silence about justice that the orthogonality must supply.

The materialist resolution holds that sharing is a real event between two real subjects in a real field, possessing at once a structure, an ethical weight, and a dynamics, and that the production of the common reality is a real material process whose justice is a further real question not settled by its vividness. It refuses to crown the structure, the weight, or the dynamics as the whole, holding each to be an aspect of one real event whose truth is their articulation. It is materialist in taking the between to be a real relation producing a real common reality, not a construction of either subject nor an appearance of an absolute; it is dialectical in holding the structure, the weight, and the dynamics to be aspects whose articulated relation is the truth of sharing. Against the idealism that would make the we a moment of one subject's self-relation, it holds the real difference of the two that concord preserves; against a reductive account that would make sharing mere behavioural coordination, it holds the ethical weight of witnessing; against an account that would celebrate the common reality without judging it, it holds the orthogonal question of justice. Sharing is the real production of a common reality between two who remain two, structured and weighted and dynamic and answerable to justice, and reducible to none of these, which is the materialist dialectic applied to the birth of the relational.

4.16. Repetition without Return

苟日新，日日新，又日新。

The Great Learning

The fourth movement completes the cycle and is the one most liable to be misread, because the word that names it carries two opposite meanings and the whole account depends on holding them apart. Reproduction can mean the making-again of the same, the duplication that runs an identical operation a second time, and in that meaning it is the mark of the mechanical, the assembly line, the labour of the one condemned to roll the same stone forever. Reproduction can also mean the thickening by which what was

shared settles as a raised starting point, so that the next perception begins higher and finer, and in that meaning it is the very accumulation that distinguishes a good cycle from a wheel. The fourth step is reproduction in the second sense and not the first, and the labour of this section is to say, with precision, what divides them, since they can look identical from outside and the difference between them is the difference between a life that gains and a life that merely turns. This is where the metaphysics of repetition, which the earlier treatment of maintenance opened, is brought to its formal point, and where the political economy of the reproductive act, which the next part will take up, is first joined to it.

4.16.1 The semantic pivot: reproduction returns to the root, not the origin

The distinction the section needs is the one this series has carried as its central geometric figure. To reproduce, in the sense the model requires, is not to repeat the identical but to return to the root without returning to the origin. The cycle closes; perception, reception, sharing, and reproduction bring the practitioner back to perception. But because the sharing has settled as a changed disposition of the field, what is returned to is not the point of departure. The threshold of joint perception has been lowered; the partners can now register what before went unseen; the starting point of the next cycle has been raised. The closing-without-returning is the anholonomy the series has named throughout, the gain that a cycle accumulates precisely by not coming back to where it began, and reproduction is the name, at this most intimate scale, for the settling of that gain.

Reproduction returns to the root and not to the origin. The good cycle closes, bringing the practitioner back to perception, but the starting point has been raised by what the previous cycle settled, so that what is returned to is the root and not the origin. Reproduction in the required sense is this raising of the starting point, the anholonomy of the intimate cycle; reproduction in the degenerate sense is the closing of the cycle upon its own origin, the wheel whose holonomy is zero. The two are indistinguishable in any single act and are told apart only by whether the next cycle begins higher.

This pivot fixes the criterion the section will use throughout, and it is a criterion in the dynamical sense and not the evaluative one. Whether a given repetition is good or degenerate is not read from how the act looks, since the same gesture serves both, but from whether accumulation occurs across cycles, whether the spiral gains altitude or the wheel turns in place. The criterion is the one the series proposed for cycles in general, here brought to the scale of a single returned gesture between two people, and the traditions gathered below are gathered to deepen it, to say in their several languages what makes a repetition gain rather than turn.

An illustrative case — [. The same walk, on the hundredth evening] The two have a walk they take in the evening, the same streets, the same turning, the same return. On the hundredth evening it is, to all appearance, the walk it was on the first: the same route, the same length, the same hour. Yet two hundredth evenings are possible, and they are not the same evening. On the one, the walk has become a track worn smooth, a motion performed because it is performed, each evening a copy of the last, the streets no longer seen, the company no longer met, the walk a wheel that turns because it has always turned. On the other, the hundredth walk is thick with the ninety-nine, the same turning met with a perception deepened by every previous turning, a small new thing seen because so much has been seen before, the company known more finely for the hundred evenings of knowing, so that the walk gains, the field it builds accumulating across the evenings rather than flattening. The route is identical; the repetition is opposite. What divides the deadening walk from the deepening one is the whole question of reproduction, and it cannot be read from the route, which is the same, but only from whether the hundredth evening begins higher than the first.

4.16.2 The two repetitions

The first body of theory is the philosophical analysis of repetition itself, and it converges, from two directions, on the very distinction the pivot drew. One line opposes a backward repetition, the recollection that retrieves what already was, to a forward repetition that produces the new in the form of the again, a repetition by which what is repeated is not retrieved but renewed and gained (Kierkegaard 1843), taken up into a future rather than recovered from a past. Reproduction in the model's sense is forward in just this way:

the shared beauty is not retrieved unchanged but taken up so that the relation gains, and the gain is what makes the again a thickening rather than a recovery. A second line distinguishes a bare repetition of the identical, which is the mechanical and the dead, from a repetition that always carries difference, in which what returns returns differently and the difference is productive (Deleuze 1968); on this analysis the mechanical same is the degenerate limit of a repetition whose truth is the carrying of difference. Both lines give philosophical standing to the distinction between the spiral and the wheel, and both may be read alongside the holonomy criterion without being identified with it, since a literary or metaphysical analysis of repetition and a dynamical measure of path-dependent gain are not the same thing and are not made the same by agreeing.

What these analyses contribute is the demonstration that the good repetition is not a special achievement laid over ordinary repetition but the truth of repetition itself, of which the mechanical same is the falling-away. This matters to the paper's politics as much as its metaphysics, because it means that the bad repetition, the wheel, is not the natural state of the everyday from which beauty must rescue it, but a degeneration of the everyday's own generative tendency, a degeneration with causes that the next account locates. The everyday does not have to be redeemed from repetition. It has to be kept from the degeneration of its repetition, and the difference between those two tasks is the difference between an aesthetic education that despises ordinary life and one that recovers it.

4.16.3 The political economy of the reproductive act

The word reproduction does not come without its history, and the section would be evading its most serious question if it did not hear, in the term, the analysis of social and laboring reproduction that the term carries. That analysis asks under what conditions the making-again of life becomes the alienated making-again of the same, the worker's gesture repeated for another's accumulation, the stone rolled for a purpose that is never the roller's own. Set beside the intimate cycle, the question becomes sharp and unavoidable: what distinguishes the reproductive act that alienates, the gesture endlessly repeated so that holonomy is siphoned off to a power outside the relation, from the reproductive act that accumulates, the gesture finely adjusted again and again so that the holonomy settles into the relation itself. The two are formally alike. Both are repetitions, both

are labour, both make again. They differ in the destination of what the labour produces, in whose field gains the curvature, in whether the accumulation returns to those whose coupling generated it or is captured by an order that owns the channel of its production.

What makes a reproductive act alienated is not repetition but the capture of its holonomy by an external power. A gesture repeated for another's accumulation and a gesture finely adjusted for the relation's own thickening are formally alike as repetitions; they differ in whether the accumulated value returns to the coupling that generated it or is siphoned to an order outside it. Alienation is therefore not a property of the everyday's repetitiousness but of the ownership of its yield, and the same act is bad repetition or good according to where its holonomy goes.

This is the section's guard against its own worst temptation, the temptation to preach a serene aesthetics of the dishcloth to people whose repetition is not theirs to shape. It locates the difference between good and bad repetition not in the inwardness of the laborer, as though the worn-down had only to find beauty in their toil, but in the structure of ownership that decides where the holonomy of their labour goes. The cause this account names, the capture of the cycle's yield by an external power, is the same cause the series identified as the most insidious of the external sources of estrangement, the bleeding of a possessive order into a generative one, and it will be carried directly into the political economy of the field, where the question of who has the leisure and the standing to shape their own repetition is met without evasion.

4.16.4 An anthropological voice: ritual and the cultivation of repetition

The study of ritual offers a third account of how repetition is made to gain rather than dull, and it is worth admitting because it describes, at the scale of cultures, a technology for exactly the good repetition the section theorises. Ritual is repetition deliberately cultivated: the same acts performed again on the recurring occasion, the same words said, the same gestures made, and yet the developed traditions of ritual are emphatic that the repetition is not to be mechanical, that the rite performed by rote is a dead rite, and that the living rite is the one entered freshly each time, the same form filled

with a present attention that makes the hundredth performance more than the first. The anthropological literature describes the means by which traditions guard their rituals against the slide into rote, the framing that marks the ritual time as set apart and so demands a heightened attention, the small variations that keep the form from becoming wholly predictable, the investment of the repeated act with a significance that rewards fresh attention. These are cultural technologies of good repetition, devices by which a community keeps its repeated forms gaining rather than dulling, and they model, at the scale of the culture, what the beauty of maintenance performs at the scale of the couple. The shared evening walk, the daily greeting, the repeated meal are the couple's rituals, and the means by which they are kept fresh, the attention that enters them as set apart, the small variations that keep them from rote, the significance with which they are invested, are the dyadic versions of the cultural technologies the study of ritual describes.

The voice contributes a specific insight the other accounts lack, that good repetition is often not spontaneous but cultivated by form, that the freshness of the repeated act is frequently secured precisely by a structure deliberately maintained, the ritual frame that demands attention rather than leaving it to arise. This corrects a possible misreading of the beauty of maintenance, the misreading on which good repetition would be a matter of spontaneous feeling, the partners simply happening to bring fresh attention to the repeated act. The anthropology of ritual suggests otherwise, that the freshness of repetition is often the achievement of a form that secures it, a structure the partners maintain precisely in order that their repetition shall gain, and that the cultivation of maintenance may therefore include the deliberate making of small rituals, forms set apart and invested with significance, whose function is exactly to keep the repeated act from dulling. Good repetition, on this account, is not only a spontaneous freshness but sometimes a cultivated one, secured by forms the partners build for the purpose, and the beauty of maintenance includes the craft of building such forms, the small domestic rituals whose office is to make the daily return the gaining kind.

4.16.5 Sedimentation and renewal: an Eastern principal voice and a phenomenological one

The last body of theory concerns how reproduction accumulates in time without becoming a hoarded stock, and here an Eastern voice and a phenomenological one speak to the

same point. The phenomenological account describes how the passing present is retained and carried forward, how experience sediments into a sedimented ground that is not a store of objects but a changed disposition out of which the next experience arises. The accumulation of the good cycle is sedimentation in this sense: not a treasury of kept beauties but a settled ground that raises the next beginning, which is exactly the changed curvature the reception section distinguished from a possessive stock. The Eastern voice gives the same accumulation its ethical accent. The injunction of daily renewal, if truly renewed for a day, then day after day renewed (Anonymous 1971), and again renewed, names a repetition that is not the recurrence of the same but the unceasing freshening of the same matter, the same ordinary act made new each time. Daily renewal is good repetition stated as a discipline of life: not the seeking of ever-new objects, which is the exhaustion the next part diagnoses as the consumption of beauty, but the renewing of the same daily thing so that it thickens rather than dulls.

The provenance of the injunction sharpens its meaning. The words are recorded as an inscription on a washing vessel, a basin used daily for an act as ordinary and as repetitive as any in a life, and the placing of the maxim there is itself the teaching: the renewal it commands is to be found in the most repeated and least exalted of daily acts, the daily washing, and not in some exceptional occasion of renewal set apart from ordinary life. To inscribe make it new, day by day, on the basin one uses every morning is to say that the newness is the newness of the same daily thing, the same washing renewed rather than replaced, and that the site of renewal is exactly the repetitive everyday the tradition might have been expected to despise. This is the doctrine of good repetition fixed to its humblest possible object, and it confirms from the Eastern side the whole orientation of this paper: that the renewal which keeps a life from dulling is not the escape from the daily and repetitive into the novel and exceptional, but the freshening of the daily and repetitive itself, the basin made new each morning by the manner of its use rather than by its replacement with a finer basin. The walk on the hundredth evening is renewed in just this sense, made new not by a new route but by the freshening of the same route, which is the only renewal a repetitive life affords and, the inscription insists, the only one it needs.

The two voices together resolve a worry the reception section deliberately left standing,

the worry that accumulation must mean storing and so must violate the mirror that does not abide. Sedimentation is accumulation that does not store, because what settles is not a stock in a place but the raised ground of the next arising; daily renewal is repetition that does not dull, because what returns is freshened rather than recurred. The accumulation reproduction requires is therefore exactly the non-possessive, non-dulling accumulation these voices describe, the settling of curvature and the freshening of the same, and this is why responding-yet-not-storing, far from forbidding reproduction, was already its condition. The mirror was a teaching about time, and these voices say what the teaching, carried into time, becomes: a ground that rises without being hoarded and a sameness that is made new without being merely repeated.

4.16.6 Two real conflicts

The accounts of reproduction conflict at two points, and the second closes the figure that has run through all four sections.

The first conflict reprises, at the level of time, the tension the reception section met: accumulation against non-abiding. The philosophical and phenomenological accounts speak of thickening, sedimentation, a raised ground, a gain carried forward; the contemplative voice that governed reception spoke of a mirror that retains nothing. Stated baldly the two seem to demand opposite things, that reproduction lay up and that nothing be laid up. The resolution was prepared in the reception section and is completed here: what the mirror forbids is the possessive stock, the beauty seized and kept in a place against loss, and what reproduction accumulates is not a stock but a changed curvature, a ground that has risen, a threshold that has lowered. These are not the same kind of thing, and only the first is storing. Sedimentation and daily renewal name precisely the accumulation that is not a hoard, the settling of disposition and the freshening of the same, so that the conflict between accumulation and non-abiding dissolves once it is seen that the accumulation in question was never of the kind non-abiding forbids. The mirror and the rising ground are consistent because one speaks of what must not be grasped and the other of what cannot be grasped, the curvature of a path being no candidate for a hoard.

The second conflict is the gravitational one, the pull of the wheel. Even granting the distinction between good and degenerate repetition, the degenerate is not a remote possi-

bility but a constant tendency; repetition slides toward the mechanical, the shared dulls into routine, the spiral loses altitude and flattens toward the wheel. If this drift is the natural fate of repetition, then the good cycle is at best a temporary victory against an entropy that will reclaim it, and reproduction, the step that was to secure accumulation, is forever undermined by the very repetitiousness it requires. The conflict is not idle. Anyone who has watched a shared life dull into habit knows the pull is real, and an account that merely asserted the good repetition without facing the drift toward the bad would be sentimental in exactly the way the paper has tried not to be.

4.16.7 The hardest step: reproduction is fed by the prior three and so closes the cycle

The resolution to the second conflict is the one that completes the model, and it turns on seeing that reproduction is not a step performed alone. The drift toward the wheel is real for any repetition considered in isolation, a making-again with no fresh input, and such a repetition does flatten, because nothing enters it to renew what it repeats. But reproduction in the model is not an isolated making-again. It is the fourth movement of a cycle whose first three movements feed it: each turn of the spiral is renewed by a fresh perception that sees what before went unseen, a reception that lets the new alteration in, a sharing that generates between the two a beauty that did not exist before. The thickening of reproduction is not the step's own solitary achievement, a stock it builds by repeating; it is the settling of what the prior three steps have freshly produced this turn. Reproduction flattens toward the wheel exactly when the prior three have ceased, when nothing new is perceived, received, or shared, and the making-again runs on empty. It gains altitude exactly when they continue, when each turn carries new contingency in.

Reproduction does not secure accumulation on its own and cannot. It thickens only insofar as the prior three movements continue to feed it, a fresh perception, a new reception, a generated sharing, on each turn; deprived of them it runs on empty and flattens toward the wheel. The health of reproduction is therefore not a property of the fourth step but a function of whether the first three are still occurring. This is what closes the four

movements into a cycle rather than a line: reproduction returns not to a stored deposit but to perception, and the return is alive only if perception is alive. The drift toward the wheel is resisted not by working harder at reproduction but by keeping the cycle turning.

An objection follows immediately and must be met, because it threatens to dissolve the fourth step altogether. If reproduction thickens only insofar as the prior three feed it, if its health is a function of whether perception, reception, and sharing are occurring, then reproduction seems to be nothing in its own right, a mere name for the settling of what the other three produce, and not a distinct movement at all. The model, on this objection, has not four steps but three, with reproduction a redundant label for their result. The objection would hold if reproduction were merely the passive deposit of the prior three, but it is not, and the distinction is precise. Reproduction is the distinct movement by which what the prior three produce is allowed to settle as a raised starting point rather than dissipating, and this allowing is itself an act, distinct from the perceiving and receiving and sharing whose product it settles. The prior three can occur and their product can still fail to settle, dissipating instead of raising the next beginning, and what makes the difference is reproduction, the distinct movement of letting the produced beauty thicken into the field rather than pass and be lost. A couple may perceive, receive, and share a beauty and then let it dissipate, treat it as a passing pleasure complete in itself, and in that case the prior three occurred and reproduction did not, the beauty had and not settled. Reproduction is the distinct act of settling, the turning of a passing event into a raised ground, and it is no more redundant for depending on the prior three than a harvest is redundant for depending on the growing, the harvest being the distinct act without which the growing yields nothing kept. The fourth step depends on the first three and is not reducible to them, because the settling it performs is an act the others do not contain, the act by which their product is made to thicken rather than pass.

This deepens rather than dissolves the closing of the cycle, because it shows reproduction to be both dependent and distinct, the movement that both requires the prior three and adds to them the settling without which they would yield no accumulation. The cycle closes through reproduction not because reproduction passively receives the prior three but because reproduction actively settles their product into the raised ground that the next perception begins from, and this active settling is the hinge on which the line

becomes a cycle, the point at which what was produced is turned back into a condition for what will be produced. Without the fourth step the first three would be a line, producing beauties that dissipate; with it they are a cycle, producing beauties that settle into a ground that raises the next production. Reproduction is thus the distinct movement that makes the difference between a line and a cycle, dependent on the prior three for its material and distinct from them in the settling it performs, and the model has four steps and not three because the settling is an act and not a mere result.

With this the figure that has organised the whole account completes itself. Each of the four sections met a conflict that threatened the model, and each conflict inverted on the same distinction, between a grasp that possesses and a generation that does not: non-division grounding discrimination, responding-yet-not-storing grounding accumulation, the preservation of difference grounding union, and now the feeding of reproduction by the living prior steps grounding the cycle's gain against the wheel. The four are not four lessons but one, the ancient counsel to generate without possessing and to bring to maturity without lording over, traced through perception, welcome, the between, and time. And the fourth completes the others, because it is the one that shows the model to be a cycle, returning to its root and not its origin, so that the form of the four steps is the very form of the good cycle they were meant to cultivate. The account, at its close, enacts what it describes; the paper, like the poetry the series took as its first paradigm, is built in the shape of its own claim.

4.16.8 A layered synthesis

The accounts of reproduction take their places without identification. The philosophical analyses of repetition are taken at the level of metaphysics: they give the standing of the distinction between the spiral and the wheel, the forward repetition that gains against the backward one that retrieves and the differential repetition against the mechanical same, and they may be read alongside the holonomy criterion without being collapsed into it. The political economy of the reproductive act is taken at the level of conditions and justice: it gives the cause of degeneration that lies outside the laborer, the capture of the cycle's yield by an external power, and it guards the account against preaching inwardness to the dispossessed. Sedimentation and daily renewal are taken at the level of temporal structure and of cultivation: they give the form of an accumulation that does

not hoard and a repetition that does not dull, and they resolve the standing worry that accumulation must violate non-abiding. None is written as equal to another, because a metaphysics of repetition, an analysis of ownership, and a discipline of daily renewal are not one thing, and the framework asks of each only what it can give.

What the synthesis secures is the close of the cycle and so of the model. Reproduction, rightly understood, is neither the mechanical making-again that the word first suggests nor a solitary feat of accumulation, but the settling, into a raised and non-hoarded ground, of what the living cycle has freshly produced, kept from alienation by the return of its yield to the coupling and kept from dulling by the continued turning of the prior three steps. The cultivation of the field, begun in perception and carried through reception and sharing, completes itself here not by reaching an end but by raising a beginning, and the four movements stand revealed as the smallest form in which a good cycle is enacted between two people, a form that gains by returning to its root and never to its origin.

4.16.9 The reach and the defeat of each account

The accounts of reproduction differ in whether they grasp its metaphysics, its political conditions, or its temporal form, and the accounting of their reach completes the section's argument.

The philosophical analyses of repetition explain the metaphysics of the distinction the section needs, the difference between the repetition that gains and the repetition that recurs, and they give the spiral and the wheel their standing in the history of thought, the forward repetition that renews and the differential repetition that carries difference against the mechanical same. What defeats them, taken alone, is their abstraction from the conditions under which repetition is actually one or the other. They tell us what good and degenerate repetition are but not what makes a given repetition degenerate in a given life, and pressed for that they would locate the difference in the inwardness of the repeater, which is exactly the sentimental error the political economy of the reproductive act exists to refuse. Their strength is the metaphysics and their defeat is the silence about conditions that the political-economic account must break.

The political economy of the reproductive act explains what the metaphysics omits, the condition that makes repetition deaden, the capture of its yield by an external power, and

it guards the account against preaching inwardness to the dispossessed. What defeats it, taken alone, is its silence about the metaphysics it presupposes. It tells us that captured repetition deadens but draws on the distinction between the gaining and the recurring repetition that only the metaphysical account supplies, and it cannot by itself say what the accumulation is that capture diverts, needing the holonomy that the framework provides. Its strength is the condition and its defeat is the dependence on a metaphysics it does not itself furnish.

The accounts of sedimentation and daily renewal explain the temporal form of the accumulation, how it settles without hoarding and freshens without dulling, and they resolve the standing worry that accumulation must violate non-abiding. What defeats them, taken alone, is their silence about both the metaphysics and the conditions, describing the form of good temporal accumulation without grounding the distinction it instances or naming the conditions under which it fails. Their strength is the temporal form and their defeat is their dependence on the metaphysics and the political economy that place the form they describe.

The materialist resolution holds that reproduction is a real temporal process in a real field, possessing at once a metaphysical structure, a political condition, and a temporal form, and that the accumulation it secures is a real material accumulation whose ownership is a real material question. It is materialist in taking the accumulation to be real, a real change in the curvature of a real field, and the capture of its yield to be a real material relation of ownership, not a metaphor; it is dialectical in holding the metaphysics, the condition, and the form to be aspects of one real process whose truth is their articulation. Against an idealism that would make repetition's renewal a matter of the repeater's attitude alone, it holds the material condition of the yield's ownership; against a reduction that would make reproduction mere biological or economic recurrence, it holds the metaphysical distinction of the gaining from the recurring; against a formalism that would describe the temporal pattern without grounding it, it holds the metaphysics and the political economy that place the form. Reproduction is the real accumulation of a real field across time, structured and conditioned and formed, and reducible to none of these, which is the materialist dialectic applied to repetition without return. With this the four battlefields are complete, and the same materialist refusal of any theory's final authority has governed

all four, each resolved not by a synthesis that crowns one account but by the determinate articulation of aspects, each doing its real work and none permitted to be the whole.

4.17. Observable Signatures: An Implementation-Level Interface

The account so far has been ontological, ethical, and cultivational, and it would be incomplete in a particular way if it stopped there, because it has repeatedly made claims of a kind that ought to leave traces. If the perception of the field is the relaxation of an over-weighted prior, if reception is the integration of what was met rather than its defence, if sharing is a coupling event between two subjects, and if reproduction is a threshold lowered across cycles, then each of these, were it actual, should show up in something measurable, and a framework that named such mechanisms while refusing every commitment about their signatures would be protecting itself from test in a way the series has elsewhere refused to. This section supplies the interface: for each of the four movements, the observable signature it should leave if the account is true. The interface is offered under a strict condition, stated before anything else, because the condition governs every sentence that follows.

4.17.1 The condition: an interface is not an identity

The condition is the same one this series has imposed wherever it has reached for the language of a formal or empirical science, in the predictive reading of trust and in the dynamical reading of the relational field. The neuroscience is taken at the level of implementation, as the description of what should be observable if the higher-level account holds, and not as a reduction of the higher-level account to the mechanism. To say that reception leaves a signature in how prediction errors are integrated is not to say that reception is that integration, in the way that to say a vow leaves a signature in a signed document is not to say the vow is the ink. The relation asserted throughout this section is that the four movements, if actual, should leave observable signatures, and that relation is one of expected manifestation under a hypothesis, not of identity. No equals sign appears in this section, and its absence is not a stylistic tic but the exact mark of the commitment: an identity claim would say the aesthetic act simply is a neural event, which would dissolve the relational ontology the whole paper has built, whereas a signa-

ture claim says only that the act, being actual, should be found to have left a trace, which leaves the ontology intact and renders it answerable to evidence at the same time. The value of the interface is precisely that it makes the account falsifiable without making it reductive: if the signatures are sought and not found, the account is in trouble; if they are found, the account is supported but not thereby shown to be nothing but the mechanism.

4.17.2 Perception: sensitivity to deviation

The perception section read the seeing of the field, at its implementation level, as a refusal to let an over-weighted prior flatten the field, a keeping of the weight on incoming evidence so that the unplanned deviation is not silently explained away. If that reading is right, then a perceiver who has cultivated this keeping should differ, observably, from one who has not, in responsiveness to deviation. The signature to look for is an enhanced neural response to the unexpected, the kind of response indexed by the established markers of surprise and salience, and a corresponding change after training: the prediction of the account is that the cultivation described in the perception section should, if it does what it claims, raise the system's registration of contingency rather than leaving it flat under a confident prior. The salience-marking systems that flag the unexpected, and the event-related components that rise to a deviation, are the candidate places such a signature would appear. The account does not assert that perceiving the field is the firing of these systems; it predicts that, if the cultivation of perception is real, its effect should be visible there, as a measurable shift in how much an unexpected event in the field is registered rather than absorbed in advance.

A subtlety must be added, because the naive form of this prediction is too crude and would be embarrassed by an obvious objection. If the signature of cultivated perception were simply a larger response to every deviation, then the cultivated perceiver would be one who is startled by everything, overwhelmed by surprise, unable to let the predictable be predictable, which is plainly not what a fine perception of the field is; a perception that responded maximally to every deviation would be not fine but pathological, drowning in noise. The prediction must therefore be refined: the signature of cultivated perception is not a uniformly larger response to deviation but a better-calibrated one, an enhanced response to the deviations that matter, the contingencies that bear on the field's state, and not to mere noise. The cultivated perceiver registers more strongly the unplanned

thing that signifies, the remark that bears a weight, the shift that means something, while not being thrown by every random fluctuation, and this is a matter of what the system treats as signal rather than of how much it responds in general. The refined prediction is thus about the selectivity of the response, its tuning to the significant deviation, and not about its gross magnitude, and this selectivity is harder to measure but truer to what cultivated perception is, the discrimination of the deviation that matters from the noise that does not, which is exactly the resolution the coupling section described, now sought as a calibration of response rather than a mere amplitude of it. The naive prediction, larger responses, would be both easy to test and wrong; the refined prediction, better-calibrated responses, is harder to test and right, and the interface must commit to the harder and right one.

4.17.3 Reception: integration rather than gating

The reception section drew a distinction between two fates of what perception delivers: it can be integrated, allowed to update the model and alter the valuation it enters, or it can be defensively gated, held off so that it changes nothing. That distinction, if real, has an implementation-level signature in whether a prediction error is propagated into an update or is suppressed before it can. The account predicts that reception, when it succeeds, should be visible as the integration of the unexpected into a revised model, the kind of revision that a measurable learning rate would register, and that defended reception should be visible as the suppression of that revision, an error met and gated rather than learned from. The regulation of limbic reactivity by prefrontal systems is the candidate locus for the difference between meeting an unexpected, possibly disturbing event with integration and meeting it with defence, and the developmental claim that injury raises defence and forecloses containment makes a further prediction here, that a relation or a subject under the load of recent injury should show, at this interface, more gating and less integration, a measurable correlate of the wounded gate the reception section described. Again the relation is one of signature and not identity: reception is not the prefrontal regulation of a limbic response, but if reception is actual it should leave its trace in whether the error it meets is integrated or suppressed.

This signature requires a refinement that distinguishes it from a confound the account must rule out, the confound of mere indifference. A system that integrated every error

without suppression might look, at this interface, like perfect reception, but it might equally be a system that defended against nothing because nothing reached it, a flatness mistaken for openness, the indifference that lets everything in because it cares about none of it. Reception, as the paper means it, is not indifference; it is the letting-in of what matters, the integration of the significant error that defence would otherwise gate, and its signature must therefore distinguish the open reception of the significant from the indifferent passage of everything. The refined prediction is that reception shows as the integration of errors that carry weight, the unexpected things that bear on the field, while indifference shows as a uniform low reactivity that integrates because it is not engaged, and the difference between them is whether the integration is selective, tuned to what matters, or flat, equal across the significant and the trivial alike. This parallels the refinement the perception signature required, the distinction of the calibrated response from the merely large one, and it has the same source: reception, like perception, is a matter of selectivity, the letting-in of the significant and not the indiscriminate admission of everything, and its signature is the selective integration of what matters rather than the flat integration of all. The interface must therefore predict not integration as such but selective integration, the letting-in of the weighted error and not the indifferent passage of every error, and this selective signature is what distinguishes the reception the paper means from the indifference that would counterfeit it at the level of the mechanism.

The developmental dimension deepens this and connects it to the account's most humane claim. If reception is a capacity that injury damages, then the signature of damaged reception should be not a uniform suppression but a specific pattern, the gating of exactly the errors that bear on the wound, the defence raised against the significant while the trivial passes freely, the selective closure that injury produces. A subject whose reception has been wounded does not become indifferent to everything; she becomes defended against what touches the injury, integrating freely what is safe and gating what is dangerous, and the signature of her wounded reception is this selective gating, the closure tuned to the threatening rather than spread across all. This makes the interface's developmental prediction specific and testable: the wounded gate is not a global suppression but a targeted one, raised against the significant and dangerous, and its healing should show as the gradual return of integration to exactly the errors it had gated, the wound's specific closure specifically reopening as the injury heals. The mercy the reception section urged

toward the wounded gate is thus given an implementation-level shape, the recognition that the wounded subject is not indifferent but specifically defended, and that her healing is the specific reopening of a specific closure, a process the interface predicts should be visible as the targeted return of integration to the errors the wound had taught her to gate.

4.17.4 Sharing: inter-brain coupling

The sharing interface is the one of greatest consequence, because it is the place where the central concept of the paper, relational aesthetics, is most directly exposed to evidence, and so it is worth stating with care what is and is not being claimed. The concept holds that beauty is a coupling event between subjects, produced in joint attention and not transmitted between two privacies. If that is so, then a shared aesthetic moment should differ from two simultaneous private ones in a way that is not located in either subject alone but in the relation between their two nervous systems, and the candidate signature is inter-brain synchrony, the coupling between two brains that the methods of dual recording, hyperscanning, are built to detect (Czeszumski et al. 2020). The prediction is specific: a genuinely shared aesthetic moment, the recursive common focus the sharing section described, should leave a signature in inter-brain coupling that the side-by-side coincidence of two private judgements should not, because the former has the between that the latter lacks, and the between is exactly what a measure spanning two brains, rather than residing in one, is positioned to register.

This makes inter-brain synchrony the strongest candidate the paper has for a hard empirical correlate of its central concept, and the stakes should be stated honestly in both directions. If shared aesthetic moments are found to be marked by inter-brain coupling that matched but unshared moments are not, that is direct empirical support for the claim that beauty in the relevant sense is a coupling event with a site between the subjects rather than within either, support of a kind that no analysis of single brains could provide. If, on the other hand, no such differential coupling is found, the concept is under real pressure, because a beauty claimed to be produced between two subjects ought to be visible between them, and its invisibility there would be evidence against the betweenness the concept asserts. The interface thus does for relational aesthetics what an interface should do: it stakes the concept on a finding rather than insulating it. And still the

condition holds, that even a confirming synchrony would be the signature of the coupling and not the coupling itself, since the beauty of the shared moment is a relational event in the world and not a correlation in a recording, however much the correlation, if found, would be its trace.

A methodological objection must be faced, because it is the one the relevant research literature has learned to press, and an interface that ignored it would be naive. Inter-brain synchrony between two people attending to the same scene might be no coupling between them at all but a mere artefact of common input: two brains exposed to the same light, the same room, the same passing event, will show correlated activity simply because they are driven by the same external causes, and such correlation would mark no betweenness, only a shared outside. If the synchrony the account predicts were of this kind, it would not be evidence for relational aesthetics, since two strangers who happened to face the same scene would show it equally, and the concept requires a coupling between the two and not a common cause acting on both. The objection is serious, and the account does not wave it away; it specifies the prediction so as to exclude the artefact. What relational aesthetics predicts is not synchrony during shared attention as such but a differential synchrony, an excess of coupling in the genuinely shared aesthetic moment over the coupling present when the same two attend to the same scene without the recursive common focus that makes the moment shared in the relevant sense. The control is the matched but unshared moment, two people attending to the same light without the joint attention that constitutes the between, and the prediction is that the shared moment exceeds it. Common input is present in both the shared and the matched-unshared condition and so cannot explain a difference between them; only the coupling the concept names is present in the one and absent in the other. The prediction is therefore not the naive one that vulnerable to the artefact but the specific one that the artefact cannot produce, and stating it so is what makes inter-brain synchrony a genuine test of betweenness rather than a measure of shared illumination.

4.17.5 Reproduction: experience-dependent plasticity

The reproduction section described accumulation as a lowered threshold of joint perception, a raised starting point carried across cycles, the settling of a changed disposition rather than a stored stock. The implementation-level signature of such accumulation

is experience-dependent plasticity, the lasting change in a system wrought by repeated experience, expressed here as a downward shift in the threshold at which the partners jointly register what before went unseen. The prediction is that good reproduction, the spiral that gains, should be visible as a longitudinal change in perceptual sensitivity, a lowering across time of the threshold for joint registration, covarying with the frequency of shared aesthetic moments, whereas degenerate reproduction, the wheel, should show no such drift, the same gesture repeated leaving sensitivity flat. This is the slowest of the four signatures, the one that appears only over time, which is fitting, since reproduction is the movement that lives in time, and its trace is by nature a trace across cycles rather than within a moment. The non-hoarding character of the accumulation has its analogue here too: what plasticity records is not a stored quantity but a changed responsiveness, a disposition rather than a deposit, which is the implementation-level echo of the distinction between curvature and stock that the reception and reproduction sections drew.

4.17.6 The purpose of the interface

Gathered, the four signatures form a research programme more than a result, a set of places to look rather than a set of findings, and they are offered in that spirit. Their function in the paper is twofold. First, they discharge the debt the perception section incurred when it retained the predictive account at the level of implementation rather than ontology: the debt is paid by showing, across all four movements, exactly what implementation-level work the empirical sciences do here, which is to supply the observable signatures of an account whose substance lies elsewhere. Second, they keep the whole edifice answerable. A philosophy of intimacy that made claims about perception, reception, sharing, and reproduction while standing wholly beyond the reach of evidence would be asking to be believed rather than tested, and the series has consistently preferred to be tested. The interface is the form that preference takes here: it names, for each movement, the finding that would support the account and the absence that would embarrass it, and it does so without surrendering the relational ontology to the mechanism, holding throughout to the one discipline this section exists to keep, that a signature is the trace of a thing and never the thing itself.

4.17.7 The interface and the relational ontology

A final word situates the whole interface within the relational ontology it serves, lest the gathering of neural signatures be misread as a quiet concession that the relational account was, after all, reducible to the brain. The opposite is the case, and the structure of the interface shows why. Of the four signatures, the one that bears most directly on the paper's central concept, the inter-brain coupling that would mark the sharing in which beauty is produced, is precisely the one that cannot be located in any single brain, that requires a measure spanning two nervous systems, that is by its nature a signature of the between and not of either pole. The most important signature the interface seeks is therefore one that a single-brain neuroscience could never find, a coupling that exists only between two brains and not within either, and this is the strongest possible indication that the interface, far from reducing the relational to the neural, requires a neuroscience that has itself become relational, that measures couplings between brains and not only states within them. The relational ontology is not conceded by the interface but imposed upon the neuroscience by it, the concept of relational aesthetics demanding a measure that spans the between because the beauty it names lives there.

This is why the interface, for all its empirical commitment, leaves the relational ontology not weakened but confirmed in its place. The signatures are the traces the relational events leave in the implementing machinery, and the most central of them is a trace that only a between can leave, a coupling no single brain contains. To seek it is to commit the neuroscience to the very betweenness the paper's ontology asserts, to require of the measurement exactly the relational structure the concept describes, so that the interface, rather than dissolving the relational into the neural, extends the relational into the neural, carrying the betweenness of the concept into the very design of the measurement that would test it. The implementation level, properly understood, does not undercut the ontology above it but answers to it, shaped by the relational structure of what it implements, and the interface is therefore the relational ontology's reach into the empirical, not its surrender to it, the point at which a philosophy of the between requires and receives a science of the between, each holding to the relational structure that the other, in its own register, describes.

4.18. A Worked Example: The Cultivation of Contingency

The four movements have been given their theory, and the theory will remain an abstraction until it is shown doing the one thing it was built to do, which is to be practised. This section takes a single capacity, the aesthetic perception of contingency, and walks it through all four steps, naming for each the practice that cultivates it, the failure that shadows it, and the condition under which it becomes the principal site. The capacity is chosen deliberately. A companion to this series argued that the perception of contingency, the noticing of what need not have happened, is the aesthetic core of the field of travel, the openness in which the relational subject is generated; but that argument said what the perception is and not how it is trained, and the omission is the one this section repairs. What follows is therefore not an illustration laid beside the theory but the theory brought to the scale at which a person could begin tomorrow morning, and it carries one constraint that the political economy section will defend: every practice named here must be a re-meeting of an act the day already contains, and not an added exercise requiring leisure the worn-down do not have, since an aesthetic education affordable only to the unhurried would betray its own thesis.

4.18.1 Perceiving contingency

The first step is to see the contingent at all, to register the small unplanned thing that the day would otherwise absorb without trace: the unexpected turn of a sentence, the way a light fell that will not fall so again, a reaction from the other that the script did not predict. The practice is the insertion of a half-second before a habitual act, a refusal to begin the planned motion until the field as it actually is this morning has been let to appear, the other's tone today, the particular disorder of the table, the thing that is not as it was yesterday. This is the emptying-to-await of the Daoist voice made into a repeatable micro-act, a gap held open between intention and the field so that the prior does not flatten the morning into a copy of every prior morning. The failure that shadows it is the flattening itself, the strong expectation that explains the field in advance, the silent certainty that she is as she always is at this hour, under which the contingent is registered as nothing because it was predicted as everything. The sign of whether the step is alive is simple and merciless: whether one can still be touched, inside the most

familiar hour, by something small that need not have been.

This is the principal site when a relation has grown dull. Dullness is not the absence of activity, since the dull relation still acts, still greets and sets the table and shares by habit; it is the cessation of seeing, the field grown so predicted that no contingency gets through, and the labour that matters then is not more doing but the recovery of sight, the reopening of the half-second gap that habit has closed. To work on sharing or reproduction while perception has died is to elaborate a cycle that no longer has an intake, and the dialectical discipline of the model is what tells the practitioner, here, that the gap is where the work belongs.

4.18.2 Receiving contingency

To perceive the contingent is not yet to let it in. The second step is to allow the unexpected thing to alter the morning rather than to correct it back into the plan, and the practice is the suppression of the reflex by which the unforeseen is treated as a deviation to be managed, the answer that did not fit folded back toward the answer that would have, the unplanned mood received as an obstacle to the day's intentions rather than as a thing that may rewrite them. This is the letting-be of releasement and the mirror that does not see things off, made into the discipline of not putting the contingent back in its place, which the reception section showed to be, at its depth, the refusal to reduce the other to the same. The failure that shadows it is defensive gating, the meeting of the unexpected as interference, its swift return to order before it can change anything, the morning's plan defended against the morning. The sign of the step's health is whether what was not foreseen is permitted to revise the valuation it entered, whether the day can be, in some small part, rewritten by what it did not expect.

This is the principal site when a relation has lately been wounded, because injury is exactly what raises the gate. After hurt the defended posture is highest, the unexpected is met as threat by default, and the contingent that might have refreshed the field cannot get past the guard; no quantity of perceiving, no eagerness to share, substitutes for the lowering of that gate, which is why the reception section insisted that the wounded relation's work is reception and not the steps around it. The mercy the political economy section will urge belongs here too: the gate that injury has shut does not open on command, and the

practice is the patient, undemanded lowering of a guard, not the forcing of a welcome the wound has made impossible.

4.18.3 Sharing contingency

The received contingency, held inside one person, is not yet the beauty relational aesthetics names; the third step carries it into the between. The practice is the timely and unelaborated joint indication of what has been received, the brief look at that light, the few words that say only that the other's remark just now was good, the bringing of the contingent into a focus the two now share and each knows to be shared. Everything turns on timeliness and lightness, because the contingent is by nature passing, and a sharing delayed until it can be explained, or weighted with analysis until it is pinned, has let the coupling event slip while preparing to honour it. The practice is the small, swift, unjudging co-indication that opens the recursive common focus before the moment is gone. It fails in two opposite ways, and the mirror named both: the contingency can be hoarded, kept as a private appreciation never carried across, the connoisseur's quiet possession of a beauty he does not share; or it can be over-spoken, the moment crushed under the weight of saying, the light talked about until it has gone out. Between the hoarding and the crushing lies the brief co-indication that lets the between be born.

This is the principal site when a relation has grown estranged. In estrangement the prior two steps may still occur within each person, each perceiving and even receiving the contingent alone, but the carrying-across has stopped, the field has lost the coupling event, and beauty is produced privately on both sides of a gap it no longer crosses. The labour that matters then is the carrying itself, however small, the re-opening of the channel by which what each sees alone can become a thing the two hold together, because it is only there, in the resumed between, that the beauty estrangement has driven into two private interiors can again become relational.

4.18.4 Reproducing contingency

The shared contingency can dissipate, consumed and forgotten, or it can settle so that the next morning's seeing begins higher; the fourth step is the settling. The practice is not the pursuit of a new and stronger contingency but the return to the same daily thing

to find in it, this time, a finer appropriateness than before, the same walk at evening, the same greeting, the same dish, met on the hundredth occasion with a perception thickened by the ninety-nine. This is daily renewal made concrete, the freshening of the same rather than the seeking of the new, and it is the practical face of the distinction between the spiral and the wheel: if each return carries a finer registration, the cycle gains and the threshold of joint seeing lowers, so that contingency becomes easier to catch together next time; if each return merely re-enacts the last, the practice has become consumption, and consumption of beauty, like all consumption in the imaginary register, demands ever-larger doses of novelty to feel anything at all. The failure that shadows reproduction is exactly this turn to consumption, the need for a bigger contingency to register a smaller and smaller return, the exhaustion that the series diagnosed as the fate of value sought as a possession.

This is the principal site when a relation has stalled in plenty, when perceiving and receiving and sharing all still happen but produce only a re-enactment of yesterday's pleasure, beauty consumed rather than thickened. And it is here that the worked example closes the loop the model promised, because reproduction's freshening is not the fourth step's solitary achievement but the lowering of a threshold that makes the first step easier on the next turn: the contingency thickened by reproduction is a contingency more readily perceived tomorrow, so that the cycle returns not to where it began but to a perception raised by what the last cycle settled. The capacity this section set out to cultivate, the aesthetic perception of contingency, is therefore not trained by working on perception alone but by turning the whole cycle, since each completed turn lowers the threshold of the perception the next turn begins from. To learn to see what need not have happened is to have received it, shared it, and let it settle, often enough that seeing it has become the easier thing.

An illustrative case — [. The four ways the cultivation of contingency fails] Each step fails in its own way, and naming the four failures together shows them to be distinct rather than one. Perception fails by the flattened morning: the prior so confident that the unplanned is explained away before it registers, the partner certain she knows how the other is and therefore unable to be surprised by him, the contingency predicted out of existence. Reception fails by the defended morning: the unplanned thing seen but met as

interference, corrected back into the plan, the answer that did not fit folded toward the one that would have, the gate raised against what might have revised the hour. Sharing fails in two opposite directions: by hoarding, the contingency kept as a private appreciation never carried across, the quiet connoisseurship of a beauty unshared; and by crushing, the moment over-spoken, weighted with analysis until the light talked about has gone out. Reproduction fails by consumption: the turn to ever-larger novelty, the need for a bigger contingency to feel a smaller return, the beauty had and discarded rather than settled and thickened. Four steps, five failures, no two alike, and the dialectical reading is what tells the practitioner which failure is the one now operating, since the remedy for the flattened morning would do nothing for the defended one, and the remedy for hoarding would only worsen the crushing.

4.18.5 The shape of the practice

Set end to end, the four practices are a single small loop that a day affords many times over, and naming it plainly is the point of the section. Before a habitual act, hold the half-second that lets the morning's contingency appear; allow what appears to revise the morning rather than be corrected away; carry it, lightly and at once, into a focus the two of you share; and return, on the next occasion, to find the same thing thickened by the sharing that went before, the threshold of seeing lowered so that the next contingency is caught more readily. The loop closes without returning to its origin, since the last step raises the first, and that closing-without-return is the holonomy the series has tracked from the beginning, here enacted at the smallest scale a shared life contains, the scale of a single noticed thing between two people. None of the four practices requires an hour set aside or a leisure the day does not already hold; each is a different way of meeting an act the day was going to contain regardless, which is the whole of what the next section means when it insists that this cultivation must be available to those whose days hold no spare hours at all. The worked example thus delivers what the theory promised, an aesthetic education that is genuinely practicable, genuinely relational, and genuinely a matter of the everyday, trainable in the most repeated and least spacious hours because it asks not for new hours but for a new way of entering the hours there are.

4.18.6 The aptness of the contingency example

It is worth saying, finally, why contingency was the capacity chosen to walk through the four steps, since the choice was not incidental and the reason illuminates the whole cultivation. Contingency, the noticing of what need not have happened, is the purest case of the perception the paper is about, because it is the perception most directly opposed to the flattening prior that habit installs. The everyday flattens by prediction, by the confident model that explains the morning in advance, and contingency is precisely what the confident model does not predict, the unplanned thing that the flattening prior would absorb without trace. To cultivate the perception of contingency is therefore to cultivate, at its sharpest point, the very capacity to resist the flattening that makes the everyday invisible, and the other perceptions the field-builder needs, the perception of the field's standing state, of the other's mood, of the appropriate gesture, are in a sense easier cases of the same capacity, less sharply opposed to the prior because less purely a matter of the unpredicted. Contingency is the hard case, the perception of exactly what the prior did not contain, and a perception trained on the hard case is trained on the rest, which is why the worked example chose it, as one trains a capacity on its most demanding instance.

Contingency is also the right example because it is the everyday's own source of renewal, the thing that keeps the repeated from becoming the merely repeated. A life that perceived no contingency would be a life wholly predicted, every morning a copy of every morning, the wheel turning without gain; and the perception of contingency is what introduces, into the repeated everyday, the difference that lets the repetition gain rather than recur. The contingency caught and received and shared and let to settle is the difference that makes the hundredth morning more than the first, the small unplanned thing that, woven into the field, keeps the repetition the gaining kind. To cultivate the perception of contingency is thus to cultivate the everyday's capacity to renew itself, the perception of the difference that keeps the repeated from dulling, and this is why the example is not merely one cultivation among many but the cultivation closest to the heart of the whole account, the perception of the contingency that is the everyday's own defense against the wheel. The worked example chose contingency because contingency is where the perception is hardest and where the everyday's renewal is sourced, the sharp point of the capacity and the spring of the good repetition, and a cultivation that masters the

perception of contingency has mastered the everyday's resistance to its own flattening, which is as near to the center of the aesthetic education of the everyday as any single capacity comes.

4.19. The Aesthetic Everyday and Aestheticized Consumption

The account of aesthetic education developed here has a counterfeit, and the counterfeit is close enough to be mistaken for it, which makes the distinction between them urgent rather than merely tidy. The counterfeit is the aestheticization of the everyday that the contemporary market promotes under the names of refined living, curated domesticity, the beautiful life, in which the rhythms and objects and gestures of daily life are made objects of display and consumption. This looks like what the paper recommends, the bringing of aesthetic attention to the everyday, and it is in fact its inversion, the wheel dressed as the spiral. This section draws the distinction, using the criterion the series has carried throughout, the difference between the cycle that gains and the cycle that turns in place, and it locates the counterfeit within the three-layer account of value the series has developed, showing aestheticized consumption to be the everyday's holonomy captured in the imaginary register.

4.19.1 The counterfeit and its appeal

The aestheticization of the everyday is a powerful counterfeit because it borrows the true coin's appearance. It attends to the daily, as the paper urges; it cares about the placement of things, the quality of the meal, the texture of the morning, as field-building does; it presents itself as the refinement of ordinary life into something fine and worth living. Its appeal is real and not simply a deception, because the impulse it answers is a true one, the impulse to bring care and attention to the everyday rather than letting it pass unregarded. What makes it a counterfeit is not that the attention is false but that the attention is turned to the wrong object and serves the wrong cycle. The aestheticized everyday makes the daily an object of display and consumption, a performance of refinement to be seen and a pleasure to be had, and in doing so it removes the daily from the relational field where field-building places it and installs it in a circuit of presentation and acquisition. The care is real; its direction is inverted; and the inversion is exactly the substitution of

a wheel for a spiral, a cycle of consumption that turns in place for a cycle of relation that gains.

4.19.2 The criterion: which cycle does the attention serve

The distinction between the aesthetic everyday and aestheticized consumption is drawn by the criterion the series has used for cycles throughout, applied now to the attention the everyday receives. The question is which cycle the attention serves, the generative cycle of the relational field or the consumptive cycle of display and acquisition. Attention to the everyday that serves the relational field is field-building: it perceives the field's state, generates the appropriate act, sustains the accumulation, and the beauty it produces is the coupling event that the field gains. Attention to the everyday that serves the consumptive cycle is aestheticization: it perceives the everyday as an object to be made fine and displayed, generates a performance of refinement, sustains a circuit of acquisition in which each acquired refinement must be succeeded by another, and the beauty it produces is a possession to be had and shown. The two attentions look alike, both careful, both directed at the daily, both producing something called beauty, and they are told apart only by which cycle they serve, the generative one that gains or the consumptive one that turns.

The aesthetic everyday and aestheticized consumption are distinguished by which cycle the attention serves. Attention that serves the relational field is field-building, perceiving the field, generating the appropriate act, sustaining the accumulation, and the beauty it produces is the coupling event the field gains. Attention that serves the cycle of display and acquisition is aestheticization, making the everyday a possession to be refined and shown, and the beauty it produces is a thing to be had. The two are alike in their care for the daily and are told apart only by their cycle, the generative one that gains against the consumptive one that turns in place. Aestheticized consumption is the everyday made into a wheel.

An illustrative case — [. Two carefully laid tables] Two tables are laid with equal care, and from a photograph they cannot be told apart. The first is laid for the other who

will sit at it, its care a perception of her, this plate here because she reaches with that hand, this dimness because the day pressed on her, the laying an act that meets her state and builds the field of the evening they will share; the beauty is in the coupling the table prepares, and it will pass when the evening passes, having done its work in the between. The second is laid to be a beautiful table, its care a performance of refinement to be photographed, admired, matched against other tables, the placement governed by an image of the beautiful table and not by the one who will sit at it, who is in a sense incidental to a table that would be equally beautiful with anyone or no one before it. The first table serves the field; the second serves the image. The photograph cannot tell them apart because the difference is not in the table but in the cycle the laying serves, and the same exquisite care builds a field in the first case and feeds a circuit of display in the second. The second table will need to be succeeded by a finer one, because the image it serves is never satisfied; the first needs no successor, because the field it built has gained and will be returned to tomorrow, the same table laid again for the same person, thickening.

4.19.3 The counterfeit in the register of the imaginary

The counterfeit can be located precisely within the three-layer account of value the series developed, and the location explains both its appeal and its exhaustion. That account distinguished the imaginary value of the idolised possession, which exhausts because it must be clung to and never satisfies; the symbolic value of the exchangeable, which is the most easily stolen; and the real value that gathers around the central absence and is the only locus of genuine positive accumulation. Aestheticized consumption is the everyday captured in the imaginary register. It makes the daily an idolised possession, a refinement to be had and clung to, and like all imaginary value it exhausts, which is why it demands an endless succession of new refinements, each consumed and found wanting, each requiring a further acquisition to sustain the feeling it briefly gave. This is the consumptive wheel in its precise form: the imaginary value of the aestheticized everyday cannot accumulate, because imaginary value never accumulates, and so it must be endlessly renewed by fresh consumption, the new curtain, the new ritual, the new performance of the beautiful life, none of which gains because none of them touches the real value that gathers only in the relational field.

The counterfeit is hard to detect from within, and saying why gives the section its sharpest practical point, because the difficulty is structural and not a matter of insufficient honesty. The aestheticized everyday is hard to tell from the aesthetic everyday from within because the imaginary register presents itself as fullness, because the idolised possession feels, in the moment of its acquisition, like the real thing it counterfeits; the new and beautiful object does give a real pleasure, and the performance of the refined life is genuinely pleasing to perform, so that nothing in the immediate feeling distinguishes the consumption from the relation. The difference shows only over time, in whether the pleasure accumulates or must be renewed, and this is the diagnostic sign the section can offer: if the beautiful thing, once had, is enough, if the field it belongs to is thereby richer and the next morning begins higher, the attention served the relation; if the beautiful thing, once had, must be succeeded by another to sustain the feeling, if the satisfaction drains and demands replacement, the attention served the consumptive wheel. The sign is not in the object or the act, which are identical across the two cases, but in the temporal signature, the accumulation or the exhaustion, the gaining or the endless renewal. A person uncertain whether their care for the everyday is field-building or aestheticization can ask not how it feels, which does not distinguish them, but whether it accumulates, whether last month's beautiful evening enriched this month's or merely set the bar for a beauty this month must exceed. The exhaustion that demands ever-more is the signature of the imaginary; the quiet sufficiency that returns to the same and finds it thickened is the signature of the real. This is the same temporal criterion the whole paper has used, the distinction of the spiral from the wheel, applied now as a practical test by which a person may detect, in their own care for the everyday, which cycle it serves.

The aesthetic everyday this paper recommends operates in the other register entirely. Its beauty is the real value that gathers around the coupling, the accumulation that the relational field gains, and because it is real value it accumulates, returns to its root raised, requires no endless succession of new objects because it is not consumed in the having but generated in the relating. The difference between the two is therefore not a difference of taste or degree, the modest everyday against the lavish one, but a difference of register, the real against the imaginary, the accumulating against the exhausting. This is why the aesthetic everyday is available to those with nothing to acquire and the aestheticized everyday is not: field-building requires no new objects, only the relating that generates real

value in whatever the field already contains, whereas aestheticized consumption requires a stream of acquisitions and so is available only to those who can afford the stream. The counterfeit is not merely the false version of the true; it is the true version's exclusion of exactly those the true version includes, the dispossessed who cannot consume but can relate, and the distinction the section draws is therefore not only metaphysical but, as the next section will press, political.

4.20. Micro Self-Legislation: Field-Building and the Remedy for the Symbolic Crisis

A companion paper in this series diagnosed the emptying of the symbolic order, the condition in which the great structures that once produced meaning, the institutions and offices and inherited forms, no longer reliably generate it, their signs persisting while the coupling that gave them sense has drained away. That diagnosis left a question it did not fully answer: if the grand symbolic structures can no longer produce meaning, where is meaning to be regenerated? This section gives one answer, and it is an answer the present paper is uniquely placed to give, because the aesthetic education of the everyday is precisely a cultivation of meaning at the scale the grand structures have abandoned. When the cathedral and the institution and the office no longer produce meaning, meaning can still be produced in the smallest and least appropriable acts of the everyday, in the building of a field between two people, and this production has a structure the section now sets out, the structure of a micro self-legislation that founds meaning without borrowing it from any external symbolic authority.

4.20.1 The smallest scale of meaning-production

The symbolic crisis is a crisis of borrowed meaning, of meaning that the subject received from a structure outside itself, the institution that conferred significance on the act, the office that lent weight to the gesture, the inherited form that told the subject what its life meant. When those structures empty, the meaning they conferred drains with them, and the subject that depended on borrowed meaning is left with signs that no longer signify. The remedy this section proposes does not attempt to refill the emptied structures, which is beyond any individual's power, but to relocate the production of meaning to a scale at

which the individual can still perform it, the scale of the field built between two people in the everyday. At that scale, meaning is not borrowed from an external structure but generated in the coupling itself, in the act that builds the field, and such meaning does not empty when the institutions empty, because it never depended on them. A breakfast made with full attention, a contingency caught and shared, a daily thing renewed rather than repeated, produces a meaning that no emptying of the symbolic order can drain, because its meaning was internal to the act of building the field and was never conferred from outside.

When the grand symbolic structures can no longer produce meaning, meaning can still be produced at the smallest scale, in the building of a field between two people in the everyday. Such meaning is not borrowed from an external symbolic authority but generated in the coupling itself, and it does not empty when the institutions empty, because it never depended on them. The aesthetic education of the everyday is therefore a remedy for the symbolic crisis, not by refilling the emptied structures, which is beyond any individual, but by relocating the production of meaning to a scale at which the individual can still perform it, the relational field that field-building constructs.

This is the same value inversion the companion paper found in the covenant, where the unsecured vow proved more capable of grounding meaning than the secured contract precisely because it forced the meaning back onto the self-legislating subject rather than borrowing it from an enforcing structure. The everyday field-building act has the same form. A breakfast made with full attention is more capable of producing meaning than a ritual performed under the authority of an emptied institution, because the breakfast borrows nothing, founds its meaning in the act itself, and so cannot be drained by the emptying of any authority it never invoked. The least appropriable acts are the most resistant to the symbolic crisis, because what cannot be appropriated by an institution cannot be emptied when the institution empties.

4.20.2 The structure of micro self-legislation

The production of meaning at this scale has the structure of self-legislation, and naming the structure shows why the everyday field-building act is a descent of relational divinity at the lowest scale rather than a merely private consolation. To build a field is to legislate, in the small, what shall count as appropriate here, what this coupling shall hold as the fitting, and to do so without appeal to an external code, since no external code reaches the state-dependent appropriate. The field-builder is therefore self-legislating, establishing in the act the very standard the act meets, and this self-legislation is repeated, cycle upon cycle, in the daily building of the field, each turn reaffirming in the small that this relation has the power to determine its own appropriate, to make a portion of the world meaningful by its own act rather than by borrowing meaning from a structure outside it. This repeated self-legislation, the daily confirmation that this coupling can make its own small world meaningful, is the descent of relational divinity at the lowest scale, the same descent the companion paper found in the covenant, here found in the breakfast.

An illustrative case — [. Meaning when the large forms have gone quiet] Consider two people for whom the large structures that once conferred meaning have gone quiet. The institutions they were raised to trust no longer command belief; the public rituals feel hollow; the inherited forms that once told a life what it meant have emptied, and the signs persist without their sense. This is the symbolic crisis as it is actually lived, not as a thesis but as a quiet draining of significance from the structures that used to hold it. And yet, in the morning, one of them makes the coffee in a way that means something, places it so that it says I attended to you, and the other receives it as the small meaningful thing it is, and between them, in that act, a meaning is produced that the emptying of the institutions has not touched. The meaning of the coffee was never conferred by an institution; it was generated in the coupling, legislated by the two in the act of building their morning, and so it does not drain when the institutions drain. They have not refilled the cathedral or restored the public rite; those remain empty, beyond their power. But they have produced, at the scale they can reach, a meaning that is theirs and answerable to nothing outside their field, and the daily production of such meaning is the one defense against the symbolic crisis available to those who cannot refill the large forms, the relocation of meaning-making to a scale where the emptying cannot follow.

An objection of arbitrariness presses here and must be met, because self-legislation can sound like the license to call anything appropriate, a meaning made by fiat and therefore no meaning at all. If the coupling legislates its own appropriate, what stops it from legislating badly, from calling appropriate what flattens the field, so that self-legislation becomes a name for caprice and the meaning it produces a meaning answerable to nothing? The answer is that the self-legislation is not legislation in a void but legislation answerable to whether the field actually accumulates, and this answerability is what distinguishes it from caprice. The coupling may call a gesture appropriate, but if the gesture flattens the field, the field does not accumulate, and the legislation is refuted by the dynamics it cannot command. Self-legislation establishes the standard the act meets, but the meeting is not guaranteed by the establishing; the act must actually send the field the generative way, and whether it does is not up to the legislation but up to the field. This is the difference between self-legislation and arbitrariness: the arbitrary call answers to nothing and so cannot be wrong, whereas the self-legislating act answers to whether the field gains and so can fail, can be refuted by the flattening it produces despite having been called appropriate. The meaning the coupling produces is therefore not made by fiat but generated under a constraint, the constraint of actual accumulation, and a meaning generated under a constraint that can refute it is answerable meaning, not caprice. The self-legislation is sovereign in that it appeals to no external code; it is not arbitrary because it answers to whether what it legislates actually builds the field, a test it does not control and can fail.

The phrase descent of relational divinity should not be inflated beyond what the structure warrants, and the section is careful to claim only what the structure gives. What descends is not a supernatural presence but the capacity to ground meaning without external warrant, the capacity the companion paper located in the self-legislating subject who establishes the standard its own act meets. That capacity, exercised in the everyday at the smallest scale, in the daily building of a field that borrows its meaning from nowhere outside itself, is what the section names a micro self-legislation, and its significance is exactly proportional to the symbolic crisis it answers. In a time when the grand structures empty, the capacity to produce meaning that does not empty, because it borrows from no structure, is not a small thing dressed up as a large one but a genuinely large thing available at a small scale, the one form of meaning-production left intact when the large-

scale forms have failed. The aesthetic education of the everyday cultivates exactly this capacity, the power to build fields whose meaning is self-grounded, and so it is, beneath its modest surface, a training in the production of the one kind of meaning the symbolic crisis cannot reach.

4.20.3 Against the misreading of withdrawal

One misreading must be refused, the reading on which this relocation of meaning to the everyday is a withdrawal from the public world, a retreat into private domesticity that abandons the emptied structures to their emptying. The section claims the opposite. The production of meaning in the everyday field is not a turning-away from the public crisis but the cultivation, at the scale where it can still be cultivated, of the very capacity whose large-scale failure is the crisis, the capacity to produce meaning that is not borrowed. A subject practised in grounding meaning without external warrant, in the daily self-legislation of the field, is not thereby withdrawn from the public world but is, on the contrary, the kind of subject a rebuilt public world would require, one who can produce meaning rather than only receive it. The everyday is not a refuge from the crisis but the training ground for the capacity the crisis demands, and the meaning built there is not hoarded against the public emptying but is the seed of the capacity that any refilling of the public structures would have to draw on. The relocation is tactical and not escapist: it places the production of meaning where it can still occur, so that the capacity to produce it survives the emptying of the structures that once conferred it, ready to be exercised at larger scales when larger scales again become possible.

4.21. The Political Economy of the Field

This section is the one the whole paper has been pointing toward and deferring, the place where the account must answer for its politics or be convicted of the very thing it has repeatedly guarded against. The charge is the oldest one against any aesthetics of life: that it is a doctrine for those with the leisure to practise it, a refinement available to the unhurried and irrelevant or insulting to those whose days are consumed by labour that is not theirs to shape. An aesthetic education of the everyday is peculiarly exposed to this charge, because the everyday it addresses is, for many, precisely the site of exhaustion,

the repeated labour performed for another's accumulation, and to bring such people a doctrine of building beautiful fields could be the cruelest possible irrelevance. The section meets the charge directly, and its answer is not that the charge is mistaken but that the account, properly understood, is the charge's refutation rather than its instance, because the cultivation it describes is the one form of aesthetic life that does not presuppose the leisure the charge names, and the people the charge invokes are exactly those the account most concerns.

4.21.1 The charge at full strength

The charge must be stated at full strength, because a weak version would be easy to dismiss and the easy dismissal would be an evasion. Here it is. The building of a generative field, as this paper describes it, takes time, attention, and a measure of control over one's own days; it asks one to hold a half-second before a habitual act, to let contingency revise the morning, to return to the same daily thing and find it thickened, and all of this presupposes that one's days are one's own to shape, that the morning is not already wholly claimed by labour performed under another's clock, that the attention is not already exhausted by the demands of survival. For those whose every hour is sold, whose repetition is the alienated repetition whose yield is captured, whose exhaustion at the end of the day's labour leaves nothing for the patient cultivation of a field, the doctrine of aesthetic education is not false but inaccessible, a luxury of those who have the surplus of time and attention it silently requires. And to such people the offer of this doctrine is worse than useless, because it adds to their dispossession the suggestion that their failure to live beautifully is a failure of cultivation rather than a theft of the conditions cultivation requires.

This is the charge, and the paper does not soften it, because the conditions it names are real and the dispossession it describes is the actual situation of many. The political economy of the field is unequal: the time, attention, and self-direction that field-building draws on are distributed unequally, captured disproportionately from those whose labour is owned, and an account that pretended otherwise, that spoke of building beautiful fields as though everyone stood equally able to build them, would be ideology in the exact sense, a representation of a class-bound possibility as a universal one. The paper has insisted throughout on the orthogonality of refinement and justice, and here that orthogonality

returns as a question about the account itself: a doctrine of refinement that ignored the justice of who can afford to be refined would be the fine and the unjust at the level of theory, an aestheticism that mistook its own class conditions for the human condition.

4.21.2 The account refutes the charge

The answer turns on a feature of the account built in from the start, deliberately and against the grain of every aesthetics of leisure, the feature that the cultivation it describes requires no surplus of time or means but only a different way of entering the hours one already has. The four practices, as the worked example set out, are not added exercises requiring spare hours; each is a re-meeting of an act the day already contains, the half-second held before a motion the day demanded anyway, the contingency received in an event that occurred regardless, the brief sharing of a moment that passed in any case, the return to a daily thing one was going to do again. The cultivation does not ask for hours the dispossessed lack; it asks for a changed manner of living the hours there are, and those hours, however owned, however exhausting, still contain the acts that the four practices re-meet. This was not an incidental convenience of the account but its deliberate construction, the reason the paper located aesthetic education in the everyday and in the most repetitive and unspacious everyday at that, because it is precisely the life with no spare hours that needed an aesthetic education making no demand for them.

The account refutes the charge of leisure-dependence rather than instancing it, because the cultivation it describes requires no surplus of time or means but only a changed manner of entering the hours one already has. The four practices re-meet acts the day already contains and add none; they ask not for spare hours but for a different way of living the hours there are. The aesthetic education of the everyday is therefore available precisely to those whose days hold no surplus, which is why it was located in the everyday and not in the exceptional, and why the people the charge invokes, the dispossessed whose repetition is exhausting, are the ones the account most concerns rather than the ones it excludes.

This does not dissolve the inequality, and the section must be careful not to let the

refutation overreach into a false consolation. The inequality is real: exhaustion is real, and a body and attention worn down by owned labour have less to bring even to a cultivation that asks for no spare hours, so that the dispossessed are not equally placed even with respect to a practice that requires no surplus. What the account establishes is the weaker and the true claim, that the cultivation does not presuppose leisure and so is not in principle barred to those without it, that the door is not closed by the lack of surplus hours, and this is enough to refute the charge that aesthetic education is by nature a doctrine of the leisured, while it is not enough to pretend that the worn-down come to the door as easily as the unhurried. The honest position holds both: the cultivation is available to the dispossessed, requiring no surplus they lack; and the dispossession still weighs, the exhaustion still costs, so that to make the cultivation truly available to all is not only to design it without a demand for leisure, which the paper has done, but to change the conditions that exhaust, which the paper cannot do and does not pretend to.

4.21.3 The structural remainder

What the cultivation cannot reach is named, finally, as the structural remainder, the part of the problem that no aesthetic education can solve because it is not aesthetic. The capture of the everyday's yield, the ownership of the repetition by an order that takes its accumulation away, the exhaustion manufactured by labour performed under another's clock, these are structural conditions, and their remedy is structural, a change in who owns the yield of the cycle and who commands the hours of the day. The beauty of maintenance presupposed the return of the cycle's yield to the field; the political economy is the examination of where that presupposition fails, and where it fails the failure is not to be met with a finer cultivation but with a change in the structure that captures the yield. This is the same insistence the paper has made at every turn where the aesthetic met the structural, the refusal to aestheticize across a structural line, and it returns here as the account's final honesty about its own limits. Aesthetic education is necessary and it is available to the dispossessed, requiring no leisure they lack; and it is not sufficient, because the conditions that exhaust the dispossessed and capture their yield are structural conditions that only structural change can remedy. The paper offers the cultivation as what it is, a real good genuinely available in the unspacious everyday, and it declines to offer it as what it is not, a substitute for the structural change that the

justice of the field, as distinct from its beauty, finally requires.

An illustrative case — [. Two yields, one captured and one not] A worker comes home from a day whose every hour was sold, whose repetition built a wealth that flowed entirely to an owner, whose exhaustion is the manufactured exhaustion of labour performed under another's clock. Of that day's yield she keeps nothing; it was captured at the source, and no beauty she might have found in her toil would have returned it to her, which is why the paper refuses to tell her to find beauty in the toil. But the evening is not sold. The field she builds at home, with the one she loves, in the few unspacious hours that remain, yields a value of a different register, the real value that gathers in the relational field, and that yield is not captured, because it was never in the register the capturing reaches. The owner takes the day's holonomy; he cannot take the evening's, because the evening's accumulates in a coupling he has no purchase on, in a field whose gain returns to those who build it. This is why the cultivation matters most to her and not least: it is the one accumulation of her day that comes home with her, the one yield not siphoned, and to make her evening's repetition the gaining kind is to secure the only wealth the structure leaves in her hands. The structural injustice is real and the paper has named it; and within it, undefeated by it, the evening field remains hers to build, its yield the one the capture cannot reach.

4.21.4 Aesthetic education and structural change

A question remains that the account of the structural remainder raised but did not settle: whether the aesthetic education of the everyday bears at all on the structural change that the structural remainder requires, or whether it is simply silent on it, a cultivation of the private field that leaves the public structure untouched. The honest answer is mixed, and stating it precisely guards against two errors. The first error would claim too much, that the cultivation of generative fields is itself a form of structural change, that to build accumulating fields in the everyday is to transform the conditions that capture their yield. This is false, and the paper has insisted on its falsity: the capture of the yield is a structural condition, and no quantity of beautiful field-building changes who owns the cycle's yield, which is altered only by a change in the structure of ownership. To claim that aesthetic education is structural change would be to aestheticize across the

very line the paper has refused to cross. The second error would claim too little, that aesthetic education is wholly irrelevant to structural change, a private cultivation with no bearing on the public transformation. This too is false, and seeing why is the point of the subsection.

Aesthetic education bears on structural change in one specific and limited way, through the kind of subject it cultivates. A person practised in building generative fields, in producing meaning that is not borrowed, in perceiving who is rendered fuel within an accumulating field, is a person with capacities that structural change requires, the capacity to produce and not only consume meaning, the capacity to perceive injustice within apparent flourishing, the capacity to build the generative relations on which any reconstructed structure would depend. The cultivation does not itself change the structure, but it cultivates the subjects who could, and a structural change carried out by subjects incapable of building generative fields would rebuild the captured structure in a new form, as the series has noted in its analyses of how new forms of decentralised production are recaptured by the orders they were meant to escape. The bearing of aesthetic education on structural change is therefore neither identity nor irrelevance but cultivation of the agents: it does not change the structure, and it does form the kind of subject without whom a change in the structure would only reproduce the capture under a new name. This is a limited bearing, and the paper claims no more, but it is not nothing, and it places the aesthetic education of the everyday in a relation to the structural question that is honest about both its limits and its contribution, the limit that it cannot change the structure and the contribution that it forms the subjects any genuine change would require.

4.21.5 Those who most need it

The section closes by reversing the charge entirely. The charge held that aesthetic education is for the leisured and irrelevant to the dispossessed; the account establishes that it is the dispossessed who most need it. Those whose days are full of owned, exhausting, captured repetition are exactly those for whom the difference between the wheel and the spiral is most consequential, because their repetition is most in danger of being the wheel, most pressed toward the mechanical and the deadening by the conditions that own it. For them, the capacity to make their repetition the gaining kind, to turn even the

owned and exhausting day so that the field they build with those they love accumulates rather than flattens, is not a luxury but a defence, the one accumulation available to them when so much is captured, the real value that gathers in the relational field and cannot be siphoned because it was never in the register the siphoning reaches. The aesthetic education of the everyday is, for the dispossessed, the cultivation of the one cycle whose yield returns to them, the field they build between themselves and those they love, and that, far from being a luxury of the leisured, is the most necessary cultivation of all for those from whom every other yield is taken. The charge inverts: it is not that the dispossessed cannot afford aesthetic education, but that they, of all people, cannot afford to be without it.

4.22. The Terminus of the Reduction Chain: The Unification of the Series's Fields

The reduction chain that has organised this paper reaches its terminus here, and the terminus has a retrospective force the earlier sections could only anticipate. The chain ran from relational production through the field, from the field's construction as an aesthetic rather than an engineering matter, through the coupling of the aesthetic and the ethical, to the reframing of field-building as aesthetic education. Stated forward, this is the argument of the paper. Stated backward, from the terminus, it does something more: it unifies the whole series, because every paper in the series has described a field, and the capacity this paper names is the capacity to build them all. What looked, across the series, like a sequence of distinct studies, of poetry and the vow and water and travel, is revealed from the terminus as a sequence of studies of fields, and the aesthetic education this paper describes is the cultivation of the single capacity that builds every one of them.

4.22.1 Every paper described a field

The retrospective unification can be made exact by recalling what each of the prior studies was a study of. The study of poetry described a field, the conditional environment in which meaning resists settlement and moves along the interpretive path, a field whose generativity lay in its refusal of closure. The study of the vow described a field, the conditional environment of trust in which the unsecured covenant grounds a coupling

more firmly than the secured contract, a field whose generativity lay in its self-legislation. The study of water described a field, the conditional environment of the yielding that overcomes by not contending, a field whose generativity lay in its non-extractive flow. The study of travel described a field, the conditional environment of spaciousness in which contingency is met and the relational subject generated, a field whose generativity lay in its openness. These were not four unrelated topics but four fields, four conditional environments of generative coupling, each studied for the particular way its conditions secured the good cycle, and the variety among them is the variety of conditions under which a field can be generative, not a variety of unrelated subjects.

Every prior study in the series described a field, a conditional environment of generative coupling, distinguished by the particular conditions under which it secured the good cycle: poetry by its refusal of closure, the vow by its self-legislation, water by its non-extractive flow, travel by its spaciousness. The aesthetic education this paper describes is the cultivation of the single capacity that builds them all, the capacity to perceive a field's state, generate the appropriate act, and sustain the accumulation, in whatever conditions the particular field presents. The terminus of the reduction chain is therefore also the unification of the series: what the series studied as distinct fields, this paper names as the objects of one cultivable capacity.

The four-step model gives the unification a finer grain, because each of the prior fields can be seen to call on the four movements, weighted differently as its conditions require. The field of poetry calls especially on the freshness of reproduction, the refusal of closure being the refusal to let the cycle settle into a fixed reading, the keeping-open that is reproduction guarding against its degenerate form; to build the field of poetry is to reproduce without ever closing, the fourth movement held in the mode of perpetual non-settlement. The field of the vow calls especially on reception, the self-legislation being the receiving of a standard one then holds oneself to, the taking-in of an obligation that binds because it has been let in; to build the field of the vow is to receive in the strong sense, to let in what will bind. The field of water calls especially on the non-grasping that runs through all four, the yielding that overcomes by not contending being the non-extractive flow that

the whole model requires, reception that does not seize and reproduction that does not hoard; to build the field of water is to perform the four movements in the mode of yielding. The field of travel calls especially on perception, the spaciousness being the openness in which contingency is perceived, the room left for the unplanned to be seen; to build the field of travel is to perceive in the mode of openness to contingency. Each prior field is thus the four-step model weighted toward one of its movements by the field's particular conditions, and the single capacity builds them all by performing the four movements with the weighting each field's conditions require, which is the finer form of the unification, the one model differently weighted across the series' several fields.

4.22.2 One capacity, many conditions

The unification is not a flattening, and the section must be careful to preserve the variety it gathers. The fields of the series differ really, in the conditions under which each secures its generativity, and the capacity to build them is not a single technique applied uniformly but a single power exercised differently as the conditions differ. To build the field of poetry is to sustain the refusal of closure; to build the field of the vow is to perform the self-legislation; to build the field of water is to yield without contending; to build the field of travel is to keep the spaciousness open. These are different exercises of one capacity, the capacity to perceive what a field's generativity requires in its particular conditions and to act to secure it, and the unity is in the capacity and not in a uniform method. This is why the aesthetic education this paper describes is an education of a perception and not a transmission of a technique: a technique would apply uniformly and would fail across the variety of fields, whereas a trained perception discerns, in each field, what its particular conditions require, and acts accordingly. The single capacity builds many fields not by doing the same thing in each but by perceiving, in each, what that field's generativity demands.

This is also why the present paper completes rather than merely extends the series. The prior studies each described the conditions of a particular field and the way those conditions secured the good cycle; none described the capacity to build such fields as such, the perception-and-practice that, trained, can secure generativity across the variety of conditions. This paper describes that capacity, and in describing it gives the series its missing member, the account of the cultivation that the prior studies presupposed with-

out naming. When the study of poetry showed how a poem sustains the good cycle, it presupposed a capacity to sustain it; when the study of the vow showed how a covenant grounds trust, it presupposed a capacity to perform the grounding; and so through the series, each study presupposing the cultivable capacity that this paper finally names. The aesthetic education of the everyday is thus the series' keystone in the architectural sense, the member that the others leaned toward and that, set in place, holds them together, the account of how a person comes to be able to build the generative fields that the whole series has studied.

4.22.3 The everyday, the privileged site

It remains to say why this capstone capacity is cultivated in the everyday rather than in the exceptional fields the series often studied, the heightened field of the poem or the solemn field of the vow. The answer is that the everyday is where the capacity is most generally needed and most generally available, and a cultivation of the capacity that required the exceptional field would be a cultivation available only to those who could enter exceptional fields. The poem and the vow and the journey are not daily; they are the heightened occasions on which the good cycle is most visible, and the series studied them partly because their heightening made the structure of the good cycle legible. But a life is mostly not heightened, mostly daily, mostly the unspacious repetition that no journey relieves, and a capacity to build generative fields that worked only on the heightened occasions would leave the bulk of a life uncultivated. The everyday is the privileged site of aesthetic education because it is where the capacity must work if it is to work at all for most of a life, and because, as the paper has argued throughout, the capacity can work there, the good cycle being buildable in the narrow room of the daily and not only in the spacious occasions of the exceptional. The series studied the heightened fields to make the good cycle legible; this paper returns the capacity to the daily field, where it is needed most and where, the paper has shown, it is genuinely available, completing the series by bringing its central capacity home to the everyday from which the exceptional fields were always only the heightened departures.

4.22.4 The choice of the name aesthetic education

A final objection concerns the name. If the capacity is the capacity to build generative relational fields, and if the building is at once aesthetic and ethical, why call its cultivation aesthetic education rather than ethical education, or relational education, or by some new name that would not import the museum's associations the introduction worked to leave behind? The choice of name is deliberate and the section defends it. The cultivation is not called ethical education because that name would suggest the transmission of a moral code, the very rule-governed instruction the paper has argued the appropriate exceeds; ethical education, as ordinarily understood, teaches principles, and the capacity this paper describes is precisely not the application of principles but the trained perception of the fitting where no principle decides. It is not called relational education because that name would lose the central thesis, that the building of the field is a matter of the perception of appropriateness, which is an aesthetic perception in the broad sense the genealogy recovered, the discernment of the fitting where no rule applies. The name aesthetic education is chosen because it alone names the capacity correctly, as the cultivation of a perception of the fitting, while the genealogy and the coupling have shown that this aesthetic perception is at the same time the perception of the good, so that aesthetic education, rightly understood, already is ethical education, not by adding a moral code but by cultivating the perception in which the appropriate and the good are one. The name is not a metaphor or a borrowing; it is the precise name for a cultivation of perception that the tradition narrowed to the museum and the paper has returned to its full breadth, the breadth in which to educate the aesthetic sensibility is to educate the moral one, because they were never two. To call it aesthetic education is to insist on exactly the coupling the paper established, and to call it anything else would be to lose the coupling in the naming.

4.23. The Beauty of Transmission: Why Aesthetic Education Is an Education

The paper has described what aesthetic education cultivates and how, but it has deferred the question lodged in its own name, the question of the word education, of the cultivating of one by another, the passing of the capacity from those who have it to those who do not.

The four-step model described how a person who already has the sensibility exercises it; the worked example described how that person trains the capacity in herself. Neither has yet said how the sensibility passes from one person to another, how the capacity to build generative fields is transmitted, which is what the word education finally demands. This closing section addresses the transmission, and it finds that the manner of the transmission is dictated by everything the paper has established, so that aesthetic education must be an education in a particular and demanding sense, a transmission that cannot be reduced to instruction, and that the paper itself, in being read, is one instance of the transmission it describes.

4.23.1 The limit of instruction in transmission

The transmission of the sensibility cannot be the transmission of a code, for the reason the whole paper has pressed: the sensibility is a trained perception of the state-dependent appropriate, and the state-dependent appropriate cannot be specified, so there is no code to transmit. One cannot teach the capacity to build generative fields by telling, by handing over rules for the appropriate gesture, because the appropriate gesture is a property of the token field and no rule reaches tokens. This is why aesthetic education is an education and not an instruction, and the distinction, drawn several times in the paper, can now be given its full weight. An instruction transmits a specifiable content, a code that the instructed can apply; an education raises a capacity that the educated must exercise in the concrete, and it raises it not by transmitting a content but by cultivating a power. The transmission of the sensibility is education in this strict sense: it cannot hand over what it transmits, because what it transmits is a perception, and a perception is not the kind of thing that can be handed over, only the kind of thing that can be cultivated in another by exercise.

4.23.2 Transmission requires co-presence

If the sensibility cannot be transmitted by instruction, how is it transmitted at all? The answer the paper's framework dictates is that it is transmitted by co-presence, by the shared exercise of the capacity in which one who has it and one who is acquiring it perceive, receive, share, and reproduce together, so that the acquiring one's perception is cultivated by participation in the having one's. The sensibility passes as the capacity for

joint attention passes, by being exercised jointly, the finer perception drawing the coarser one along, the way a child's perception of a field is cultivated by sharing fields with those who perceive them finely, the way any trained perception is acquired by exercising it alongside one already trained. This is transmission by demonstration and shared practice rather than by telling, and it requires the co-presence of the transmitter and the acquirer in a shared field, because only in a shared field can the acquiring perception be drawn along by the having one. The sensibility cannot be sent; it can only be grown, in a shared field, by joint exercise, and this is the deepest reason aesthetic education is an education, that its transmission has the structure of the very sharing the paper has described, the joint attention in which a field is built between two.

The sensibility is transmitted neither by instruction nor by any sending of content, but by co-presence, the shared exercise of the capacity in which an acquiring perception is cultivated by joint participation in a finer one. Transmission has the structure of sharing itself, the joint attention in which a field is built between two, so that to transmit the capacity to build generative fields is to build a generative field with the one who is acquiring it. Aesthetic education is an education in the strictest sense, a cultivation of perception by shared exercise, and its transmission cannot be reduced to instruction because a perception cannot be handed over, only grown in a shared field.

This gives the word education its full sense and closes the question the section opened. The cultivating that the word names is the cultivation of one's perception by another's, in a shared field, by joint exercise, and it is therefore not a lesser or metaphorical education but education in its most exact form, the growing of a capacity in another by sharing the exercise of it. That the transmission requires co-presence, a shared field in which the capacities are jointly exercised, is not a limitation but the mark of the kind of thing being transmitted, a perception that lives only in its exercise and can be cultivated only by being exercised together.

4.23.3 The child and the inheritance of a sensibility

The clearest case of the transmission is the one in which a child acquires the sensibility from those who raise her, and it is worth dwelling on because it shows the structure of the transmission at its most consequential and confirms that the transmission cannot be instruction. A child does not learn to build generative fields by being told the rules for building them, because there are no such rules, and a child raised on instruction alone, told what to do and not shown, acquires no sensibility at all. What cultivates the child's perception is participation in fields built by those who can build them, the daily sharing of a life in which the contingencies are caught and shared and the daily things renewed, so that the child's own perception is drawn along by the finer perception she lives within, acquiring by exercise what no telling could convey. A child raised in a home whose fields are generative acquires, without a lesson being given, the perception of what makes a field generative, the way a child raised among a language's speakers acquires the language without being taught its grammar, by exercising the capacity alongside those who have it. And a child raised in a home whose fields are flattened or captured acquires the coarser perception, or the defended one, not by being taught it but by living within it, which is the somber side of the same truth, that the sensibility is transmitted by the fields one is raised within and not by the precepts one is given.

This has a consequence that the political economy section's concern with the dispossessed must be allowed to darken. If the sensibility is transmitted by participation in generative fields, then those raised in homes where the conditions of field-building have been damaged, by exhaustion, by captured yield, by the manufactured pressures that flatten the everyday, inherit a diminished capacity through no failure of their own, the structural injustice reproducing itself in the transmission of the sensibility across generations. The cultivation this paper describes is available to the dispossessed, as the political economy argued, requiring no surplus they lack; but the transmission of the capacity to the next generation is harder where the fields the child is raised within have been damaged by the conditions the dispossessed endure, and this is a further face of the structural remainder, the part the cultivation alone cannot reach. The honest account holds both: the sensibility is transmissible in any home by the sharing of fields, requiring no surplus; and the damage that captured and exhausting conditions do to a home's fields is reproduced in

what its children inherit, so that the justice of the field bears not only on those who build it now but on the capacity their children will have to build it in their turn.

4.23.4 The paper, an instance of its own transmission

The paper closes by turning upon itself, as the series has turned its papers upon themselves throughout, and finding that it is an instance of the transmission it describes. A paper cannot, by the argument just made, transmit the sensibility by instruction, and this paper has not tried to, has offered no code for the appropriate gesture, no rules for building fields, because it has held throughout that no such code exists. What it has tried to do is otherwise, and the manner of its trying is the manner of the transmission it describes. It has cultivated, in the reader who has followed it, a perception, drawing the reader's attention to the state-dependence of the appropriate, to the difference between the spiral and the wheel, to the failures that shadow each movement of the cycle, in the hope that the reader's own perception of the fields of her own life is thereby a little finer, a little more able to discern what before went unseen. This cultivation is not instruction but a kind of shared exercise conducted in the medium of reading, the paper perceiving the structure of the field and the reader drawn along to perceive it too, and to the extent it has succeeded the reader's sensibility has been cultivated by the paper's, which is the transmission the paper describes performed in the only co-presence a paper allows.

This self-instancing is not a flourish but a consequence, and it completes the paper's form in the way the series has always sought, the form enacting the claim. The paper claims that the sensibility is transmitted by the cultivation of one perception by another in a shared exercise; and the paper, in being read, cultivates the reader's perception by its own, in the shared exercise of attending together to the structure of the field. It cannot do this by instruction, and it has not; it has done it, to whatever extent it has done it, by drawing the reader along into a finer perceiving, which is exactly the transmission it describes. The paper is thus its own last example, a field built between writer and reader in the medium of the page, accumulating, if it has worked, a perception in the reader that was not there before, and returning, at its close, to the root from which it began, the cultivation of the capacity to build generative fields, now performed upon the reader rather than only described to her. If the reader perceives the fields of her life a little more finely for having read, the paper has built a field with her, and its argument has become,

in the reading, the thing it argued for.

4.24. Contributions and the Structure of the Paper

This closing section states the paper's contributions explicitly and exhibits its structure in a form that the running argument, of necessity linear, could not make visible all at once. The visualizations are not decorations but the connective tissue the prose approached one link at a time; gathered here, they show the joints between claims that the linear exposition could only assert in sequence. A word on the spirit in which they are offered is owed first, because it governs how the tables that compare theories are to be read. The paper holds to a dialectical-materialist commitment, which means that it treats no theory gathered here, neither the predictive nor the contemplative nor the phenomenological nor the psychoanalytic, as a final or unconditioned rationality, and assigns each instead its determinate place, its proper level, and its limit. The comparative tables therefore record, for each theory, not only what it contributes but what it cannot reach, and the layered syntheses they summarize are arrangements in which each theory does the work it can and is kept from the work its commitments would botch. This is the materialist refusal of any theory's pretension to be the whole, carried into the form of the exposition itself.

4.24.1 The reduction chain

The argument's spine is a reduction chain, and the chain is best seen whole. Each link carries a determinate argumentative burden, discharged in a determinate section, and the chain's force is cumulative, each link presupposing the one before and enabling the one after.

The chain is not a deduction in which the conclusion is contained in the premises, but a reduction in which each link is independently argued and the terminus reframes what aesthetic education is. The most contested link is the second, the claim that field-building is aesthetic and not an engineering matter, and it bears the weight of the whole, since if the construction of a field could be specified by rule the chain would terminate in a technics rather than an education. The orthogonality guard is the chain's necessary qualification: the coupling of the aesthetic and the ethical holds at the level of the field's generative direction and is silent on the justice of who is rendered fuel for the accumulation, and this

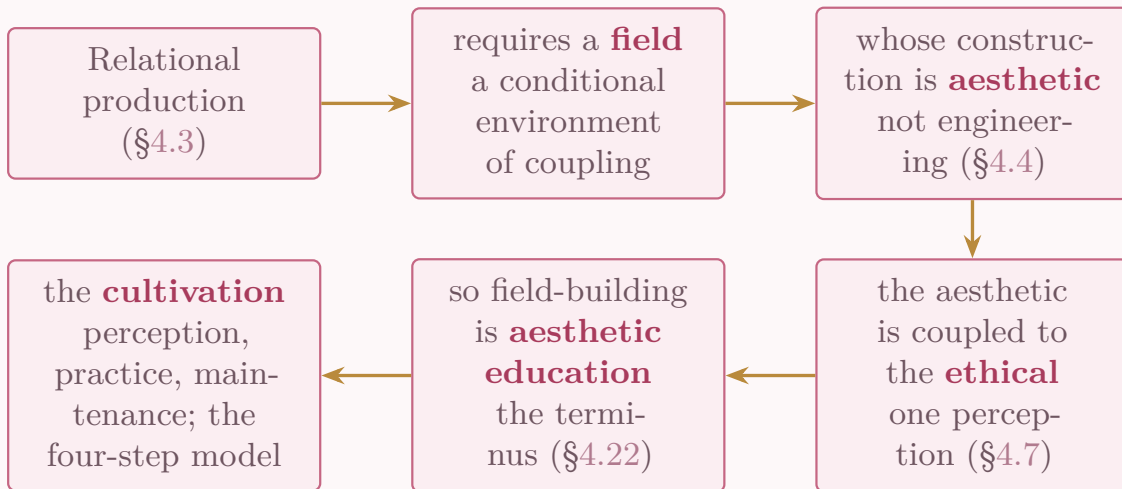


Figure 4.1: The reduction chain. Each link is argued in the section noted; the orthogonality guard (§4.8) bounds the third link, marking where the aesthetic-ethical coupling ends and the separate question of justice begins.

silence, marked at the third link, is what keeps the chain from issuing in an aestheticism.

4.24.2 The four-step model, mapped

The four-step model is the cultivation in motion, and its four movements stand in determinate relations to the relational state that makes each the principal site, to the failure that shadows each, and to the Eastern resource that most illuminates each. Table 4.1 gathers these relations, which the prose introduced one movement at a time.

The table makes visible what the prose asserted but could not display, that the four movements are not a procedure performed in fixed order but a diagnosis: which movement is principal is read from the field's state, and the right labour is a function of that reading rather than a standing rule. The migration of the principal site across the four relational states is the practical content of the generative dialectic, and it is what distinguishes this account from the issuing of four techniques to be applied uniformly.

Movement	Principal when the field is...	Shadowed by the failure of...	Eastern resource
Perception	dull (sight has gone slack)	the flattened morning (prior absorbs the contingency)	single-practice absorption; emptying-to-await
Reception	lately wounded (defence is high)	defensive gating; or grasping possession	the mirror that responds yet does not store
Sharing	estranged (beauty does not cross)	hoarding; or over-speaking that crushes	music as the common; concord without uniformity
Reproduction	stalled in plenty (consumed not thickened)	consumption demanding ever-larger novelty	daily renewal inscribed on the washing-basin

Table 4.1: The four-step model under the generative dialectic. The principal site migrates with the field's state; the cultivation has no fixed prescription but reads which movement is principal, which reading is itself the first movement turned on the relation as a whole.

4.24.3 The four hardest steps, unified

At each of the four theoretical battlefields, a conflict threatened the model and was resolved by an inversion of the same shape, the shape in which a relinquishing of grasp founds rather than forbids a generation. Table 4.2 sets the four inversions side by side, exhibiting the single movement of thought that the prose traced four times in four idioms.

That the four inversions share a structure is the paper's strongest evidence that the four movements are not an arbitrary list but the articulation of one thing. The unity is not imposed by the table; it was earned at each battlefield separately, and the table only makes visible that what was earned four times was, each time, the same.

4.24.4 Three beauties and four movements

The capacity admits two true and non-competing articulations, the static anatomy of three beauties and the dynamic cycle of four movements. Their relation is a non-trivial mapping, three onto four, which Figure 4.2 displays.

Movement	What is relinquished	What it thereby grounds	Section
Perception	deluded, subject-against-object division (and grasping investment)	the subtle discernment of appropriateness (and open caring)	§4.10
Reception	possessive retention; responding yet not storing	healthy reproduction (curvature, not hoarded stock)	§4.14
Sharing	the will to fusion, the dissolution of the two	union as concord, which preserves the difference it needs	§4.15
Reproduction	the solitary feat of accumulation	the cycle, fed and renewed by the living prior three steps	§4.16

Table 4.2: The four hardest steps as one movement of thought. Each conflict inverts on the same distinction, between a grasp that possesses and a generation that does not, which is the ancient counsel to generate without possessing read into perception, welcome, the between, and time.

4.24.5 The genealogy, gathered

The coupling of the aesthetic and the ethical is an inheritance recognized across traditions, not the paper's stipulation, and Table 4.3 gathers the witnesses with the proposition each contributes and the link of the paper's argument each supports. The table also records the asymmetry between the Western witnesses, for whom the coupling is a recovery against their own separation, and the Eastern witnesses, for whom it is an inheritance never lost.

4.24.6 Contributions

The paper's contributions, stated plainly, are these. First, it establishes the concept of *relational aesthetics*, on which beauty is a coupling event between subjects, produced relationally, and it shows this concept to resolve the old quarrel between objectivist and subjectivist aesthetics by locating beauty where both were reaching, in the between. Second, it proposes the *four-step model* of perception, reception, sharing, and reproduction,

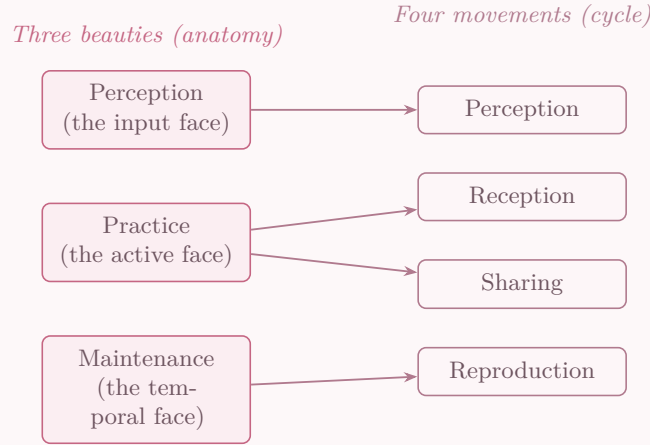


Figure 4.2: The static anatomy and the dynamic cycle of one capacity. The middle face, practice, divides in motion into reception and sharing, the doing that takes the contingency in and carries it across; this is why the anatomy has three faces and the cycle four movements. Neither articulation subsumes the other; the paper holds both, as it holds the plural without forcing it into a governed unity.

and shows it to be not a procedure but the smallest form a good cycle takes between two people, a holonomy cycle returning to its root and not its origin. Third, it reconstructs the dialectic of principal and secondary contradiction into a *generative dialectic* that directs generative attention rather than concentrating force, consistent with a dialectical-materialist refusal to absolutize any theory. Fourth, it supplies the *mechanism* of the aesthetic-ethical coupling that the philosophical tradition reported but never explained, the identification of appropriateness with the perceptible signature of accumulating holonomy. Fifth, it conducts four *adversarial syntheses* of the contending traditions of perception, reception, sharing, and reproduction, assigning each theory its level, its reach, and its limit, and resolving their conflicts by inversions that share one structure. Sixth, it installs the *orthogonality guard* that separates the refinement of the sensibility from the justice of the field, securing the account against aestheticism. Seventh, it specifies an *implementation-level interface* of observable signatures, including inter-brain coupling as a candidate correlate of the central concept, without reducing the relational to the neural. Eighth, it gives a *political economy of the field* that defends the cultivation against the charge of leisure-dependence and shows it most needed by the dispossessed. And ninth,

it *unifies the series*, naming the cultivable capacity that the prior studies of poetry, the vow, water, and travel each presupposed without naming.

4.24.7 The structure of the paper

The paper falls into five parts. Part I (§4.1–§4.5) lays the foundations: the introduction, the generative dialectic that is the method, the ontology of the field, the argument that field-building is not engineering, and the design-theoretic support. Part II (§4.6–§4.8) establishes the legitimacy of the aesthetic-ethical coupling: the genealogy, the coupling mechanism, and the orthogonality guard. Part III (§4.9–§4.12) sets out the three beauties, the static anatomy of the capacity, with perception receiving the densest treatment as the first battlefield. Part IV (§4.13–§4.18) develops the four-step model and its theory: the establishment of relational aesthetics, the four battlefields of reception, sharing, and reproduction joined to the perception battlefield of Part III, the implementation-level interface, and the worked example of contingency. Part V (§4.19–§4.25) draws the consequences: the critique of aestheticized consumption, the account of micro self-legislation against the symbolic crisis, the political economy of the field, the terminus that unifies the series, the account of transmission, and the polyphonic conclusion. The present section stands outside the five parts as their retrospective gathering, and the conclusion that follows returns the whole to the everyday from which it began.

4.25. Polyphonic Conclusion: Against Reducing Aesthetic Education to a Method

A paper that has argued, throughout, that the appropriate cannot be reduced to a rule and that aesthetic education is the cultivation of a perception rather than the transmission of a code, would contradict itself if it closed by reducing what it has said to a single method, a procedure for building generative fields that the reader could apply. The temptation to close so is real, since a reader who has followed the argument may reasonably want, at the end, the thing the argument has refused to give, a method. This conclusion declines the temptation, and its declining is not an evasion but the last enactment of the paper's central claim. There is no method, because the thing the paper describes is a perception, and a perception cannot be a method. What the conclusion offers instead is polyphonic,

several distinct framings of what has been argued, held together without a synthetic meta-framing that would subordinate them to a single master statement, because the refusal of the master statement is itself the paper's final fidelity to its argument, and the holding-together-without-synthesis is the form the argument's truth takes at its close.

4.25.1 The framings, unsynthesised

The paper can be read as several things, and the readings do not reduce to one. It can be read as the completion of a reduction chain, the demonstration that relational production, pursued through the field and the field's aesthetic construction and the coupling of the aesthetic and the ethical, terminates in aesthetic education, so that the cultivation of the capacity to build generative fields is what aesthetic education properly names. It can be read as the establishment of a concept, relational aesthetics, on which beauty is a coupling event between subjects rather than a property of objects or a state of subjects, and the working-out of what follows for the cultivation of beauty once beauty is understood relationally. It can be read as a recovery, the restoration to aesthetic education of the principal contradiction the tradition mislaid, the generation of the good cycle in the relational field, in place of the secondary contradiction the tradition elevated, the refinement of individual taste. It can be read as a defence of the everyday, the demonstration that the most repetitive and unspacious life is not excluded from generative cultivation but is its privileged site, the place where the capacity is most needed and, against the charge of leisure-dependence, genuinely available. It can be read as a remedy for the symbolic crisis, the showing that when the grand structures of meaning empty, meaning can still be produced at the smallest scale, in the self-grounded building of a field between two people, a meaning that does not drain because it borrows from no emptying authority. It can be read as the completion of a series, the naming of the cultivable capacity that the prior studies of poetry and the vow and water and travel each presupposed without naming, so that the account of the builder is given to stand beside the accounts of the things built. These framings are each true and each partial, and no one of them is the framing of which the others are aspects, because the paper is not a single thesis admitting one canonical statement but a structure that the several framings each truly describe and none exhausts.

To insist on this is not to shirk the labour of conclusion but to perform it rightly. A

synthetic meta-framing, a single master statement to which the others were subordinated, would claim for one description the finality the paper has denied to any rule, would make one framing the principle of which the others are applications, and would thereby commit, at the level of the paper's self-understanding, the very reduction the paper has argued against. The polyphonic close is the paper's refusal to do to itself what it has told its readers not to do to the appropriate, the refusal to settle the plural into a governed unity, and it is therefore not a failure to conclude but the only conclusion consistent with the argument, the holding-open at the level of the whole that the argument required at the level of the gesture.

4.25.2 The form, the final argument

This polyphonic close is the last instance of a self-instancings that has run through the paper, the form enacting the claim. The four-step model was shown to be a holonomy cycle, returning to its root and not its origin; the four battlefields were shown to turn on one movement, the relinquishing of grasp that founds generation, appearing four times; the transmission section was shown to perform, upon the reader, the cultivation it described. Now the conclusion is shown to refuse, in its own structure, the reduction the paper argued against, holding its framings polyphonically rather than synthesising them, so that the paper's last act is itself an instance of the open, non-settling generativity it has described from the first page. The form has been the argument throughout, and at the close the form makes its final argument, that a thing whose truth is the refusal of settlement must end without settling, in a plurality held open rather than a unity closed, and that to end so is not to leave the work undone but to complete it in the only way its own claim permits.

4.25.3 Envoi

It is fitting to close not on the structure but on the smallest thing, the morning and the cup and the light on the wall, because the everyday was the whole point. The grand fields the series studied, the poem and the vow and the journey, were always the heightened departures from a daily ground, and this paper has returned the capacity they displayed to that ground, to the unspacious mornings that make up most of a life. The aesthetic education of the everyday asks for no spare hours and no exceptional occasions; it asks

only that the cup be placed, the contingency caught, the daily thing renewed, with a perception a little finer than before, so that the field built between two people in the narrow room of an ordinary day accumulates rather than flattens, returns to its root raised rather than closing on its origin. That is the whole of it, and it is not small. A life is mostly mornings, and to build, in the mornings, a field that gains, is to make most of a life generative, which is as much as any cultivation could hope to do. The paper ends where it began, in the everyday, having shown that the everyday, perceived and received and shared and renewed with a trained and unattached attention, is where the good cycle is most needed and most possible, and that the building of it there, between two people, in the smallest acts a day affords, is the aesthetic education that the whole long argument was for.

The saying that opened this paper said that carrying water and chopping firewood are nothing other than the wondrous way, and the long argument between that opening and this close has been the working-out of how the saying can be true, in what sense the most ordinary and repetitive labour can be the wondrous way and not merely be called so. The answer the paper has given is that the carrying and the chopping are the way when they are perceived and received and shared and renewed with the trained and unattached attention that builds a generative field, when the water is carried not as a wheel turning in place but as a spiral that gains, the same carrying made new each day and thickened by every previous carrying, shared with the one for whom it is carried, settling into a field that accumulates. The wonder is not in the water and not in the carrying, which are ordinary; it is in the cycle the carrying can be made to turn, the good cycle whose holonomy is the wonder, the returning to the root and not the origin that an ordinary act, attended rightly, performs. To learn to carry the water so is the aesthetic education of the everyday, and it is available to anyone who carries water, which is nearly everyone, in the unspacious days that are nearly every day.

And so the paper returns, at the last, to the one for whom it was written, the girl who loves the forest, with whom its author has not yet carried the water of a shared everyday but hopes to, for a long time, in the ordinary mornings that a shared life is mostly made of. The grand fields are the heightened occasions, the journey not yet taken together, the vow already exchanged; but the life that follows them will be mostly mornings, mostly

the narrow room of the daily, mostly the carrying of water, and it is for that life that the capacity this paper describes is the capacity that matters, the building, in the ordinary days, of a field that gains. The whole long argument was for this, that the everyday between two people who love each other can be made generative, can be perceived and received and shared and renewed so that it accumulates rather than flattens, and that the cultivation of the capacity to make it so is the aesthetic education that is, in the end, an education in how to build, in the smallest acts of the most ordinary days, a world together.

Witness	The recognition contributed	Supports	Mode
Rite-and-music (Confucian)	the person is completed in the aesthetic; the good and beautiful never divided	the coupling itself	inheritance
Schiller	the moral problem must first be solved as an aesthetic one	aesthetic education grounds the ethical	recovery
Wittgenstein	ethics and aesthetics are one; both shown, not said	the appropriate overflows rules	recovery
Scheler	value is felt before it is reasoned	value-apprehension is perceptual (§4.7)	recovery
Gadamer	taste was a moral power before it was narrowed to art	the fitting where no rule applies	recovery
Williams	moral theory mistakes the nature of ethical life	appropriateness is not rule-governed	recovery
Murdoch	just attention is moral action; the moral and aesthetic gaze are one	perception is at once aesthetic and moral	recovery

Table 4.3: The genealogy of the aesthetic-ethical coupling. The witnesses share almost nothing in method or metaphysics, which is why their convergence on one recognition is strong evidence; the paper supplies the mechanism, holonomy and the field, that the tradition reported but did not explain.

References

- Alexander, Christopher (1979). *The Timeless Way of Building*. Oxford University Press.
- Alexander, Christopher, Sara Ishikawa, and Murray Silverstein (1977). *A Pattern Language*. Oxford University Press.
- Anonymous (1967). *The Record of Music*. Hong Kong University Press.
- (1971). *The Great Learning*. Penguin.
- (2020). *The Kaogongji*. Routledge.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail (1981). *The Dialogic Imagination*. University of Texas Press.
- Bion, Wilfred R. (1962). *Learning from Experience*. Heinemann.
- Clark, Andy (2013). “Whatever Next? Predictive Brains, Situated Agents, and the Future of Cognitive Science”. In: *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 36.3, pp. 181–204.
- Confucius (1979). *The Analects*. Trans. by D. C. Lau. London: Penguin.
- Czeszumski, Artur et al. (2020). “Hyperscanning: A Valid Method to Study Neural Inter-Brain Underpinnings of Social Interaction”. In: *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* 14, p. 39.
- Deleuze, Gilles (1968). *Difference and Repetition*. PUF.
- Durkheim, Emile (1912). *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. Alcan.
- Friston, Karl (2010). “The Free-Energy Principle: A Unified Brain Theory?” In: *Nature Reviews Neuroscience* 11, pp. 127–138.
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg (1960). *Truth and Method*. Mohr Siebeck.
- Heidegger, Martin (1959). *Discourse on Thinking*. Neske.
- Huineng (2012). *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*. Columbia University Press.
- Kierkegaard, Soren (1843). *Repetition*. Reitzel.
- Laozi (1963). *Dao De Jing*. Penguin.
- Levinas, Emmanuel (1961). *Totality and Infinity*. Nijhoff.
- Marion, Jean-Luc (1997). *Being Given*. Stanford University Press.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice (1945). *Phenomenology of Perception*. Gallimard.
- Murdoch, Iris (1970). *The Sovereignty of Good*. Routledge.
- Rosa, Hartmut (2019). *Resonance: A Sociology of Our Relationship to the World*. Polity Press.
- Scheler, Max (1913). *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values*. Niemeyer.
- Schiller, Friedrich (1795). *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*. Reclam.

- Tomasello, Michael (2008). *Origins of Human Communication*. MIT Press.
- Williams, Bernard (1985). *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*. Harvard University Press.
- Winnicott, Donald W. (1965). *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment*. Hogarth Press.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig (1922). *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Kegan Paul.
- Zhuangzi (2013). *The Complete Works of Zhuangzi*. Columbia University Press.

CHAPTER 5

The Aesthetic Philosophy of the Quotidian and the Cultivation of Perception

This paper develops an aesthetics of the everyday and, on its basis, a theory of aesthetic education. Its guiding claim is that everyday aesthetic perception, small in amplitude and prone to go dead through habituation, is generated rather than given, coming to be in the relation between a perceiver and what is perceived and, in the cases that matter most, between two perceivers turned together toward a shared world. From this it draws its central proposal, generative relational aesthetic education, as one thesis with four faces: that beauty is generated within a relational structure; that an education in beauty must therefore cultivate the relation and not only the individual, which marks it off from the individualist tradition from Schiller onward; that the relational and the individual stand in a spiral dialectic in which neither is prior; and that aesthetic generation carries an ethical valence at its root, so that beauty and ethics share a single source rather than being joined by a later moral rule.

The argument proceeds in three spines, of generation, of the body, and of justice, arguing across phenomenology, cognitive science, psychoanalysis, and the political economy of the senses that perception constructs a world under a prior frame; giving this its empirical ground in the neuroscience of perceptual plasticity; and showing, through the distribution of the sensible, that the uneven distribution of perceptual capacity is a neglected injustice. On this ground the paper offers, as a preliminary and openly revisable contribution, four models of everyday aesthetic practice, each with its theoretical descent made explicit: a basic generative cycle; a reflective variant beginning in silence, where reception suspends private judgement; the leaving of emptiness, a field in which contingency may generate of itself; and an iterative symbolic refinement modelled on evolution without a fitness function. The paper closes not in synthesis but in directed fissures, the first pointing toward the emergence of culture in intimate relation.

致她——

For her—

那个属于森林与山之女孩，

the girl who belongs to the forest and the mountains,

她教我看见平常日子裡的光。

who taught me to see the light in ordinary days.

致我最爱的人。 To the one I love most.

5.1. Introduction

Most of what is ever perceived as beautiful is perceived in the course of an ordinary day, and almost none of it is perceived in a museum. A person wakes to a particular quality of light on a wall, hears rain begin against the glass, tastes the first mouthful of something warm, watches someone they love cross a room. Such perceptions are small in amplitude, high in frequency, and gone almost before they are noticed, and philosophy has largely declined to treat them, having inherited a discipline of aesthetics built around the rare and framed object. A theory of beauty attending only to what hangs in galleries has thereby passed over the overwhelming majority of the sites at which the aesthetic actually occurs. This paper takes those sites for its subject. It concerns the aesthetics of the everyday, and it concerns what it would be to cultivate a capacity for that aesthetics, which is the old question of aesthetic education asked of the most ordinary material there is.

The everyday is not an easy subject, and it is not easy for the reason that recommends it. The same low amplitude and high frequency that make daily aesthetic life pervasive also make it the natural home of habituation: the light on the wall becomes *the light on the wall*, unseen by the second week. An account of everyday aesthetics that only celebrated the beauty available in ordinary things, without reckoning with the standing tendency of ordinary things to go dead to perception, would be sentimental and would deserve the neglect the subject has received. The everyday is the hardest case for any claim that the aesthetic is generated rather than given, because it is where the givenness of the world is most nearly total and where the work of generating perception must be done against the heaviest resistance. This paper accepts that difficulty as its proving ground: a theory of aesthetic generation that can be made to hold in the kitchen at seven in the morning has been tested where it is most likely to fail.

The proposal: generative relational aesthetic education

The central proposal can be put as one thesis with four faces, and the argument of the whole paper is the defence of these four together. The first is ontological, and it is the ground of the other three. Beauty is generated within a relational structure. It is not projected onto a neutral object by a sovereign subject, in the manner of aesthetic

subjectivism, nor discovered as a property the object carried in itself waiting to be found, in the manner of aesthetic objectivism; it comes to be in the relation between a perceiver and what is perceived, and, in the cases this paper cares about most, in the relation between two perceivers turned together toward a shared world. A meal, a swept room, the light at a particular window: the beauty of these is not located in the thing, nor in either mind alone, but in the relational event of *our* perceiving and *our* doing thus, together. The everyday is where this is most visible, because everyday things are too plain to sustain the illusion that their beauty was simply sitting in them.

The second face follows from the first and gives the paper its title. If beauty is generated in a relational structure, then an education in beauty must cultivate the relation, and not only the individual within it. This marks the proposal off from the tradition of aesthetic education it most respects. From Schiller's letters onward (Schiller 1967), that tradition has taken its unit to be the single person: it asks how one human being's sensibility, taste, or character might be brought toward completion, how the sensuous and the rational might be reconciled within a soul. The proposal here asks a different question, whose difference is the whole contribution: how a relation might be brought to go on generating the aesthetic, how two people might cultivate between them a shared capacity that neither carries alone. The cultivated thing is the relation's power to generate perception, and this is why the paper calls its subject generative relational aesthetic education.

The third face guards the second against a misreading it invites. To make the relation the unit of cultivation is not to dissolve the individual into it. The relational and the individual stand in a dialectic, and the dialectic is a spiral rather than a subordination. An individual's perceptual refinement, the trained discrimination this paper will trace through the neuroscience of expertise, is the condition on which relational aesthetic generation draws; and the shared perception generated in the relation returns to reshape the individual's own capacity, which enters the next round already altered. Neither pole is prior. The individual sinks into the relation and the relation returns to remake the individual, and the return does not arrive back at its origin. This spiral, which earlier papers of this series have tracked under the geometry of holonomy, is what keeps the relational from swallowing the individual, and the paper will insist on it wherever the temptation to a simpler collectivism appears.

The fourth face concerns the bearing of all this on ethics, and it is placed here, at the outset, because it is not an addition to the aesthetic argument but a consequence of it. Because beauty is generated in a relation, and because a relation may be of a kind that returns what it generates to both who stand in it or of a kind that draws one of them off as mere material for the other's experience, aesthetic generation carries an ethical valence at its root. A perception that consumes the other as a spectacle, the aestheticising gaze that turns a person into scenery, is a bad aesthetic generation in the exact structural sense this series has given to badness; a perception in which each party to the shared seeing is a beneficiary of it is a good one. Beauty and ethics are not joined here by adding a moral rule to an aesthetic fact. They share a single root in the structure of relational generation, and the theory of justice this series has been building enters the aesthetics of the everyday through that shared root rather than over a wall.

Contribution, and its measure

The contribution of this paper should be stated with its limits showing. It does not offer a completed system of relational aesthetic education, and it does not claim to have settled how such an education would proceed. What it offers is, first, the rethinking of aesthetic education along three axes on which that tradition has rarely been set: the relational system, in which the unit of cultivation is a relation rather than a person; the theory of justice, in which the uneven distribution of perceptual capacity is recognised as a form of injustice; and ethics, in which aesthetic generation is shown to carry its ethical valence at the root rather than by later addition. On the ground so prepared, the paper then proposes, as a preliminary and openly revisable offering, four models of everyday aesthetic practice, each with its theoretical descent made explicit and none advanced as a closed prescription. That the models are four, and offered for testing and amendment rather than as a finished inventory, is not a modesty of manner but a fidelity to the subject: an aesthetic education that could be reduced to a fixed procedure would have contradicted, in its form, the generativity it means to cultivate.

Where the paper stands, and how it proceeds

The argument does not begin from nothing. It stands on ground this series has already laid: a relational ontology in which relations precede their terms; a theory of value in three

registers, imaginary, symbolic, and real, whose real register alone carries endogenously good value; the distinction between the good and bad cycle, given a geometric body as the sign of a holonomy; the framework of generative justice developed in exchange with Eglash (Eglash 2016), in which every party to a generative process must be a beneficiary and none reduced to fuel; and the account of happiness, from an earlier paper of this series, as a quality of a dynamical process rather than a state to be reached. To these it joins resources from outside: the phenomenology of perception, the predictive-coding account of the perceiving brain, the psychoanalytic account of how desire organises the visual field, the political economy of the historically produced senses, the tradition of everyday aesthetics, and Rancière's account of the distribution of the sensible. The joining is deliberate and is governed by a method the paper states plainly, so that its breadth is not mistaken for eclecticism. The disciplines are arranged in three tiers. A small number bear the weight of the argument's spines. Several more enter as structural interventions, each doing a determinate piece of work at a determinate place. The rest sound as overtones, supplying an image or a formal correspondence without being asked to carry a claim. Where the paper reaches a formal register at all, it keeps the formalism in the serving position, translating results already established rather than deriving them here; and throughout, it declines to convert the cultivation of perception into a technique, on the methodological ground that a generativity made procedural is a generativity killed.

Three spines carry the paper, and each is named here with the disciplines that bear it. The first is the spine of *generation*: that aesthetic perception generates a world rather than registering one, a claim tested where it is hardest, in the everyday, and argued across phenomenology, cognitive science, and psychoanalysis. The second is the spine of *the body*: that perception is plastic, so that the cultivation of perception is a real training and not a metaphor, a claim given its empirical body by the neuroscience of perceptual learning. The third is the spine of *justice*: that the distribution of perceptual capacity is uneven in ways that constitute a neglected injustice, so that aesthetic education is answerable to the theory of justice, a claim argued through the political economy of perception and the distribution of the sensible. The paper is the working-out of these three spines toward the proposal they were raised to support, and it ends not in a synthesis but in a set of directed fissures, each marking a place where what has been said runs out and points beyond itself, the first of them toward the emergence of culture that a later paper must

take up.

5.2. The Phenomenology and Diagnostics of the Everyday

Before a theory of everyday aesthetics can propose anything, it owes two things that are usually run together and are better kept apart: a description of how the everyday actually shows itself to perception, and a diagnosis of what has gone wrong with it and what a healthy relation to it would be. The first is phenomenological and withholds judgement; the second is diagnostic and does not. This section supplies both in that order, because the proposals of the later parts of the paper are answerable to a diagnosis, and a diagnosis that has not first looked carefully at the phenomenon it means to treat is a prejudice with clinical pretensions. What the description will show is an aesthetic life of low amplitude and high frequency, pervasive and endangered in the same breath. What the diagnosis will add is an account of the danger, of the ground on which the everyday nonetheless remains the decisive field, and of what it would be for the dynamics of a life and a relation to be well rather than ill within it.

5.2.1 The phenomenology of the everyday

The everyday shows itself, first, in a register beneath the threshold at which experience ordinarily announces itself as aesthetic. It does not arrive framed. The quality of morning light on a wall, the particular sound a familiar door makes, the warmth of the first cup held in both hands, the way a person one lives with sets down a book: these present themselves not as objects offered for contemplation but as the barely-noticed texture of being somewhere, doing something, with someone. Their amplitude is low. No single instance of everyday beauty makes the demand upon attention that a painting in a gallery is institutionally arranged to make; each could be, and mostly is, passed over without remark. Their frequency, correspondingly, is enormous. Where the encounter with art is rare and set apart, the everyday delivers its small aesthetic events continuously, through every waking hour, so that the total aesthetic weight of a life is carried far more by this constant low murmur than by the few occasions on which one stands deliberately before something made to be seen.

The everyday shows itself, second, as transient in a way that is constitutive rather than

incidental. The light that is precisely this on the wall now will not be this again; even were the same people to gather tomorrow in the same room with the same things, the gathering would not be the same gathering, for the light would have moved, and the people would have altered, and something would have shifted that cannot be shifted back. The tradition of tea gave this its exact name. 一期一会, one time, one meeting: a phrase drawn from the practice of tea and crystallised by Ii Naosuke, marking each gathering as singular and unrepeatable, and doing so, as its commentators are careful to note, in a register that is relational before it is contemplative, concerned with the shared event between persons and not merely with the inner state of one (Saito 2007). The everyday is the standing home of this transience. Its beauty is very largely the beauty of what is passing, and this is not a melancholy attaching to the everyday from outside but a feature of how the everyday is given at all.

The everyday shows itself, third and most consequentially, under a constant tendency to recede from view. What is encountered continuously is precisely what perception learns to stop registering. This is not a failure that befalls some perceivers and spares others; it is the ordinary working of a perceptual system that economises by ceasing to attend to what it has learned to predict. The phenomenological description must therefore include, as one of the everyday's own features, its liability to become invisible to the very perceiver it surrounds. It is here that description shades into diagnosis, for this liability is at once a fact about how the everyday appears and the opening through which its characteristic pathologies enter.

5.2.2 Three pathologies

The everyday fails perception in three linked ways, and naming them precisely matters, because the models proposed later are, among other things, answers to these three.

The first pathology is *habituation*. The continuous and the familiar are what perception ceases to see. Russian Formalism gave this its sharpest early statement: everyday life, Shklovsky wrote, produces automatisations, a condition in which perception goes mechanical, and habitualisation *devours* the objects of a life, its work and its clothing and its furniture and even, in his unsparing list, one's spouse (Shklovsky 1965). The observation is exactly right and the paper takes it as the first term of its diagnosis. But it is worth

marking at once where this paper will part from the remedy Formalism attached to the observation, since the divergence sets the whole direction of what follows. Shklovsky's cure was defamiliarisation: the work of art makes the familiar strange, interrupts the automatism, and restores the freshness of a perception that ordinary life had dulled. The cure locates the aesthetic power in a technique applied to the object, and it locates it, tellingly, in *art*, so that the everyday is redeemed only by being made, through artistic device, to stop being everyday. The path taken here is the contrary one. The remedy for habituation will not be to make the ordinary strange but to cultivate a relational capacity by which the ordinary is generated anew in its very ordinariness. One does not defeat the deadening of the light on the wall by rendering the light bizarre; one defeats it by the generative work of a perception, and above all a shared perception, that meets the light as this light, now, once. Shklovsky diagnosed the disease with precision and prescribed an escape from the everyday; this paper prescribes a deeper entry into it.

The second pathology is *numbing*, which is habituation's affective completion. Where habituation is the failure to perceive, numbing is the failure to be moved by what is perceived, the flattening of affective response until the small aesthetic events of the day register, if at all, without consequence. Numbing is the more dangerous because it can wear the costume of depth: a perceiver gone affectively flat may mistake the flatness for equanimity or maturity, and a theory of the everyday must be able to tell the deadening of response apart from any genuine composure. The mark of the difference is generative: composure remains open to being moved and simply holds the movement well, whereas numbing has closed the channel by which the everyday could move one at all.

The third pathology is *symbolic decoration*, and it is the subtlest, because it looks like the cure rather than the disease. Faced with an everyday gone dead, a life may reach for the symbol: it may photograph the meal, narrate the moment, arrange the ordinary into a legible sign of itself to be displayed or archived. The gesture promises to rescue the everyday from invisibility by marking it as significant. What it frequently accomplishes instead is the substitution of the sign for the perception, so that one possesses the token of having-seen in place of the seeing. This third pathology cannot be properly analysed here, because its analysis requires the theory of the symbolic order and its two fates that §5.4 will supply; the symbol's intervention in perception is not in itself a pathology, and

only a certain fate of that intervention is. It is entered here as the third term of the diagnosis and left, deliberately, as a debt to be paid when the resources to pay it are in hand.

5.2.3 The everyday as the field of contingency

Diagnosis so far has been negative, a naming of failures. It must now become positive, and it becomes positive by saying what the everyday is such that these are its failures. The everyday is the field of contingency. This is not a fresh coinage but the specific character taken, at the scale of daily life, by the category of the field that earlier papers of this series established, the conditional structure within which relational production occurs. At this scale the field's defining character is that what happens in it is not arranged in advance. The everyday is precisely the region of a life that is not staged, not brought to a ceremonial peak, not curated into the frame of art or ritual; and its contingency, far from being a deficiency it should overcome by aspiring to the condition of the framed and the arranged, is the very condition of its generativity. A field in which everything is arranged admits only execution: what is fully staged can be performed, and performed well or badly, but it cannot generate, because generation requires that something occur which was not laid down in advance. The everyday's refusal of arrangement is therefore not the absence of aesthetic order but the presence of the room in which aesthetic order can be generated rather than merely enacted. One time, one meeting names this too: the singular and unrepeatable gathering is aesthetically decisive exactly because its precise configuration was contingent, never to recur, and so is a site of generation and not of reproduction. The pathologies of the previous section can now be understood in their unity. Each is a way in which the field of contingency is prevented from generating: habituation forecloses the contingent by predicting it away, numbing forecloses it by rendering it inconsequential, and decorative symbolisation forecloses it by settling it prematurely into a sign. The disease, in each of its three forms, is the arrest of a generativity that the contingency of the everyday was the standing opportunity for.

5.2.4 The dynamics of flourishing

The positive diagnosis can be completed by saying what it would be for a life and a relation to be well within the field of contingency, and here this paper draws on the

account of happiness given earlier in the series and does not rebuild it. That account declined to treat happiness as a state to be reached and treated it instead as a quality of a dynamical process, a matter of how the coupled systems of a person and a relation move through time rather than of any terminus at which they might arrive (Wanhong 2026b). Set in the present frame, the claim is that a healthy everyday is one in which the dynamics of an individual system and of a relational system develop, within the field of contingency, in a direction that tends toward flourishing; and that the aesthetic life of the everyday is the sensuous medium in which this development is largely carried. The small continuous aesthetic events of the day are not ornaments upon a life whose real business lies elsewhere. They are among the principal couplings through which a person and a relation move each other, the medium in which the trajectory toward or away from flourishing is actually traced. This is why the arrest named by the three pathologies is not a merely aesthetic loss. When the field of contingency is prevented from generating, the medium through which the coupled dynamics of a life could tend toward flourishing is deadened, and the persons within it are left to move through a day that has stopped moving them. The stakes of an aesthetics of the everyday are, in the end, the stakes of this dynamics: to keep the ordinary generative is to keep open the medium in which two people, turned together toward their shared and unrepeatable days, may go on becoming well.

5.3. The Generation of Perception: Several Schools

The first spine of this paper holds that aesthetic perception generates a world rather than registering one. The claim is easy to assert and easy to reduce to a slogan, and it earns its place only if it can be shown to be the convergent finding of several traditions that arrived at it by different routes and in different vocabularies. This section assembles those traditions. It takes up in turn the phenomenology of perception, the predictive account of the perceiving brain, and the psychoanalytic account of how desire organises the visual field, and it shows that each, pressed on the question of what perceiving is, returns a version of the same answer: that perception is a construction of the world under a prior frame, and not the passive receipt of a world already made. It then meets the objection that would dissolve the whole enterprise, the denial that there is any distinctively aesthetic

perception at all, and closes with the contemporary aesthetics of atmosphere, which locates the beautiful in exactly the relational between that this paper's ontology requires. The traditions are not merged here. Their convergence is the business of a later chapter (§5.8); the business of this one is to let each speak.

5.3.1 The phenomenological genealogy

Phenomenology reached the constructive character of perception first and states it most directly. For Merleau-Ponty, perception is not the reception of sense-data by a mind that then interprets them; it is the activity of a body already geared into a world, a body whose *schema* is a prior organisation of the perceptual field in advance of any particular thing perceived within it (Merleau-Ponty 1962). To perceive is to bring a bodily hold on the world to bear on what appears, so that what appears is always already articulated by the hold. There is no moment of pure reception prior to this articulation; the articulation is perception. Husserl, working the same ground from another side, gave the point its most exact name in the analyses of passive synthesis: before any active judgement, the perceptual field is already synthesised, already organised into unities and saliences and continuities by a passivity that has done its constructive work beneath and prior to the perceiver's notice (Husserl 2001). What arrives at active attention has already been shaped. The everyday is the natural home of this passivity, since it is precisely in the unattended flow of ordinary perception that passive synthesis does the greater part of its constructive labour, delivering a world already organised to a perceiver who takes that organisation for the world itself. Phenomenology's contribution to the first spine is therefore this: that the givenness of the perceived world is the achievement of a constructive activity, bodily and passive, which perception mistakes for a mere finding because the construction is not itself perceived.

5.3.2 The cognitive-scientific genealogy

The predictive account of the brain reaches the same conclusion through the study of the perceiving nervous system, and it is worth marking that it was not built to vindicate phenomenology and vindicates it anyway. On this account, perception is not the upward flow of sensory information into a receiving mind but a process in which the perceptual system continually generates predictions of its sensory input from a prior model of the

world and corrects that model only by the residual error its predictions fail to cancel (Friston 2010). What is perceived is, in the first instance, what the system predicted; sensation enters as the correction of prediction rather than as the origin of perception. The frame under which the phenomenologists said perception constructs its object is, in this idiom, the generative model the brain brings to its input, and the constructive priority they described is here the literal direction of the dominant signal, which runs from model to world before it runs from world to model. The paper treats this correspondence as a substantive convergence and not a loose analogy, and it defers to the chapter on convergence the argument that the two are versions of one finding, and to the chapter on plasticity (§5.7) the neural body of the claim. What the first spine draws from cognitive science here is only the philosophical point: that the best current theory of the perceiving brain describes perception as the generation of a predicted world, corrected by sensation, rather than the assembly of a world out of sensation.

5.3.3 The psychoanalytic genealogy

Phenomenology and cognitive science establish that perception constructs under a prior frame; psychoanalysis asks what organises the frame, and answers with desire. Its contribution to the first spine is the one the other two cannot supply, an account of why the constructed world is constructed *thus*, salient here and blind there, and its answer is that the perceptual field is organised around desire and its object. Lacan's analysis of the visual field turns on the claim that vision is structured by a gaze that does not belong to the seeing subject, a gaze that functions as *objet a*, the object-cause of desire, around which the scopic field is arranged (Lacan 1978). What a perceiver sees, and the point from which the seen is organised into a scene, is set by a desire that precedes and exceeds the perceiver's intention; the fantasy frame decides, beneath consciousness, what will show up as visible and what will remain unregistered. This is not a mysticism. It is the specification, at the level of desire, of the prior frame the other two traditions described formally: the generative model is not neutral, the bodily hold is not disinterested, and what organises their selectivity is, in the cases this paper cares about, the structure of a desire. The consequence for an aesthetics of the everyday is severe and clarifying. The beauty a perceiver finds in an ordinary scene is, in part, the beauty their desire was structured to find; the light at the window is seen as it is seen because of what the

seer wants, has lost, or circles. Perception of the beautiful is thus never the innocent registration of a beauty simply there, and any theory that treats it so has failed to ask who is doing the seeing and around what lack their seeing is organised. The paper will draw on this again when it comes to the reproduction of experience in silence (§5.12), where the psychoanalytic account of how experience is reworked after the fact becomes the theoretical body of one of its practical models.

5.3.4 The objection that there is no aesthetic perception

An objection now stands directly across the path, and it must be met before the argument proceeds, because if it holds there is no distinctively aesthetic perception for any education to cultivate. In his attack on the aesthetic attitude, Dickie argued that the supposed special mode of aesthetic attention is a myth: every alleged instance of a distanced or disinterested aesthetic attending turns out, on inspection, to be merely a case of attending or of failing to attend, with no special aesthetic manner of attention doing any work (Dickie 1964). There is attention, and there is inattention, and there is no third thing that is aesthetic attention. The paper accepts the premise and denies the conclusion, and the way it does so shows what its own claim is not. It grants Dickie that there is no special psychological state of aesthetic attention laid over ordinary perception, no distinct faculty that switches on before a sunset and off before a spreadsheet. Generative relational aesthetic perception is not the exercise of such a faculty, and a theory that posited one would deserve Dickie's refutation. But the conclusion Dickie drew, that aesthetic perception has therefore no distinctive character and reduces to ordinary attention, follows only on a further assumption that this paper rejects: that perception itself is mere registration, so that once the special attitude is removed nothing constructive remains to distinguish one perceiving from another. That assumption is exactly what the three preceding genealogies deny. If ordinary perception is already a construction of the world under a frame, then the aesthetic is not a special attitude added to a neutral perceiving but a modality of the constructive activity that all perceiving already is, a manner in which the generative work of perception is drawn upon and intensified. Dickie was right that there is no aesthetic attitude sitting on top of perception. He was wrong to conclude that perception is therefore aesthetically undifferentiated, because he took perception to be a receiving where it is a making. Removing the myth of the aesthetic attitude does not

leave a flat field of mere attention; it leaves the generativity of perception itself, within which the aesthetic is a way that generativity is exercised.

5.3.5 The generation of atmosphere

The contemporary aesthetics of atmosphere completes this section by naming, in aesthetic terms proper, the relational locus that the paper's ontology requires. Böhme's new aesthetics displaces the beautiful from both of its traditional addresses. Beauty is not a property the subject projects onto a neutral object, and it is not a property the object possesses in itself awaiting discovery; it is the atmosphere, the tuned in-between in which the qualities radiating from things and the felt bodily state of the perceiver meet, and which is neither simply out there nor simply within (Böhme 2017). Atmosphere is, in Böhme's account, among the primary objects of perception rather than a vague addition to it, and it is generated in the between rather than found on either side. This is the aesthetic articulation of the ontological claim with which this paper began, and the paper takes Böhme as its ally in displacing beauty from subject and object alike into the relation between them. It must also mark where it goes further. Böhme's between is the between of a single perceiver and an environment; the relation he theorises runs from one felt body to the qualities of a place. The relation this paper cares about most is the further one, between two perceivers turned together toward a shared world, in which the atmosphere generated is not one body's attunement to a room but the shared generation of a perceived world by two who are also perceiving each other perceiving it. That extension is the work of the later parts of the paper. What this section has established is the ground it stands on: that across phenomenology, cognitive science, psychoanalysis, and the aesthetics of atmosphere, perception is found to generate its world under a prior frame, and beauty is found in the relational between rather than in subject or object alone. The frame's plasticity, which makes an education of perception possible, is the subject of the spine to which the paper now turns.

5.4. The Symbolic Order and Its Two Fates

A debt was left unpaid in the diagnosis of the everyday. The third pathology, the decorative symbolisation that photographs the meal and narrates the moment, was named and

then deliberately set aside, on the ground that it could not be analysed until the theory of the symbolic order was in hand (§5.2.2). This section pays that debt, and in paying it corrects a crudeness that the word *pathology* invited. It would be easy, and it would be wrong, to treat the symbolic intervention in perception as such a pollution, a fall from some purer immediate seeing. The symbolic order is the condition of shared perception, not its enemy; without symbolisation there is no perception two people could hold in common, only the silted-up interiority of a private imaginary. The symbol is therefore not the disease. What the diagnosis glimpsed as a pathology is one of two fates that the symbolic intervention may meet, and the work of this section is to distinguish the fate in which symbolisation generates from the fate in which it appropriates, and to give the criterion that tells them apart.

5.4.1 Symbolisation as the condition of shared perception

Perception, left in the register of the imaginary alone, is unshareable. The account of the three registers this series has used throughout locates in the imaginary the domain of the perceiver's own images, vivid and immediate and idiosyncratic, and it is a standing feature of that register that its contents cannot as such be given to another; my image of this light is mine, and remains mine, until it is articulated in a system that another can enter. That system is the symbolic order, and its defining property, since Saussure, is that it signifies by difference rather than by resemblance: a term means through its place in a structure of contrasts, not through any likeness to what it marks (Saussure 1959). It is precisely this differential structure that makes the symbolic shareable where the imaginary is not, for a structure of differences can be occupied by more than one subject, whereas an image cannot be inhabited by anyone but the one who has it. When a perception is symbolised, it is lifted out of the private immediacy in which it could only be undergone and given a form in which it can be transmitted, revisited, and held in common. The intervention of the symbolic in perception is thus the very operation by which a perception becomes something that a relation, and not only a solitary perceiver, can have. To wish the symbol away in the name of an unmediated seeing is to wish away the possibility of a shared aesthetic life, which is the possibility this paper is about. The symbolic is the condition of the relational, and the relational is where, on this paper's central claim, beauty is generated. The question is therefore never whether perception

should be symbolised. It is always what becomes of a perception when it is.

5.4.2 The generative fate

A symbolisation may generate. It does so when the form it gives a perception opens that perception to renewed generation rather than closing it into a token, when the symbol returns the perceiver, and the one to whom the perception is transmitted, to the generative encounter rather than substituting for it. The mark of the generative fate, in the vocabulary this series has built, is that the symbolisation is organised around the empty place and does not settle it. A perception symbolised generatively keeps the incommensurable core of what was perceived unfilled, presenting a form that points toward the real value at its centre without claiming to have captured it, and so remains an invitation to perceive again rather than a receipt for having perceived. The love letter that says the day was beautiful in a way that sends its reader back to the day, the shared word between two people that names a recurring quality of their evenings and thereby deepens their attention to it, the poem that does not exhaust the light it speaks of but teaches the eye to return to it: these are symbolisations whose fate is generative, because each returns its participants to the generative relation and leaves the real value at its heart uncommandeered. Such symbolisation is, moreover, the very medium of relational aesthetic life, since it is only through symbols of this kind that the perception generated between two people can be sedimented into a form they can revisit together. Far from being a fall, the generative symbol is how a shared aesthetics accumulates. The paper will return to this in its account of the benevolent sign, where the symbolic arrangement of a shared life becomes one of the practical models of everyday aesthetic generation (§5.12).

5.4.3 The appropriative fate

A symbolisation may instead appropriate, and this is the fate the diagnosis glimpsed. It does so when the symbol is substituted for the perception rather than opened onto it, when possessing the token of having-seen takes the place of the seeing. The photograph taken so that the meal need not be tasted, the moment narrated so that it need not be undergone, the ordinary arranged into a legible sign of itself for display and archived in place of being lived: in each the symbol closes over the perception it was meant to carry, settling the real value into a commensurable and exchangeable mark. The appropriative

symbol belongs, in the value theory of this series, to the register that is most readily stolen, the symbolic value that can be counted, compared, accumulated, and displayed. Its social form is the one this paper will later confront under its own name, the spectacle, in which perception is handed over to the sign and the generative encounter is replaced by the consumption of images; that confrontation belongs to the chapter on justice, where the political economy of the appropriative symbol can be given its full weight (§5.13). What must be fixed here is only the structure of the appropriative fate as such. It is not that a symbol has been used, for the generative fate also uses symbols. It is that the symbol has been settled, closed over the empty place it should have kept open, converted from an invitation to perceive into a possession that dispenses with perceiving. The appropriative symbol does not transmit a perception; it retires one.

5.4.4 The criterion

The two fates must be told apart by a criterion that does not appeal to whether a symbol was used, since both use symbols, nor to any inner sincerity of the one who symbolises, since the difference is structural and not a matter of avowed intention. This series has such a criterion already, and the present distinction is its instance in the register of perception. A relational process carries a good or a bad character according to the sign of the holonomy of its value cycle: the good cycle returns to its root with a genuine surplus generated around the empty place, an endogenous increment produced by the internal tension of the relation and possessed by no one, which the formal companion of this series renders as a positive geometric phase (Berry 1984; Huang 2025); the bad cycle either generates no surplus across its return or generates one only by external extraction, closing the loop and settling the real value it should have circled. The generative symbolisation is the positive holonomy of this cycle in the domain of shared perception. It returns the perceivers to the encounter with a surplus of attention and shared meaning that neither owns and that was produced by their joint perceiving, and it leaves the incommensurable centre unsettled, so that the cycle can turn again. The appropriative symbolisation is the vanishing or the negativity of that holonomy. It closes the loop, settles the centre into an exchangeable token, and returns the perceivers not to the encounter but to the possession of its sign, from which no further generation issues. The criterion is therefore neither the presence of the symbol nor the psychology of the symboliser but the sign of

the holonomy: whether the symbolisation, taken through its full cycle, returns a surplus to the shared perception around an unsettled centre, or retires the perception into a settled and possessable mark. With this the debt of the diagnosis is paid. The decorative symbolisation named among the pathologies of the everyday is not the intervention of the symbol, which is the condition of any shared aesthetics, but the appropriative fate of that intervention, the symbolisation whose holonomy has gone to zero or turned negative; and the cure for it is not the abolition of the symbol but the cultivation of the other fate, the generative symbolisation whose possibility this section has established and whose practice the later parts of the paper will develop.

5.5. Value, Perception, and Circulation

The two preceding sections established that perception is generated under a prior frame and that its symbolisation may generate or appropriate. Neither has yet asked what is generated, in the register of value, when perception goes well, nor what is stolen when it goes badly, nor why the everyday should be the place where the answer matters most. This section supplies the value theory the paper's argument has so far leaned on without stating. It does three things in sequence. It sets out how the perception of value, of the ethical, of the just, and of the beautiful is generated across the three registers this series has used throughout. It shows, with the political economy of the senses, that the frame under which perception is generated is itself historically produced, so that perceptual capacity is never a natural endowment but a social product. And it isolates what is peculiar to everyday aesthetic value, the low-amplitude, high-frequency, non-accumulable value that is, for exactly those reasons, the hardest to steal, before closing on the circulation of that value and the justice of its return.

5.5.1 The perception of value across the registers

Perception does not merely deliver objects; it delivers them as valuable, as fitting or unfitting, as beautiful or mean, and the different kinds of value it delivers are generated differently. The three-register account this series has developed can be brought to bear directly on perception, and doing so clarifies what an education of perception would be educating. In the register of the imaginary, value is perceived as an idealised complete-

ness projected onto the object, the beauty that promises to fill a lack and to make the perceiver whole; this is the value of the perfect image, and it is exhausting in the precise sense that it can never be possessed without disappointing, since the completeness it promises was the perceiver's own projected wish. In the register of the symbolic, value is perceived as a place in a system of differences, the worth a thing has by its rank, its price, its position in an order of comparison; this is the value that can be counted and exchanged, and it is, as the previous section found, the value most readily appropriated, because what is commensurable can be transferred. In the register of the real, value is perceived around the empty place, as the incommensurable worth of what cannot be ranked, priced, or substituted, the value that gathers around the *das Ding* at the centre of a genuine attachment and that no symbolic equivalent can discharge. The perception of the beautiful, of the ethical, and of the just each runs across these registers. The beautiful may be perceived as imaginary completeness, as symbolic distinction, or as real and incommensurable singularity; the ethical may be perceived as an idealised purity, as conformity to a coded rule, or as the irreducible claim of a particular other; the just may be perceived as an imagined harmony, as an accountable balance of exchangeable goods, or as the real and unsettleable demand that no participant be reduced to fuel. An education of perception is, among other things, an education in which register one's perception of value chiefly moves in, and the wager of this paper is that a cultivated everyday perception is one drawn increasingly toward the register of the real, where alone, on this series' account, endogenously good value is carried.

5.5.2 The political economy of the senses

The frame under which perception is generated is not given by nature, and the claim that it is plastic, which the next spine will establish physiologically, has a social form that must be stated first, because it bears directly on justice. Marx stated it in the 1844 manuscripts with a directness that has not been improved upon: the forming of the five senses, he wrote, is a labour of the entire history of the world down to the present (Marx 1959). The senses are not a fixed biological endowment through which a ready-made world is received; they are themselves produced, historically and socially, so that what a perceiver is capable of perceiving is the sediment of a history. Marx drew the consequences that matter here. The perceiver bound by crude practical need has only a restricted sense:

to the starving, food exists only in its abstract character as food and not in its human form; the care-burdened and poverty-stricken have no sense for the finest play; the dealer in minerals sees the commercial value of the stone but not its beauty, having, in Marx's phrase, no mineralogical sense. Perceptual incapacity is here shown to be produced by a mode of life, and aesthetic perception in particular to be conditioned by the material circumstances that free or bind the senses. This has a contemporary extension that the argument requires, since the mode of production under which perception is now formed has made a commodity of perception's own scarce condition. Attention, Simon observed, is what a wealth of information consumes, so that an information-rich world is an attention-poor one, and the efficient allocation of a now-scarce attention becomes an economic problem (Simon 1971). The everyday perception this paper cares about is conducted under precisely this regime: an economy organised to capture and resell attention systematically draws off the perceptual capacity that everyday aesthetic life requires, outsourcing the perceiver's seeing to a flow of engineered images and leaving the light on the wall unattended not by accident but by design. The political economy of the senses therefore joins the diagnosis of §5.2 to the theory of justice the paper will reach: the habituation and numbing named there are not merely private failures of attention but the subjective face of a social production of perceptual incapacity, and the appropriative symbolisation of §5.4 is the cultural form through which that production operates. Who can perceive the everyday, and how well, is in part a question of political economy.

5.5.3 The value of everyday aesthetic perception

Everyday aesthetic value has a character of its own, and naming it precisely is one of this paper's contributions, because that character is what makes everyday aesthetic value at once endangered and peculiarly resistant to theft. It is, first, low in amplitude. No single instance of it makes a large claim; the value of this morning's light is small, and makes no demand comparable to that of a masterwork. It is, second, high in frequency. What is small in each instance is nonetheless delivered continuously, so that the aggregate everyday aesthetic value of a life is very large, carried in a multitude of minor increments rather than a few major ones. It is, third, non-accumulable. Everyday aesthetic value cannot be stored, collected, or held as a stock; the light perceived this morning does not deposit a quantity of value that can be drawn on tomorrow, for its value was in

the perceiving and passed with it, and tomorrow's must be generated anew. These three features together yield a fourth, which is decisive for the argument. Everyday aesthetic value is, of all aesthetic value, the hardest to appropriate. What is low in amplitude offers little worth expropriating in any single instance; what is non-accumulable cannot be stored and therefore cannot be stockpiled, converted, or transferred; and what must be generated afresh at each occurrence cannot be captured once and possessed. The masterwork can be bought, insured, and hung as a sign of its owner's standing, its symbolic value abstracted from any perceiving and made to circulate as capital. The light on the wall cannot. Its value exists only in the recurrent generative event of its being perceived, resists conversion into a possessable and exchangeable token, and so remains, structurally, close to the register of the real. This is why the everyday, for all its exposure to habituation, is the privileged site of endogenously good aesthetic value. Precisely because it is too small, too frequent, and too fleeting to be worth stealing, it is the aesthetic value least corrupted by appropriation, and the one whose generation an education of perception can most hope to protect.

5.5.4 Circulation and the justice of return

Value that is generated must circulate, and the character of its circulation is the difference between a good and a bad aesthetic life. This series has drawn the distinction sharply, and it applies without alteration here. In a good cycle, the value generated in perception returns to the perceivers with an endogenous surplus produced by the internal tension of their shared attending, a surplus possessed by no one and settling nothing, so that the cycle can turn again with the real value at its centre still unfilled. In a bad cycle, the value either fails to return, dissipated into habituation, or returns only by external extraction, one party's perceptual life drawn off to feed another's. The just cycle, in the terms developed with Eglash, is the one in which every party to the generative process is a beneficiary of it and none is reduced to fuel (Eglash 2016). This condition has a specifically aesthetic violation that the paper will pursue under the name of the spectacle and the theory of justice (§5.13), but its structure can be fixed now. There is an aesthetic extraction in which one person's perceptual labour sustains another's aesthetic consumption without return: the arranged and maintained beauty of a life or a place that is drawn upon by those who did not make it and returned to those who did as nothing,

the aestheticised regard that consumes a person as scenery and gives back no share in the seeing. Such extraction is the bad cycle in the register of perception, an appropriation of aesthetic value in which the generativity of one is expropriated as the consumption of another. The good cycle is its contrary: a circulation of everyday aesthetic value in which those who generate the perception are those who benefit from it, in which the surplus returns to the shared attending that produced it, and in which no one is rendered the unattended maintainer of a beauty that others consume. To cultivate everyday aesthetic perception is therefore never a merely private refinement. It is to sustain a circulation of aesthetic value whose justice is measured by whether the value returns to all who generate it, and this is the point at which the aesthetics of the everyday becomes answerable, at its root and not by later addition, to the theory of justice.

5.6. The Philosophy of the Body

The second spine holds that perception is plastic, and that the cultivation of perception is therefore a real training rather than a figure of speech. Before that claim receives its empirical body from the neuroscience of the perceiving brain (§5.7), it must be given its philosophical form, for the empirical results are only intelligible as an education of perception if perception is first understood to be the kind of thing an education could reach. This section supplies that form by way of the body. It shows, from the phenomenology of embodiment and from the enactive tradition in cognitive science, that perceiving is a bodily accomplishment, a skilled coupling of a body with its world rather than a mental registration behind the eyes; and that because it is a bodily skill, it is the kind of capacity that is acquired, refined, and reshaped through the history of a body's engagements. Plasticity, in other words, is not first a neural fact awaiting philosophical interpretation. It is entailed by what perception already is, once perception is understood as embodied. The neuroscience of the next section will then be read not as the discovery that perception can be trained but as the physiological account of a trainability the philosophy of the body already requires.

5.6.1 The phenomenology of the body

Phenomenology distinguished, before cognitive science reached the matter, between the body one has and the body one is. The lived body, the *Leib*, is not the object-body, the *Körper*, that anatomy describes and that one might survey as one surveys any thing in the world; it is the body as it is lived from within, the seat and the medium of perceiving rather than one of perception's objects. Merleau-Ponty made this lived body the ground of all perceiving. To perceive is not to receive impressions in a mind to which the body is external hardware; it is to bring to bear a bodily hold on the world, a hold organised by the body schema that arranges the perceptual field in advance of any particular perceiving within it (Merleau-Ponty 1962). The body schema is not a representation the perceiver consults; it is an operative, practical familiarity, a way the body already has of being geared into its surroundings, and it is this that perception draws upon. Husserl had already located the same priority in the kinaesthetic constitution of perception: the perceived thing is given as the correlate of possible movements of the perceiver's own body, so that to see the front of a thing is already to carry an implicit bodily sense of the movements that would bring its hidden sides into view (Husserl 2001). Perceiving is, at its root, a matter of what the body can do and could do, a system of bodily potentialities brought to bear on what appears. This has a consequence the paper needs. If perceiving is a bodily hold, and if the hold is constituted by an acquired practical familiarity and a repertoire of kinaesthetic potentialities, then perceiving is a skill, and skills are cultivated. The lived body is not a fixed apparatus delivering a standard perceptual world; it is a history of acquired bodily competences, and its perceptual world is the correlate of that history. The everyday is where this is most fully true, since it is in the unremarkable and repeated engagements of ordinary bodily life, the ten thousand small dealings with familiar things, that the body schema is chiefly formed and reformed. What one can perceive in an ordinary room is the sediment of how one's body has learned to inhabit ordinary rooms.

5.6.2 The enactive genealogy

Cognitive science reached the same conclusion from its own side and gave it a sharper operational edge, and its convergence with phenomenology is not accidental, since the enactive programme took the reconciliation of the two as its explicit aim. The founding

claim of that programme is a direct denial of the picture on which perception is the internal representation of a pre-given world. Cognition, Varela, Thompson, and Rosch proposed, is not the representation of a ready-made world by a ready-made mind but the enactment of a world and a mind together, on the basis of the history of actions a living being performs; cognition is embodied action, and perceiving is a mode of it (Varela et al. 1991). Perception brings forth a perceived world through the sensorimotor coupling of an agent with its environment rather than mirroring an environment given in advance. Two developments of this claim supply what the paper's second spine requires. The first is Gibson's ecological account, from which the enactive tradition took its start: the primary objects of perception are affordances, the possibilities for action that a thing or a place offers to a perceiver whose bodily capacities they answer to, so that to perceive is directly to perceive what the environment affords, and the perceived world is a field of action-possibilities correlative to a body's powers (Gibson 1979). What one perceives is a function of what one's body can do, and a differently capable body perceives a differently afforded world. The second is the sensorimotor account of O'Regan and Noë, on which perceptual content is constituted by the perceiver's practical mastery of the regularities linking movement and sensory change: to see is to exercise an implicit knowledge of how sensory input would vary with one's own action, so that what one sees is not a static internal picture but a grasp of a structured space of possible sensorimotor engagements (O'Regan and Noë 2001; Noë 2004). Both developments carry the same implication for cultivation, and it is the implication the whole spine was raised to secure. If perceptual content is constituted by the mastery of sensorimotor regularities, and if the perceived world is the correlate of a body's affordance-answering capacities, then perceptual capacity is precisely a mastery, an acquired competence that can be extended and refined by the enlargement of the sensorimotor repertoire it rests on. A perception is not a fixed output of a standard organism; it is the exercise of a skill whose sophistication is a function of a history of engagement, and which further engagement can deepen. The philosophy of the body thus delivers the second spine in advance of any neuroscience: because perceiving is an embodied skill, a coupling constituted by acquired sensorimotor mastery, perception is intrinsically the kind of capacity an education could cultivate. What remains is to show, in the physiology of the perceiving brain, the mechanism by which this cultivation actually occurs, and to defend it against the charge that what such a mechanism trains

is not perception but mere preference. That is the work of the section that follows.

5.7. The Neural Plasticity of Perception

The philosophy of the body established that perceiving is an embodied skill and therefore, in principle, the kind of capacity an education could reach. This section supplies the mechanism. It is the most empirical chapter of the paper, and it carries the second spine's weight, because a claim that perception can be cultivated is idle unless the perceiving system is in fact modifiable by experience in the relevant way. The neuroscience of the last decades has established that it is, and established it at the level that matters: not merely that preferences shift or that judgements are learned, but that the perceptual system itself, down to the tuning of neurons in early sensory cortex, is reorganised by training. The section sets out this evidence, connects it to the predictive account already introduced, and then meets the objection that the neuroscience of the aesthetic measures pleasure rather than perception, an objection this paper must answer with particular care because answering it is where its own use of neuroscience becomes distinctive. It closes by drawing, from the very plasticity it has established, the line between the cultivation of perception and its commodified training, which is the second spine's ethical bound.

5.7.1 Plasticity as the empirical premise of cultivation

The enabling fact is that neural plasticity is not an exceptional or developmental state of the brain but its ongoing condition. It was once assumed that the perceptual system fixed early, that after a critical period in development the neural mechanisms of early sensory processing were no longer modifiable, and that what improvement adults showed with practice was a matter of higher cognition, of decision and judgement laid over an unchanging perceptual base. This assumption has not survived the evidence. Cortical representations of sensory input remain plastic in the mature brain, and the reorganisation of neural circuits by experience is the normal ongoing state of the nervous system across the lifespan (Gilbert et al. 2001). This is the premise on which an education of perception rests. If the perceptual system were fixed after development, the cultivation of perception could reach only the judgements and associations built on top of a standard perceiving, and the paper's second spine would collapse into a claim about taste rather than sight.

Because the perceptual system is plastic throughout life, the cultivation of perception can be what the paper claims it is: a training of perceiving itself.

5.7.2 Perceptual learning and cortical reorganisation

The direct evidence is the phenomenon of perceptual learning: the sustained and robust improvement, through repeated practice or exposure, in the ability to discriminate and identify perceptual features, an improvement that develops gradually and largely without conscious effort and is maintained over months and years (Watanabe and Sasaki 2015). Perceptual learning is not the acquisition of a belief about what one sees; it is an enhancement of the seeing. Its behavioural signature, improved discrimination at the trained task, is accompanied by measurable change in the nervous system at multiple levels, including the tuning of neurons in early sensory cortex, the correlational structure of sensory populations, and the weighting by which sensory evidence is read out for perception (Gilbert et al. 2001; Watanabe and Sasaki 2015). What training alters is the perceptual apparatus itself, the machinery by which a stimulus becomes a discriminated feature, and not merely a downstream decision about an already-fixed percept. For the argument of this paper the significance is exact. When it is claimed that a person may be brought to perceive the everyday more finely, to discriminate qualities of light, texture, sound, and taste that were previously undifferentiated, the claim names a real and studied form of neural change and not a metaphor of enrichment. The refinement of perception is the perceptual learning of the everyday, and it has the same standing as the perceptual learning studied in the laboratory.

5.7.3 Expertise and the reorganised perceiver

The most vivid form of the evidence is the perceptual expert, and the expert cases matter to this paper because they show the endpoint toward which cultivation tends. Sustained, deliberate engagement with a domain reorganises the brain, structurally and functionally, in ways that imaging has documented across musicians, athletes, and other trained perceivers (Watanabe and Sasaki 2015). The trained musician hears a texture of sound where the untrained hears an undifferentiated chord, and the difference is not merely that the musician has words for what they hear; their auditory processing has been reshaped by training so that the discrimination is perceptual. The taster discriminates in

a mouthful of wine what the novice cannot detect at all; the trained eye of the radiologist sees, in a field the layperson finds uniform, the salient and the anomalous. These are not additions of knowledge to a common perceptual base. They are reorganisations of perceiving, acquired through a history of engagement, by which the expert comes to inhabit a perceptually richer world than the novice occupies before the same stimulus. The expert perceiver is the demonstration, at the limit, of what the cultivation of everyday perception aims at in small: a person whose sustained attention to a domain has remade their capacity to perceive within it, so that the world answers their trained perception with a richness it withholds from the untrained. What the sommelier is to wine, a cultivated everyday perceiver is to the light of ordinary rooms and the textures of ordinary days.

5.7.4 The predictive implementation

These findings are not a loose collection; they are unified by the predictive account of the brain already introduced, and the unification matters because it ties the plasticity of perception to the generativity established in the first spine. If perception is the generation of a predicted world corrected by sensory error (Friston 2010), then perceptual learning is the refinement of the generative model under the pressure of that error, and the reorganisation documented in sensory cortex is the physical form of a model that has been retuned by experience to predict a domain more finely. The expert's richer perceptual world is the world afforded by a more finely differentiated generative model, one whose predictions carve the domain at joints the novice's model does not represent. This connects the second spine to the first at the level of mechanism. The generativity of perception and the plasticity of perception are one fact seen twice: perception generates its world under a model, and cultivation is the retuning of that model, so that to cultivate perception is to reshape the very generative activity by which perception constructs what is perceived. The everyday, once more, is where the retuning most matters, because it is the domain in which an unrefined generative model most readily predicts the familiar away into invisibility, and in which a cultivated model most transforms what is available to be perceived.

5.7.5 The objection from pleasure

An objection arises precisely from the existing neuroscience of the aesthetic, and it must be met with care, because meeting it is where this paper's use of neuroscience declares its difference. Neuroaesthetics, the field named by Zeki and developed through the aesthetic-triad model of Chatterjee and Vartanian, studies the neural bases of aesthetic experience by way of three interacting systems, the sensory-motor, the emotion-valuation, and the meaning-knowledge, and its characteristic finding locates the experience of beauty in the pleasure centres and reward circuits of the brain, with pleasure treated as a necessary if not sufficient condition of the beautiful (Zeki 1999; Chatterjee and Vartanian 2014). The objection this invites against the present paper runs as follows: if the neuroscience of the aesthetic shows that aesthetic experience is a matter of reward and valuation, then what any training of the aesthetic trains is preference, liking, the hedonic response to a stimulus, and not perception at all; the talk of cultivating perception collapses into the conditioning of pleasure. The paper's answer turns the structure of the aesthetic triad against the objection rather than denying the triad. It grants that the emotion-valuation system is engaged in aesthetic experience and that reward is a real component of it. But the reduction of the aesthetic to reward conflates distinct systems that the triad itself separates, and it conflates, within the valuation system, the wanting and the liking that a careful reward neuroscience has shown to be dissociable (Berridge and Kringelbach 2015; Kringelbach and Berridge 2009). The cultivation this paper is concerned with does not principally engage the emotion-valuation system at all. It engages the sensory-motor system, the perceptual apparatus whose plasticity the preceding sections documented; its object is not the intensification of the pleasure taken in a stimulus but the reorganisation of the perceiving by which the stimulus is discriminated. This is the paper's distinctive claim about the neuroscience of the aesthetic, and it is where a background in the dynamics of perceptual and neural systems earns its place. Where neuroaesthetics has largely measured the reward correlates of preference, asking which stimuli the brain likes, this paper points the neuroscience at a different question, asking how the perceiving itself is reorganised, and locating the aesthetic cultivation of the everyday in the plasticity of perception rather than in the conditioning of reward. The sommelier is not someone trained to like wine more; the sommelier is someone whose perception of wine has been remade. The objection from pleasure holds only against a project that sought to train

pleasure, and that is not this project.

5.7.6 The line between refinement and commodified training

The plasticity that makes cultivation possible makes its abuse possible in the same measure, and the second spine must therefore draw a line within the very trainability it has established. Perception can be reorganised, and it can be reorganised toward the refinement this paper commends or toward an end this paper must mark as its corruption. The refinement of perception enlarges the perceiver's world, deepening the discriminations available to them and returning them to the everyday with a richer capacity to generate its perception. The commodified training of perception does the contrary under the same mechanism: it reorganises perceiving so as to bind it to consumption, training the eye to discriminate the marks of status and the triggers of purchase, tuning the perceptual system to the demands of an attention economy that profits from what it teaches the senses to want. Both are perceptual learning; both retune the generative model; both are, at the level of mechanism, the same neural plasticity. The line between them is not drawn in the neuroscience, which is neutral between them, but in the value theory the paper has already supplied. Refinement is the cultivation of a perception whose value returns to the perceiver and to the shared attending that generated it, a perception drawn toward the register of the real and the good circulation of everyday aesthetic value. Commodified training is the cultivation of a perception whose value is extracted, a perceiving reorganised to serve a circuit of consumption in which the perceiver's own trained senses are turned into an instrument of their capture. The plasticity is one; the two uses of it are told apart by whether the reorganised perception generates value that returns to the perceiver or is harnessed to extract it. This is the ethical bound of the second spine, and it hands the argument forward to the theory of justice, where the social distribution of perceptual cultivation, and the question of whose senses are refined and whose are trained for capture, becomes a question of justice proper (§5.13).

5.8. The Convergence of the Schools: Toward Generative Relational Aesthetic Education

The paper has now let five traditions speak, and it has kept them apart while they did. Phenomenology, cognitive science, and psychoanalysis each gave an account of how perception is generated; the philosophy of the body and the neuroscience of plasticity each gave an account of how the perceiving body is formed and reformed; and along the way the political economy of the senses showed the forming to be historical. This section does the work those separations were holding in reserve. It argues that the traditions converge, that their convergence is on a single structure, and that this structure is what licenses the paper's proposal rather than leaving it a preference asserted over the disciplines. The argument matters because without it the breadth of the preceding parts would be an eclecticism, a gathering of authorities who happen to point the same way; and a proposal resting on an eclecticism could always be met by choosing different authorities. If instead the traditions can be shown to arrive, by independent routes, at one account of what perceiving is, then the proposal built on that account stands on the convergence and not on a choice among schools. The section establishes the pairwise correspondences first, states the shared structure they compose, and then draws from that structure the two claims the rest of the paper needs: that perception, being what the convergence shows it to be, can be cultivated, and that its cultivation must be relational.

5.8.1 Phenomenology and the predictive brain

The first correspondence is between the phenomenology of perception and the predictive account of the brain, and it is close enough that the two can be read as one finding in two idioms. Phenomenology held that perceiving brings a prior organisation to bear on what appears: the body schema arranges the perceptual field in advance of any particular perceiving, and passive synthesis has already constructed the field's unities before active attention arrives (Merleau-Ponty 1962; Husserl 2001). The predictive account holds that the brain generates its perceptual world from a prior model and admits sensation as the correction of prediction rather than as perception's origin (Friston 2010). Set side by side, the body schema and the generative model are the same posit named twice: a prior organisation the perceiver brings to the world, which structures what can appear

before any particular appearance, and which perception mistakes for the world because it operates beneath notice. Passive synthesis and the downward flow of prediction are one direction of construction described from two sides, the lived and the computational. This correspondence is not the paper's invention; it is the subject of an active literature that has taken the reconciliation of predictive processing with embodied and enactive cognition as its explicit task, most influentially in Clark's argument that the predictive brain is an embodied and world-engaging one rather than a sealed inference engine (Clark 2013; Clark 2016). The paper stands within that literature and draws from it the point its own argument requires: that the phenomenological and the neuroscientific accounts of perception are not two theories between which one must choose but two disclosures of a single structure, in which perceiving is the bringing of a prior generative organisation to bear on a world it thereby constructs.

5.8.2 Psychoanalysis and the frame

The second correspondence supplies what the first leaves open. Phenomenology and the predictive account agree that perception constructs under a prior frame, but neither, in itself, says what gives the frame its particular shape, why it is organised so and not otherwise, salient here and blind there. Psychoanalysis answers: the frame is organised by desire. Lacan's analysis of the scopic field located a gaze that does not belong to the seeing subject and that functions as the object-cause of desire, around which the visual field is arranged, so that what shows up as visible and what remains unregistered is decided beneath consciousness by the structure of a desire (Lacan 1978). Read into the vocabulary of the convergence, this is a claim about the generative model and the body schema: the prior frame is not neutral, and what sets its selectivity, its saliences and its blindnesses, is in the relevant cases a fantasy structure, a desire that has organised the model in advance of any particular perceiving. The high-level prior that predictive processing places at the top of the perceptual hierarchy is, where a human perceiver's desire is engaged, a fantasy frame; the precision the perceiver assigns to one part of the field rather than another is the weighting of attention by what the perceiver wants, has lost, or circles. Psychoanalysis thus specifies, at the level of desire, the content of the prior that the other two traditions described only in form. It tells us not merely that perception is framed but whose frame it is and around what lack it is bent, and it thereby

completes the account of the generated perception by giving the generation a motive.

5.8.3 The historical production of the frame

The third correspondence guards the convergence against a mistake it would otherwise invite. If the frame under which perception is generated were taken as a fixed structure, given with the organism or the psyche once and for all, then the account would have naturalised perception and closed off the possibility on which the whole paper turns, that perception can be otherwise and can be cultivated. The political economy of the senses forbids this closure. The frame is itself produced, historically and socially: the forming of the five senses, Marx wrote, is a labour of the entire history of the world, so that what a perceiver can perceive is the sediment of a history and not the endowment of a nature (Marx 1959). Set into the convergence, this is the claim that the generative model, the body schema, and the fantasy frame are not fixed priors but formed ones, laid down by a history of engagement that is at once bodily, libidinal, and social. The prior that predictive processing places at the top of the hierarchy has a history; the body schema that phenomenology describes is the sediment of a life; the fantasy frame that organises desire was itself organised, by a biography lived within a social order. The three traditions had each described a prior frame; the political economy of the senses adds that the frame is a product, and therefore alterable, and therefore the possible object of a cultivation or a corruption. Without this third correspondence the convergence would describe a perception fixed under its frame; with it, the convergence describes a perception whose frame is a historical achievement, open in principle to being formed otherwise.

5.8.4 The shared structure

The three correspondences compose a single account, and it can now be stated. Perception is the construction of a world under a prior frame, in a continual negotiation between the frame and the sensory world, in which the frame supplies the organisation and the world supplies the correction, and the perceived is the issue of their negotiation rather than the deliverance of either alone. This is the shared structure on which the five traditions converge, and each tradition contributes one determination of it. From phenomenology and cognitive science: the frame is a generative organisation, bodily and predictive, that constructs the perceived in advance of sensation and is corrected by it.

From psychoanalysis: the frame is organised by desire, bent around a lack, selective in its saliences and its blindnesses. From the political economy of the senses: the frame is historically produced, the sediment of a bodily, libidinal, and social history, and therefore alterable. And from the neuroscience of plasticity, joining the account at the level of mechanism, the frame is neurally plastic, its retuning by experience the physical form of its alterability (Gilbert et al. 2001; Watanabe and Sasaki 2015). The perceived world is thus the negotiated product of a frame that is generative, desiring, historical, and plastic, brought to bear on a sensory world that corrects it. No single tradition holds this whole; each holds one face of it; and their convergence is the paper's warrant for treating perception as it now proceeds to treat it, as a generated, framed, and alterable accomplishment rather than a fixed receiving.

5.8.5 From the structure to the proposal

Two claims follow from the shared structure, and they are the two the rest of the paper was raised on. The first is that perception can be cultivated, and this now follows not as a hope but as a consequence. If the frame under which perception is generated is plastic and historically produced, then it can be formed deliberately as well as it is formed by accident, and the deliberate forming of the perceptual frame is what aesthetic education is. The convergence thus converts the possibility of aesthetic education from an assumption into a result: because the perceptual frame is generative, historical, and plastic, it is the kind of thing an education could reach, and the cultivation of perception is the intentional cultivation of the frame under which perception generates its world. The second claim is that this cultivation must be relational, and it follows from the same structure once one asks how a frame is in fact formed. The frame is laid down by a history of engagement, and the engagements that form it are, for a human perceiver, overwhelmingly shared: the body schema is trained in a world of others, the fantasy frame is organised in relation to others' desire, and the historically produced senses are produced in a social order and not in solitude. A frame formed in relation cannot be reformed in isolation, and the deliberate cultivation of a perceptual frame therefore cannot be the private project of a single perceiver working on their own sensibility. It must work on and through the relations in which the frame was and is formed. This is the point at which the convergence delivers the paper's title. Because the perceptual frame is

generated, plastic, and relationally formed, an education of perception is possible, and because it is relationally formed, that education must cultivate the relation and not only the individual within it. Generative relational aesthetic education is not a preference laid over the disciplines. It is what the convergence of the disciplines, followed to its consequence, requires. The remaining parts of the paper develop what such an education is: how the tradition of aesthetic education must be revised to become relational (§5.9), how the spaces in which perception is formed may be designed (§5.10), what its practice looks like set within the existing theory of everyday life (§5.11, §5.12), and what justice requires of it (§5.13).

5.9. Aesthetic Education: From Tradition to the Relational

The convergence delivered the paper's title as a consequence: because the perceptual frame is generated, plastic, and relationally formed, an education of perception is possible and must be relational. This section begins the development of that education by setting it against the tradition it revises. It is a tradition of the first rank, and the paper approaches it with the respect owed to the thought it is departing from, since the departure is intelligible only against a full statement of what is departed from. The section therefore does three things. It states the tradition of aesthetic education at the level of its theory, from Schiller through Dewey and Cai Yuanpei to Read and Greene, taking care to render each at its strongest and to mark where the tradition already strains toward what this paper will claim. It isolates the shared presupposition that nonetheless unites these otherwise different thinkers, that the unit of aesthetic cultivation is the individual. And it states the difference that follows from the convergence, that generative relational aesthetic education takes the relation for its unit, before showing how the individual and the relational are held together in the cultivation itself. The treatment here is of the tradition's theory; its practical models, the actual methods by which it has trained perception, are taken up later, where they can be set beside the paper's own models of practice (§5.11).

5.9.1 The tradition at its strongest

Aesthetic education has a founding text, and it set the terms the tradition would keep. Schiller's letters proposed that the human being is divided between a sensuous drive, bound to matter and the life of feeling, and a formal drive, bound to reason and law, and that neither alone yields freedom; the aesthetic, through what he called the play drive, reconciles the two, restoring to the person a wholeness in which sensibility and reason are no longer at war (Schiller 1967). It is essential to render Schiller fairly here, because his account is not the private cultivation of taste it is sometimes reduced to. The reconciliation he sought had a political horizon: the aesthetic education of the human being was, for him, the path by which a people might become capable of freedom, the aesthetic state the condition of a genuine political one. Schiller is not a straw individualist, and the paper does not treat him as one. Yet the wholeness his education restores is the wholeness of a person, the reconciliation of the drives within a single soul, and the political freedom it opens onto is reached by way of the aesthetic completion of individuals. The unit is the person, however political the person's completion is meant to become.

The tradition's later high points inherit this unit while enriching the account. Dewey brought the aesthetic down from the museum into the continuity of experience, refusing the separation of art from life and locating the aesthetic in the rhythm of doing and undergoing by which any experience may be brought to fullness; his was a democratic aesthetics, holding that every person is capable of the artist's relation to their own experience (Dewey 1934). This is the tradition at its most hospitable to the everyday, and the paper draws on it gratefully. But the artist Dewey would make of every person is each person severally, and the fullness of experience he describes is the fullness of an individual's experience, however much that individual lives among others. Cai Yuanpei, proposing in 1917 that aesthetic education replace religion, appropriated the Kantian and Schillerian account for a China in crisis and gave the tradition one of its most socially ambitious statements, aesthetic education as the cultivation of a citizenry; yet the development he sought was the full development of the person in the three domains of knowledge, will, and feeling, an individually focused vision even at its most national in aim (Cai 1917). Read, making art the medium of a general education, sought through it the integration of the individual personality (Read 1943). And Greene, who of all the

tradition comes nearest to what this paper will claim, made aesthetic education the deliberate fostering of informed and imaginative encounters with art, and turned in the end toward community, toward the classroom as a social undertaking in which a teacher must see and hear students in all their plurality (Greene 1995). Greene reaches the threshold of the relational and is the tradition's most generous approach to it. But what her aesthetic education releases is the imagination, and the imagination it releases is each student's; the community she envisions is the condition and the medium of that release rather than itself the thing cultivated. The tradition strains toward the relational in Greene and does not cross into it.

5.9.2 The shared presupposition

Across these differences one presupposition holds, and naming it is the point of the survey. In each case the unit of aesthetic cultivation is the individual. What is to be brought toward completion, fullness, integration, or imaginative freedom is a person: Schiller's soul reconciled in play, Dewey's individual brought to the fullness of an experience, Cai's citizen developed in knowledge and will and feeling, Read's integrated personality, Greene's student whose imagination is released. That the completion is often meant to have social or political issue does not alter its unit; the person is completed first, and the polity or the community is reached through or after the completion of persons. This is not a failing of the tradition on its own terms, for the tradition took the cultivation of individuals to be exactly its task. It becomes a limit only in the light of the convergence, which showed that the perceptual frame an aesthetic education would cultivate is not formed in the individual first and shared afterward, but formed in relation from the start. If the frame is relationally constituted, then an education that takes the individual as its unit works downstream of where the frame is actually formed, cultivating the person's sensibility while leaving unaddressed the relation in which that sensibility was and is generated. The tradition's presupposition is not false about individuals; it is incomplete about where perception comes from.

5.9.3 The relational difference

Generative relational aesthetic education takes the relation for its unit, and this is the whole of its difference from the tradition. What it cultivates is not, in the first instance,

an individual's capacity to perceive the everyday aesthetically, but the capacity of a relation to go on generating aesthetic perception between those who stand in it. The distinction is not a matter of emphasis or of adding a social dimension to an individual cultivation. It is a difference in the object of cultivation. Where the tradition asks how a person's sensibility may be brought toward completion, this paper asks how two people may cultivate between them a shared perceptual life that neither carries alone, a capacity resident in the relation rather than in either party, by which their common world is continually generated as perceived. The convergence licenses this shift and indeed requires it: since the frame under which perception is generated is laid down in shared engagement, organised in relation to others' desire, and produced within a social order, the deliberate formation of that frame must work on the relations that form it, and cannot be accomplished by either party working alone on their own sensibility. The everyday is where this is most concretely true. The shared perceptual life of two people who live together, the qualities of light and sound and texture and gesture that their common days are made of, is generated in and by their relation, in the ten thousand small mutual attunements of a shared ordinary life; and to cultivate it is to work on that relation's generative capacity, not to improve two sensibilities in parallel and hope they meet. Relational aesthetic education is the deliberate cultivation of the relation's power to generate the perception of a shared everyday.

5.9.4 The individual and the relational in cultivation

To take the relation as the unit is not to dispense with the individual, and the third face of the paper's thesis, stated at the outset, must now be shown at work in the cultivation itself. The individual and the relational stand in a spiral, and the cultivation runs in both directions of it. An individual's perceptual refinement, the trained discrimination whose neural reality the second spine established, is drawn upon by the relation and is a condition of what the relation can generate: two people cannot generate between them a finely perceived shared world if neither has cultivated the capacity to perceive finely at all, and the sommelier's trained palate, brought into a shared meal, raises what the shared perception of that meal can become. In this direction the individual conditions the relational. But the shared perception generated in the relation returns upon the individual and reshapes their capacity: what two people come to perceive together, each

learns to perceive, so that the individual enters the next occasion already altered by what the relation generated, perceiving now what before the relation they could not. In this direction the relational conditions the individual. Neither pole is prior, and the cultivation is the turning of this spiral, in which refined individual perception feeds the relational generation and the relational generation refines individual perception, and the return does not arrive back at its origin, since each turn leaves both the individuals and the relation altered from where they began. This is why relational aesthetic education does not swallow the individual it declines to take as its unit. It cultivates the relation, and in cultivating the relation it cultivates the individuals, because the relation and the individuals are joined in a spiral that the cultivation sets and keeps turning. The tradition cultivated individuals and hoped the relation would follow; this paper cultivates the relation and shows that the individuals follow, because the perceptual frame was relational before it was ever individual, and returns to the individual by way of the relation that formed it.

5.10. The Design of Space and Perception

Perception is formed, and it is formed somewhere. The convergence established that the perceptual frame is laid down by a history of engagement; but engagements have places, and the places are largely made. A person's everyday perception is trained, day after day, in built environments that were designed, and the design of those environments is therefore among the concrete means by which perception is cultivated or deadened. This section takes up the spatial dimension of aesthetic education, and it takes it up as a chapter in its own right because the theory of how space forms perception is deep and specific and cannot be compressed into a remark. The section sets out that theory in four registers, the phenomenological, the atmospheric, the design-theoretic, and the political-economic, each of which has studied how built space acts on perception; and it then states the paper's own contribution, that space trains or dulls the perception of those who dwell in it, that the home is the privileged relational field in which everyday perception is continually generated, and that the design of space carries a question of justice about whose perception is cared for and whose is starved.

5.10.1 The phenomenology of built space

Architecture has its own phenomenology, and it reached, from the side of the made environment, the same embodiment the paper established from the side of the perceiving body. Pallasmaa's critique of the ocularcentrism of modern building is its sharpest statement. Architecture, he argued, has become an art of the eye alone, a retinal art of images fixed by the hurried glance of the camera, and in privileging vision it has starved the other senses through which a body actually inhabits a space, the touch of a handrail, the acoustic of a room, the temperature and smell and underfoot texture that make a place bodily habitable (Pallasmaa 2005). The eyes of the skin are the whole sensing body brought to bear on built space, and a building addressed only to the eye trains a diminished perception in those who live in it. Bachelard, earlier, had shown the inward face of the same relation: the spaces of a dwelling shape thought, memory, and reverie, so that the house is not a neutral container of a life but a formative structure of the perceiving and remembering that go on within it (Bachelard 1994). Norberg-Schulz gave the relation its name in the *genius loci*, the character or spirit of a place that a phenomenology of architecture must attend to, the specific way a place gathers and discloses a world to those who dwell there (Norberg-Schulz 1980). Across these the finding is one: built space is a formative condition of perception, addressing the sensing body, shaping the inward life, and disclosing a world with a specific character, so that to design a space is to design, in part, the perception of those who will inhabit it.

5.10.2 Atmosphere and attunement

The aesthetics of atmosphere, introduced earlier as the aesthetic articulation of the relational locus of beauty (§5.3.5), returns here as the theory of what built space generates. What a designed space produces, on Böhme's account, is an atmosphere, a tuned space in which the qualities radiating from materials, proportions, and light meet the felt body of the one who enters, so that the space attunes its inhabitant to a mood before any object in it is regarded (Böhme 2017). The atmosphere is the space's primary aesthetic action on perception, the way it sets, beneath notice, the key in which everything within it will be perceived. Eastern spatial thought had refined a cognate insight into a discipline. The Japanese conception of 間, *ma*, treats the interval, the pause, the charged emptiness between things, as itself a positive element of spatial and temporal composition, so that

what is not built carries as much of the aesthetic work as what is; a space is attuned as much by its intervals and its held emptiness as by its filled and articulated parts. This will bear directly on one of the paper's models of practice, the leaving of emptiness (§5.12), for the designed interval is the built form of the field of contingency, a space made so that perception may generate within it rather than being directed to a prescribed object. Atmosphere and *ma* together specify how space acts on perception below the level of the discrete object: it attunes, it sets a key, and it can do so as much by what it withholds as by what it presents.

5.10.3 Affordance and the design of the everyday

Design theory proper supplies the most concrete register, and it does so through the concept the paper has already drawn on from ecological psychology. Gibson's affordances, the possibilities for action that a thing or place offers to a body whose capacities they answer to (§5.6.2), became, in Norman's hands, the central concept of a theory of everyday design: a well-designed object communicates its affordances to the user, and where the affordance is not directly perceivable, a signifier is added to indicate it, so that design is the shaping of the perceived possibilities of action that a made thing offers (Gibson 1979; Norman 2013). The bearing on perception is exact and everyday. The objects and spaces of ordinary life, in offering or failing to offer perceivable affordances, train the perception and action of those who use them; a well-made handle teaches the hand, a coherent room teaches the movement through it, and the daily traffic with designed things is a continual, unnoticed schooling of perception in what the made world affords. Norman's title names the paper's own domain, the design of everyday things, and his analysis supplies the fine grain of how designed everyday objects act on the perceiving body that uses them. What his user-centred design largely set aside, the aesthetic and not merely the functional dimension of this shaping, is what the present chapter restores to it: the affordances a space offers are not only for use but for perception, and a space may afford, or fail to afford, the finely generated aesthetic perception of an ordinary life.

5.10.4 The production of perceptual space

The formation of perception by space is not innocent of power, and the political economy of the senses established earlier has a spatial extension that this register supplies. Space,

Lefebvre argued, is produced: it is not a neutral container in which social life happens but a social product, produced by and reproducing the relations of a mode of production, so that the organisation of space is among the means by which a social order maintains itself (Lefebvre 1991). Joined to the claim that the senses are historically produced (§5.5.2), this yields the proposition the paper needs here: the spaces in which everyday perception is formed are themselves produced under a mode of production, and they form perception in its interest. The retail environment engineered to capture attention and direct it to purchase, the domestic space arranged around the screens that resell the attention they absorb, the built environments that afford consumption richly and generative perception hardly at all, are the spatial production of a perception fitted to an economy. The habituation and numbing diagnosed at the paper's outset are trained, in part, by spaces built to train them. This is the spatial face of the commodified training of perception marked as the second spine's corruption (§5.7.6): perception is reorganised toward consumption not only by what it is shown but by the very spaces it is shown in, and the design of space is therefore one of the principal sites at which the cultivation and the corruption of everyday perception are decided.

5.10.5 The home as a field of perceptual generation

The paper's own contribution gathers these registers to a claim about the home, which is, for the everyday perception this paper cares about most, the decisive designed space. The home is where the greatest part of everyday aesthetic life is generated, the space whose light and sound and texture and arrangement make up the sensory substance of ordinary days, and it is, unlike the retail and the public spaces produced by a distant power, a space its inhabitants themselves in large part make and arrange. This gives the home a double character in the paper's argument. It is, first, the built condition under which a shared everyday perception is trained: the arrangement of a home, its affordances and atmospheres and intervals, forms the perception of those who dwell in it, and a home may be arranged to afford the finely generated perception of ordinary life or to starve it, to attune its inhabitants to their shared days or to distract them from these into the resold attention of the screen. It is, second and distinctively, a space of relational making, since a shared home is arranged by those who share it, and its arrangement is itself one of the practices by which they cultivate between them the perception of their common

life. The home is thus not only the space in which relational aesthetic education occurs but one of its media, a designed field that its inhabitants continually remake and that continually reforms their shared perception in turn, in the spiral by which the individuals and the relation form each other. This connects the chapter forward to the models of practice, where the arrangement of a shared space by benevolent signs becomes one of the concrete forms of everyday aesthetic generation (§5.12), and it carries the chapter's justice to the threshold of the paper's account of justice proper. For if perception is formed by designed space, and if some are given spaces that afford the cultivation of perception while others are given spaces built to starve it and resell their attention, then the design of space distributes perceptual capacity unequally, and does so along the lines of who can command the making of their own space. Whose home affords the generation of a shared aesthetic life, and whose does not, is a question of justice, and it is to justice that the paper now turns (§5.13).

5.11. The Theory and Existing Forms of Everyday Practice

The paper is about to propose models of everyday aesthetic practice, and it owes, before it proposes anything, a full account of the theory and the practice that already occupy this ground. Everyday life has been theorised, its practices studied, and its aesthetics given a scholarly literature; aesthetic education has its methods; and the East has traditions of everyday practice older and more refined than any Western theory of them. To advance a typology of practice without first setting it within this field would be to reinvent, in ignorance, what has been carefully thought, and to earn the objection that the paper does not know the literature it presumes to extend. This section therefore surveys the field in four registers, the theory of practice, the practical methods of aesthetic education, the sub-field of everyday aesthetics, and the practice traditions of the East, and it closes by marking precisely what these leave undone, which is the space the paper's own models are built to occupy. The survey is not a formality. Each of its registers has reached a limit that the paper's typology is designed to pass, and stating the limits precisely is how the typology earns the right to be proposed.

5.11.1 The theory of practice

The theory of practice supplies the frame within which any account of everyday doing must situate itself. Bourdieu made the habitus its central concept: the durable dispositions, laid down by a social position, that generate a person's practices without being consciously followed, so that practice is the improvisation of an embodied social sense rather than the execution of a rule (Bourdieu 1990). The account has great descriptive power and a limit that its critics fixed precisely. De Certeau, granting Bourdieu's analyses, objected that the habitus finally subordinates practice to the law of reproduction, reducing the lucidly described improvisations of everyday life to the reproduction of the social structures that formed them (Certeau 1984). Against this he set the distinction his own work is known for. Strategies belong to the powers that produce and order a place, the institutions that circumscribe a proper domain; tactics belong to those who lack such a place and who operate within the order others have produced, poaching on its territory, making do, turning the arrangements of the powerful to unforeseen uses in a creative resistance that is influenced by the imposed order but never wholly determined by it (Certeau 1984). Everyday life, for de Certeau, is the art of these tactics, the inventive reappropriation by ordinary people of a world produced by others. This gives the paper two of its coordinates and, in the same gesture, two of the limits it must pass. Bourdieu's habitus theorises everyday practice as reproduction, which is, in this paper's terms, the closed cycle, the practice that returns the social order to itself; de Certeau's tactic theorises it as resistance, which is reactive, defined by the imposed order it diverges from. Neither theorises everyday practice as generation, as the endogenous production of new aesthetic value around an unsettled centre. Reproduction and resistance do not exhaust the possibilities of everyday doing, and the possibility they omit, generation, is the one the paper's models are about.

5.11.2 The practical methods of aesthetic education

The tradition of aesthetic education, whose theory was set out earlier (§5.9), has also its practical methods, and they belong to this survey because the paper's models are models of practice and must be set beside the practices that already claim this ground. That tradition trained perception and sensibility through determinate means: the guided encounter with works of art, the practice of an art oneself, the disciplines of drawing, music,

and craft through which Schiller's and Read's cultivation of the integrated person was actually pursued, and, in the schools that took this most seriously, the sensory education of the whole child, as in the Montessori training of the discriminating senses and the Waldorf cultivation of the aesthetic and imaginative life through rhythm, making, and art. The East placed its practical methods differently, in the long apprenticeships of repeated practice, 稽古, and in the copying of masters through which the arts of calligraphy, painting, and the tea gathering were transmitted, methods in which perception was cultivated not by the appreciation of works but by the disciplined repetition of a making. These methods are real and effective, and the paper does not disparage them. But their unit, as the theory of the tradition already showed, is the individual whose sensibility they refine, and their setting is the reserved one of the lesson, the studio, the practice hall, the guided encounter set apart from ordinary life. What they do not offer is a practice of the everyday as such, conducted in the unreserved flow of ordinary shared living and taking the relation rather than the individual as what it cultivates. The tradition's methods train the person in a space set apart; the paper's models work the relation in the midst of ordinary life.

5.11.3 The sub-field of everyday aesthetics

Everyday aesthetics is now an established sub-field, and the paper must locate itself within it rather than beside it. Its founding move was to establish that the aesthetic extends far beyond art into the textures of ordinary life, and that this domain deserves the attention aesthetics had reserved for the artwork; Saito's studies of the aesthetics of the familiar are its central statement, and the paper has drawn on them throughout (Saito 2007; Saito 2017). Leddy located the aesthetic value of ordinary life in the qualities by which the everyday becomes, on attention, extraordinary, developing a broadly Deweyan account of the aura of the ordinary (Leddy 2012). Others extended the field toward the practices and politics of everyday life, reading the ordinary through the lens of cultural theory. The sub-field has, in short, established the domain, described its phenomena, and defended its worth, and the present paper stands on that achievement. But it is marked by a limit its own participants have debated, and the limit is the one this paper's central claim is pitched against. The sub-field has largely treated everyday aesthetic experience as the private experience of an individual perceiver, a matter of how a person finds the ordinary

beautiful; Saito's account, in its strongest form, holds everyday aesthetic experience to be private and personal in a way that distinguishes it from the public experience of art. What the sub-field has not chiefly done is to theorise everyday aesthetic experience as relationally generated, as the shared production of a perceived world by those who perceive it together, nor to give the mechanism of that generation. It has established that the everyday is aesthetic and left open how the everyday aesthetic is generated between people, which is the question the paper's convergence answered and its models of practice address.

5.11.4 The practice traditions of the East

The East theorised everyday aesthetic practice, as practice, earlier and more deeply than the West, and the paper's models owe these traditions an acknowledgement that is more than decorative, since several of the models are their descendants. The way of tea made a discipline of the shared aesthetic occasion, treating the preparation and taking of tea as a practice in which attention, gesture, utensil, and space are composed into a single unrepeatable event, and giving that event the name the paper has already made central, 一期一会. Dogen, in the 典座教訓, the instructions for the monastery cook, made the most ordinary practice imaginable, the preparing of meals, into a discipline of awakened attention: the cook is not to regard the ingredients with ordinary eyes or handle them with ordinary feelings, is to bring the same care to the coarsest greens as to the finest cream, and is to work with the nurturing mind that the text names among the three minds of the practice (Dōgen 1996). Cooking, in Dogen, is not preparation for practice but practice itself, the everyday activity through which awakening is actualised, and this is the East's clearest statement of the thesis that everyday doing, rightly done, is where the cultivation of perception occurs. Yanagi's philosophy of 民藝, the ordinary crafts, located beauty in the objects of daily use and in the unselfconscious making of them, a beauty of use that belongs to the ordinary and the anonymous rather than to the signed artwork (Yanagi 1972). These traditions are, in several respects, ahead of the paper, and it learns from them more than it corrects. What it adds to them is not a deeper practice but a theory: the traditions transmit their practices by apprenticeship and example, within frameworks of religious and cultural meaning that the paper does not presume, and they do not, as such, offer the account of why these practices generate, in the terms

of a general theory of perception and value, that the paper's convergence supplies. The paper's models aim to state, in a form that does not depend on a particular tradition's framework, the generative structure that these traditions have long enacted.

5.11.5 What the field leaves undone

The survey can now be gathered into the precise statement of what the field leaves for the paper's models to do. The theory of practice has given everyday doing as reproduction and as resistance, but not as generation. The practical methods of aesthetic education have trained the individual's sensibility in a reserved space, but have not offered a practice of the relation in the unreserved flow of ordinary life. The sub-field of everyday aesthetics has established the everyday as aesthetic and treated it largely as the private experience of an individual, but has not theorised its relational generation or given its mechanism. And the practice traditions of the East have enacted the generative cultivation of everyday perception with a depth the West has not matched, but have transmitted it by apprenticeship within particular frameworks rather than stating its structure as such. The space these leave open is exact and it is single: a set of models of everyday aesthetic practice that are generative rather than reproductive or merely resistant, relational rather than individual, conducted in the flow of ordinary shared life rather than in a reserved space, and stated in the general terms of the paper's theory of perception and value rather than within a particular tradition. That space is what the next section is built to occupy, and the models it proposes are answerable, one by one, to the limits this survey has fixed.

5.12. A Typology of Everyday Aesthetic Practice

This section makes the paper's most concrete offering: four models of everyday aesthetic practice, proposed to occupy the space the survey left open, generative rather than reproductive or resistant, relational rather than individual, conducted in the flow of ordinary shared life, and stated in the general terms of the theory the paper has built. Each is given with its theoretical descent made explicit, because a model of practice that could not say what it rests on would be a suggestion rather than a proposal, and the paper's claim is that these four are derived from its theory and not improvised. The models are offered as preliminary and open, a beginning of the typology rather than its closure, and

the reason for their openness is internal to the fourth of them, which makes the openness of an aesthetic practice a structural requirement rather than a modesty. The four share a single skeleton, and the section states it first, then develops each model in turn with its basis and its ethics, and closes on the unity of the typology and the sense in which it remains unfinished.

5.12.1 The common skeleton

The four models are variations on one structure, and seeing the structure first prevents the models from looking like a list. Each moves from a perception or its equivalent, through a reception, through a sharing that enters the relational system, to a reproduction or feedback that returns upon the shared life and begins the cycle again. The skeleton is the good cycle of value in the domain of practice: a generative circuit that returns to its root with a surplus around an unsettled centre, whose positive holonomy is the mark of its goodness (§5.4.4). What distinguishes the models is where they enter the circuit and what happens at each of its moments. The first enters through active perception and is the paradigm. The second enters through silence and makes reception the suspension of judgement. The third does not directly produce at all, but constructs the field in which the circuit may generate of itself. The fourth iterates the circuit across many turns, refining the strategy by which it is entered. Three of the four, the first, second, and fourth, are the same circuit run at different timescales, single, reflective, and evolutionary; the third is the circuit's complement, the making of room for it. Together they cover the principal temporalities of everyday aesthetic generation, and none is advanced as excluding the others, since a shared life will move among them.

5.12.2 Model I: perceiving, receiving, sharing, reproducing

Model I. The basic generative cycle of everyday aesthetic practice runs from a shared perception, through its reception into the perceivers, through its symbolisation and sharing, to its reproduction in the relation, which returns the perceivers to a deepened perception and turns the cycle again.

The theoretical basis of the first model is threefold and has been established in earlier parts of the paper. Its rhythm is Dewey's: the movement of doing and undergoing by which an experience is brought to fullness, taken here into the shared case, so that the perceiving and the receiving are the undergoing and the sharing and reproducing are the doing of a common aesthetic experience (Dewey 1934). Its value structure is the good cycle of this series: the circuit generates a surplus around an unsettled centre and returns it to the shared attending, a positive holonomy in the register of practice (Huang 2025; Berry 1984). And its ethics is the theory of relational reproduction: the reproduction that closes the cycle must satisfy the ordered principles of that theory, generativity, co-reproduction, non-exploitation, counter-power, and the preservation of the subject, so that what is reproduced is a shared perception in which each remains a generating subject and neither is reduced to the material of the other's experience (Wanhong 2026a). The model has, accordingly, two points of ethical exposure, and naming them is part of specifying it. The sharing carries an ethics of sharing: to share a perception is to symbolise it toward another, and the sharing is generative only if it is an invitation to perceive together rather than a display that makes the other the audience of one's own seeing, which is the aesthetic form of the epistemic hospitality this series has developed, the translation of a perception into the other's sensibility as a respect for it rather than a management of it. The reproduction carries an ethics of reproduction: the perception reproduced in the relation must leave the other room to generate, not settle into a reproduced taste imposed on them, for a reproduction that fixes the other's perception has closed the cycle it was meant to turn. The first model is the paradigm because it is the full circuit run once, with both its generative promise and its two ethical exposures in plain view.

5.12.3 Model II: silence, receiving, sharing, relational reproduction

Model II. A reflective variant of the cycle begins in individual silence, which is itself a reproduction of experience; its reception is the suspension of private judgement; its sharing returns the unsettled experience to the relation; and the relational reproduction

completes the judgement in common rather than in the private interior.

The second model shares the skeleton of the first and differs at two moments, and its theoretical basis is what makes the difference intelligible. It begins not in active perception but in individual silence, and its first claim is that this silence is not an absence of activity but a reproduction of experience in its own right. This is the psychoanalytic contribution the paper reserved: the working-through by which an experience is reworked after the fact, and the deferred action, *Nachträglichkeit*, by which an experience receives its sense belatedly, in a later revisiting that reproduces it as something it was not at first (Lacan 1978). Silence, in this model, is the interval in which this internal reproduction occurs. Its danger was marked earlier and is met here by the model's second distinctive moment. What silence reproduces may be understanding and gratitude or may be resentment and misreading, and a silence that hardened its rumination into a private verdict would sediment the bad reproduction before it ever reached the relation, which is the mechanism of the cold estrangement that this series has named among the insidious injuries of a shared life. The model's reception is the guard against this. Reception here is the suspension of private judgement, the epoché in which the perceiver holds what the silence has surfaced without ruling on its value in the private interior, and carries it, unsettled, back to the relation to be judged in common (Husserl 2001). This is the aesthetic instance of the presentational justice this series developed for the non-binding vow: the individual does not sit as the sole judge of their own experience in a private court, but suspends the verdict and returns the matter to the relational system in which alone it is rightly adjudicated. The ethics of the second model is thus built into its structure rather than added to it, for the reception that suspends private judgement is the very device by which the silent reproduction is kept from going bad; the good silence and the bad are told apart by whether the silence passes through this suspension or hardens into a private verdict. And the model demonstrates something about the skeleton it shares with the first, which is that the cycle does not depend on an external aesthetic stimulus to drive it: the reworking of an experience already had, in silence, can enter and turn the same circuit, so that the generativity of the shared cycle is shown to be capable of running on the internal reproduction of experience alone.

5.12.4 Model III: the leaving of emptiness

Model III. Rather than producing a perception, one may construct the field in which perception generates of itself, leaving an emptiness in which the contingency of the everyday is given room to occur.

The third model is the complement of the others, and its theoretical basis is the account of the field of contingency joined to the Daoist ethics of non-possession. Where the first two models enter and turn the generative circuit, the third makes room for it, and this making of room has been prepared twice in the paper: in the diagnosis, where the everyday was shown to be the field of contingency, generative precisely because it is not arranged in advance (§5.2.3), and in the design of space, where the interval, the 間, was shown to be a positive element of composition, the built form of that contingency (§5.10.2). To leave emptiness is to construct, in the arrangement of a shared life and its spaces, the room in which perception may generate of itself rather than being directed to a prescribed object. Its ethics is the Daoist 玄德, the dark virtue that generates without possessing, acts without presuming, and leads without commanding, 生而不有, 為而不恃, 長而不宰 (Laozi 1963). The leaving of emptiness is the practical form of this virtue in everyday aesthetic life: the restraint that declines to produce the perception, that does not fill the shared field with one's own arrangement, that trusts the contingency of the ordinary and the other's generativity to bring forth what no one commanded. Its characteristic danger is the contrary of the second model's: not the hardening of a private verdict but the abdication that mistakes mere absence for generative emptiness, leaving not a field but a void. The virtue is not in the emptiness as such but in the emptiness constructed as a field, tuned like Böhme's atmosphere and composed like the interval of *ma*, so that it affords generation rather than merely withholding presence. The leaving of emptiness is the hardest of the models to do well, because it must produce, through restraint, the conditions of a generation it does not itself perform.

5.12.5 Model IV: iterative symbolic refinement

Model IV. Because the good of a symbolic arrangement cannot be known in advance, everyday aesthetic practice may proceed by iterated refinement: an aesthetic perception issues in a symbolic strategy, the strategy is enacted in a symbolic arrangement, the arrangement enters the relational system, the relation returns a value-feedback, and the strategy is refined for the next turn.

The fourth model is the paper's most distinctive proposal, and it exists to solve a circularity the other models leave standing. To arrange the symbols of a shared life well, a love letter, a note left in the morning, the small benevolent signs by which a home is made to generate tenderness, would seem to require that one already know what a good such arrangement is; but the good aesthetic arrangement is exactly what an aesthetic education has yet to generate, and cannot be presupposed without begging the question the whole paper is about. The fourth model dissolves this circularity by making operable not the good, which cannot be operated, but the symbolic strategy, which can. One does not produce a good sign; one enacts a symbolic strategy, returns it to the relation, receives the relation's response, and refines the strategy accordingly. The theoretical basis of this is evolutionary, and it is precise rather than metaphorical. The structure is that of an evolutionary process, variation of strategy, selection, and refinement across iterations; but it is an evolutionary process of a particular kind, one without a fitness function, because the aesthetic has no objective function that could score a strategy in advance. Here the model draws on the finding of Lehman and Stanley that in a search whose objective cannot be well specified, and whose direct pursuit is therefore deceptive, abandoning the objective and searching instead by other signals can reach what the pursuit of the objective could not (Lehman and Stanley 2011). The aesthetic is such a search: the direct pursuit of beauty, the arrangement made to be beautiful, is deceptive in exactly their sense, as the photographed and displayed meal is deceived out of the beauty it grasped at. The fourth model replaces the missing fitness function not with

novelty as such but with the value-feedback of the relation, which is not a scalar score but a multidimensional and generative response, and which is itself in evolution, since what counts as a good response is redefined by the relation as it develops. The good, in this model, is not presupposed and then approximated; it emerges through the co-evolution of the strategy and the relation's own criterion for it, so that the aesthetic education of a shared symbolic life is an open-ended evolution without a fixed fitness landscape. Its ethics is the ethics of the symbolic strategy, and it descends from the symbolic order's two fates (§5.4): the refinement is generative where the value-feedback returns to both parties and appropriative where the strategy is refined toward the management or manipulation of the other, so that the direction of refinement, toward the positive holonomy of a shared surplus or the negative holonomy of a one-sided capture, is what tells the good iteration from the bad. This model, finally, is the reason the typology is offered as open. If the good aesthetic arrangement is not presupposed but emerges through open-ended refinement, then a fixed and closed set of models would contradict the very structure the fourth model describes, and the typology must itself remain, like the practice it theorises, open to the refinement of its own strategies.

5.12.6 The unity of the typology

The four models compose one typology, and its unity can now be stated against the limits the survey fixed. They cover four temporalities of everyday aesthetic generation: the active generation of the first, the generation after reflective sedimentation of the second, the making of room for generation of the third, and the generation across iterated refinement of the fourth. The first, second, and fourth are the shared circuit run at the timescales of the single occasion, the reworked experience, and the evolutionary series; the third is the circuit's complement, the constructed emptiness in which it may occur. Each passes a limit the survey named: against the theory of practice, which gave everyday doing as reproduction or resistance, all four are generative, producing new aesthetic value rather than reproducing a structure or resisting one; against the methods of aesthetic education, which trained the individual in a reserved space, all four work the relation in the flow of ordinary life; against the sub-field of everyday aesthetics, which treated the everyday aesthetic as an individual's private experience, all four are relational, taking the shared generation of perception as what they cultivate; and against the practice traditions of the

East, which enacted such generation within particular frameworks, all four are stated in the general terms of the paper's theory of perception and value, as the structure those traditions have long enacted. The typology is preliminary, and it is preliminary in the strong sense the fourth model requires: not a finished inventory awaiting application but an opening set, offered for the refinement that its own fourth model makes the condition of any living aesthetic practice. What the models share, beneath their differences, is the single commitment from which the whole paper proceeds, that the unit of everyday aesthetic practice is the relation, and that to practise the aesthetics of the everyday is to turn, between two people, the generative cycle by which their shared and ordinary world is continually brought to perception.

5.13. The Distribution of the Sensible

The third spine holds that the distribution of perceptual capacity is uneven in ways that constitute a neglected injustice, so that aesthetic education is answerable to the theory of justice. The paper has been laying this spine's foundations throughout: in the political economy of the senses, which showed perceptual capacity to be socially produced (§5.5.2); in the account of value circulation, which distinguished the return of aesthetic value to its generators from its extraction (§5.5.4); in the line between the refinement and the commodified training of perception (§5.7.6); and in the production of perceptual space, which distributes the affordances of cultivation unequally (§5.10.5). This section gathers those foundations into the claim of justice they were preparing. It sets out Rancière's account of the distribution of the sensible, which makes perception itself the primary political stake; it proposes, as the aesthetic instance of a form of injustice this series has developed, a generative aesthetic injustice; it confronts, as the paper's principal adversary in the register of political economy, Debord's spectacle; and it closes by returning to the claim with which the paper began, that beauty and ethics share a single root, and by gathering under a single criterion the ethics that the models of practice carried severally.

5.13.1 Rancière and the distribution of the sensible

Rancière gave the political theory of perception its decisive formulation, and it is the frame this section requires. At the core of politics, he argued, there is an aesthetics,

understood not as the annexation of politics by art but as the system of a priori forms determining what presents itself to sense experience: a distribution of the sensible that fixes, in advance of any particular political dispute, what is visible and what is not, what is audible and what goes unheard, who has a part in the common world and who is left without one (Rancière 2004). The distribution of the sensible is at once a sharing, which establishes the perceptual conditions of a common world, and a partition, which divides those who are counted within it from those who are not perceived at all. Politics proper, for Rancière, occurs when those whom the reigning distribution renders imperceptible force a reconfiguration of it, demanding not merely to exist but to be perceived. This makes perception the primary stake rather than a secondary reflection of interests already formed elsewhere, and it converges exactly with the account this paper reached by another route. The distribution of the sensible is Rancière's name for the social determination of the perceptual frame that the convergence established (§5.8): the a priori forms that decide what can be perceived are the frame, historically produced and unequally distributed, and Rancière adds that this distribution is itself the fundamental political fact. What a person can perceive, and whether a person is perceived, is distributed, and the distribution is a matter of justice. The paper's third spine is the aesthetics of the everyday read through this recognition: if perceptual capacity is distributed, and if the everyday is where the greater part of aesthetic life is generated, then the uneven distribution of the capacity to generate everyday aesthetic perception is a distribution of the sensible in Rancière's sense, and falls under justice as he showed perception to do.

5.13.2 Generative aesthetic injustice

The paper can now name the specific injustice its third spine concerns, and it does so by extending a form of injustice this series has already developed. Fricker identified epistemic injustice, the wrong done to a person specifically in their capacity as a knower, in two forms: the testimonial, in which prejudice deprives a speaker of due credibility, and the hermeneutical, in which a gap in shared interpretive resources leaves some experience unintelligible and inexpressible (Fricker 2007). This series has argued for a third, generative form of epistemic injustice, the wrong of being excluded from the generation of the interpretive resources themselves. The present paper proposes the aesthetic instance of this generative injustice. There is a generative aesthetic injustice, the wrong done to a

person in their capacity as a generator of aesthetic perception, when they are deprived of the cultivation by which the everyday could be generated as perceived, or excluded from the shared generation of a perceived world, or reduced to the material of another's aesthetic experience without a share in the generating. This is not the injustice of being denied access to art, though it includes that; it is the deeper wrong of having one's perceptual life left uncultivated or extracted, one's capacity to generate the aesthetic perception of one's own ordinary days stunted by the social production of perceptual incapacity, or drawn off to sustain an aesthetic consumption in which one has no part. The political economy of the senses showed this injustice to be produced rather than natural: the person bound by need to a restricted sense, the person whose attention is captured and resold, the person whose home is built to starve perception and whose senses are trained for consumption, suffers a generative aesthetic injustice that a mode of life has inflicted. And the distinction between refinement and commodified training locates its mechanism: the same plasticity that could cultivate a perception whose value returns to the perceiver is turned, under the injustice, to training a perception whose value is extracted from them. Generative aesthetic injustice is the uneven and often deliberate distribution of the capacity to generate everyday aesthetic perception, and it is the specific wrong that the third spine holds aesthetic education answerable to.

5.13.3 The spectacle

The paper's principal adversary in this register is the social form under which generative aesthetic injustice is now most pervasively produced, and it has a name and a theorist. Debord's spectacle is the condition in which social life, under modern conditions of production, presents itself as an immense accumulation of images, in which everything directly lived has receded into a representation, and in which the spectacle is, in his exact formulation, a social relation among people mediated by images (Debord 1994). Read through this paper's framework, the spectacle is the generalisation of the appropriative fate of the symbol (§5.4.3) to the whole of social perception: it is the systematic substitution of the image for the perception, the outsourcing of seeing to a flow of representations, and the replacement of the generative encounter with the consumption of what is shown. The spectacle is thus the social engine of generative aesthetic injustice. It produces, at scale, the perceptual incapacity the third spine indicts: it habituates and numbs by supplying

a perpetual stream of images that dispense with perceiving, it captures and resells the attention that everyday aesthetic life requires, and it trains perception for consumption under the guise of enriching it. Lefebvre's critique of everyday life supplies the register in which this operates, the everyday as the site where the reproduction of the relations of production is secured, and where consumer capitalism has colonised the ordinary that might otherwise have been the field of an unalienated life (Lefebvre 1991). The everyday is contested ground: it is at once the field of contingency in which generative aesthetic perception is possible and the territory that the spectacle colonises to produce a perception fitted to consumption. This is why the aesthetics of the everyday cannot be politically innocent. To cultivate the generative perception of ordinary life is, whether or not it intends to be, a refusal of the spectacle's substitution of the image for the seeing, and the paper's models of practice are, in this light, small counter-practices to a pervasive social production of perceptual incapacity. The paper does not claim that the arrangement of a shared home or the leaving of an emptiness overturns the spectacle; it claims that the cultivation of generative everyday perception is the practice through which, at the scale of a shared life, the spectacle's colonisation of the ordinary is locally refused.

5.13.4 Beauty and ethics at one root

The paper returns, at its close, to the claim with which it began, that beauty and ethics share a single root, and it can now gather under one criterion the ethics its models carried severally. The fourth face of the paper's thesis held that aesthetic generation carries an ethical valence not by the later addition of a moral rule but at its root, because beauty is generated in a relation and a relation may return what it generates to all who stand in it or draw one of them off as fuel (§5.9.4). The whole of the argument since has borne this out. The good and the bad symbolisation, the refinement and the commodified training, the good and the bad cycle of aesthetic value, the generative and the appropriative iteration of a symbolic strategy, and now the just distribution of the sensible and its spectacular corruption: these are one distinction drawn across the registers of the paper, and the single criterion beneath them is the one this series has carried throughout. An aesthetic generation is good, in perception as in symbol as in practice as in the distribution of perceptual capacity, when its value returns to all who generate it around an unsettled centre, a positive holonomy in which no one is reduced

to the material of another's aesthetic life; and it is bad when its value is extracted, its centre settled, its cycle closed, its holonomy driven to zero or below, and some are made the unattended fuel of others' aesthetic consumption. The ethics that Model I carried in its sharing and its reproduction, that Model II built into its suspension of private judgement, that Model III drew from the dark virtue that generates without possessing, and that Model IV located in the direction of its refinement, are instances of this one criterion. And the justice that this spine concerns, the just distribution of the capacity to generate everyday aesthetic perception, is the same criterion at the scale of a society: a distribution is just when the capacity to generate the aesthetic perception of one's own ordinary life is not extracted, starved, or monopolised, but returned to all whose lives it is. Beauty and ethics are one at their root because the generation of the beautiful is a circulation of value, and the justice or injustice of a circulation, whether its surplus returns to its generators or is drawn off from them, is the ethical question as such. To cultivate the generative perception of the everyday is therefore already to take a side in a question of justice, and the aesthetic education this paper has proposed is, in the end, answerable to justice not as an external constraint upon it but as the truth of what it was all along.

5.14. The Ethical Limits of Aesthetic Education

A paper that has proposed an education must say where the education stops, and it must do so for reasons internal to what the education is rather than as a concession appended at the end. The cultivation of perception has limits that are not external boundaries fencing in an otherwise unlimited practice but conditions of its being the practice it is; to cross them is not to do too much of a good thing but to convert the practice into its opposite. This section states three such limits. The first is that the generativity aesthetic education cultivates cannot be made procedural without being killed. The second is that the cultivation of perception must be told apart from its disciplinary double, the training of a docile perception, and that the two share a mechanism and differ in what they produce and to whom its value returns. The third the section states not as a proposition but by instantiating it, in a return to the ordinary life from which the paper set out.

5.14.1 Against procedure

The first limit was implicit in the paper's method from the start and can now be made explicit. The generativity that aesthetic education cultivates is killed by being made procedural. A generation that could be produced by following a fixed procedure would not be a generation but an execution, the enactment of what was laid down in advance, and the field of contingency in which alone perception generates would have been replaced by an arrangement in which it is merely performed (§5.2.3). This is why the paper has declined throughout to convert its models into techniques, and why the fourth model made the openness of aesthetic practice a structural requirement rather than a modesty: if the good aesthetic arrangement is not presupposed but emerges through open-ended refinement, then any procedure claiming to produce it in advance has mistaken the closed cycle for the open one (§5.12.5). The models offered are therefore not procedures and cannot be made into them without ceasing to be what they are. They are descriptions of the structure of a generative practice, offered to be inhabited and refined, not steps to be followed to a guaranteed result. An aesthetic education administered as a procedure, a curriculum of perception with prescribed inputs and examinable outputs, would produce exactly the settled and appropriable perception the paper has opposed at every register, and would do so the more insidiously for calling itself an education of generativity. The limit is strict: to the precise extent that the cultivation of perception is proceduralised, it stops cultivating generativity and begins producing its counterfeit.

5.14.2 Cultivation and discipline

The first limit opens directly onto the second, because the proceduralised training of perception has a name and a theorist, and confronting it is how the paper draws the line between what it proposes and what it must refuse. Foucault described discipline as the production of docile bodies, a training that works on the body through exercise and repetition to produce a subject that is useful, obedient, and improved in the terms of the power that trains it, and that internalises the norm to which it is trained until surveillance need no longer be external (Foucault 1977). Discipline is a cultivation of the body, and it works, as the cultivation of perception works, through the plasticity that makes the body trainable and through the repeated practice that reshapes it. The two cannot be told apart by their mechanism, for the mechanism is one: both retune a plastic perceptual and

bodily capacity through sustained training. They are told apart by what they produce and to whom its value returns, which is the criterion the paper has carried throughout. Discipline produces docility: a perception trained to the norm, tuned to obey and to be useful to the power that trained it, its value extracted to that power and the subject preserved only as an instrument, the negative holonomy of a training whose surplus is drawn off from the one trained. Cultivation, in the sense this paper has given it, produces generativity: a perception trained toward its own enlargement, whose value returns to the perceiver and to the shared attending that generated it, and in which the subject is preserved as a generator rather than reduced to an instrument, the positive holonomy of a training whose surplus returns to the one trained. The distinction is exactly the one the theory of relational reproduction fixed in its principle of the preservation of the subject (§5.12.2), and the one the second spine drew between refinement and commodified training (§5.7.6). Aesthetic education stands on one side of this line, and the disciplinary training of a docile perception on the other, and because they share a mechanism the line must be drawn with care and held with vigilance, for an aesthetic education that forgot the distinction would slide, under the pressure to produce results, into the disciplinary production of a perception trained to consume, obey, and be useful, which is precisely the perception the spectacle already produces at scale (§5.13.3). The limit is therefore not only a caution but a criterion of self-examination: an aesthetic education must ask, of its every practice, whether it enlarges the generativity of those it cultivates and returns to them the value of their trained perception, or whether it has begun, however well-meaningly, to produce a docility whose value it extracts.

5.14.3 The ordinary evening

The third limit the paper states by instantiating it, since a paper on the generative perception of ordinary life should be able to return, at its close, to an ordinary evening and find there what it has been theorising. Consider, then, without further abstraction, two people at the end of a day. Neither is the teacher of the other, and neither is the other's pupil; what passes between them is not a lesson in perception but the mutual and unforced training of it, each drawing the other's attention, without design, to a quality of the light, a turn of phrase overheard, the particular way the evening has arranged itself, and each finding their own perception altered by what the other has taught them

to see. They arrange their shared space not to a plan but by the accumulated small acts of a life made together, leaving room where room is wanted and marking with a word or a kept object what has come to matter between them. They fall silent, sometimes, and let an experience settle before returning it, judged in common rather than in the solitude of either, to the shared life it belongs to. And over the long iteration of their days they refine, without ever naming it as refinement, the strategies by which they show each other tenderness, keeping what the other's response returns as generative and letting go what does not, the good of it emerging between them rather than known in advance by either. This is the whole of the paper's proposal, instantiated in an evening that asks for no theory to occur and that occurs, unnumbered, in ordinary lives. The limit it instantiates is the one the paper most needs its reader to feel rather than to be told: that the cultivation of perception this paper has theorised is not a programme to be administered but a description of what two people, turned together toward their shared and ordinary days, already do when their common life goes well, and that the office of the theory is not to produce this but to see it, to give it a name, and to defend it against the forces that would settle, extract, and proceduralise it out of existence. The theory ends where the evening begins, and hands what it has understood back to the ordinary life it was always about.

5.15. Directed Fissures

This paper does not conclude, and the refusal is principled rather than stylistic. A synthesis gathering the argument into a single closing proposition would settle what the argument has held open, converting the generative into the finished and enacting, in its own form, the appropriative closure the paper opposed at every register. In place of a conclusion the paper leaves directed fissures: places where what has been said runs out and points beyond itself, marked so that the pointing is legible. There are four, and each is a real incompleteness rather than a rhetorical modesty, an edge at which the argument reached the limit of what it could establish and can only indicate the direction of what it could not.

5.15.1 The sedimentation of shared perception

The first fissure is the widest, and the next paper must enter it. This paper showed how a shared everyday perception is generated between two people; it did not show what becomes of that perception when it accumulates. A shared perception generated and regenerated over the long iteration of a common life does not vanish at each turn. It sediments, into shared words, recurring gestures, the small rituals and understandings by which two people come to inhabit a perceptual world that is theirs and that a third could enter only by learning it. This sedimentation is the beginning of a culture, the smallest culture there is, generated in the intimacy of a shared everyday and carried beyond the moment of its generation into something inheritable. How the good repetition of shared perception sediments into a culture, how that culture is transmitted without being falsified, and how the smallest culture of two is continuous with the larger cultures of peoples and traditions, this paper has not shown. It is the subject of the paper that follows, on the emergence of culture in intimate relation, and this fissure is the seam along which the two are joined.

5.15.2 The perception that cannot be shared

The second fissure is a limit inside the argument rather than a passage beyond it. The paper made the symbolic order the condition of shared perception, holding that a perception must be symbolised to be held in common. But there are perceptions that resist symbolisation, that remain in the private register of the imaginary or gather around a real so singular that no symbol carries them, and these the paper's account reaches only to mark as unreachable. What becomes of the aesthetic perception that cannot be shared, whether it is simply lost to the relational life the paper cares about or whether it plays some role the paper has not seen precisely in its resistance to sharing, is a question the argument raised and could not answer. The fissure is the edge of the shareable, and the paper can point to it without crossing it.

5.15.3 The scale of the impersonal

The third fissure concerns scale. The paper's unit was the relation of two, and its models were models of a shared life between persons who perceive each other perceiving. But

perception is cultivated and starved at scales far larger than the dyad, by institutions, cities, and economies, and the paper's account of justice gestured at these scales without developing a practice for them. What generative relational aesthetic education would be at the scale of a school, a city, or a polity, how the models of a shared life between two could be extended to the impersonal relations of many without becoming the procedures the paper forbade, is undeveloped here. The fissure is the distance between the two who share an evening and the many who share a world, and the paper crossed it only in the direction of justice, not of practice.

5.15.4 The perception of the last day

The fourth fissure is the one the paper is least able to close, and it opens where the everyday meets its end. The aesthetics of the everyday is an aesthetics of recurrence, of the light that returns each morning and the days that go on; its models assume the continuation of the shared life whose perception they cultivate. But shared lives end, in departure and in death, and the last ordinary day is not known to be the last while it is lived. What the generative perception of the everyday becomes under the knowledge of its ending, whether the finitude that the way of tea named in 一期一会 deepens the everyday's generation or defeats it, and how a shared aesthetic life is to hold the fact that one of its two will perceive the other for the last time on a day that will have looked ordinary, the paper has felt at its edges and not thought through. This is the fissure that no next paper closes, and the paper leaves it open in the only way it can, by turning from theory to the thing itself.

晨光落案未成书，
 茶冷方知坐已虚。
 不必名之为美者，
 与君同看即吾庐。

Morning light falls on the desk; nothing yet is written.
 The tea has gone cold, and only then do I know how long we have sat.
 There is no need to give it the name of beauty.
 To watch it with you is already my home.

The poem is the paper's last instantiation of its own claim, and it is offered in that spirit rather than as ornament. It symbolises a shared everyday perception without settling it, leaves the real value at its centre unnamed by declining the word *beauty*, and returns the perception, through the reader, to the ordinary mornings it came from. It is a small generative symbolisation, made and shared, of exactly the kind the paper theorised, and it enacts, in its four lines, the whole of what the argument was for: that the light on an ordinary morning, watched with the one whose shared world it is, generates between two people a value that needs no name, accumulates into a home, and asks of theory only that it be seen, named where naming serves it, and defended where it is under threat. Here the theory ends and hands what it understood back to the ordinary life it was always about.

References

- Bachelard, Gaston (1994). *The Poetics of Space*. Trans. Maria Jolas; orig. *La poétique de l'espace*, 1958. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Berridge, Kent C. and Morten L. Kringelbach (2015). "Pleasure Systems in the Brain". In: *Neuron* 86.3, pp. 646–664.
- Berry, M. V. (1984). "Quantal Phase Factors Accompanying Adiabatic Changes". In: *Proceedings of the Royal Society of London. Series A* 392.1802, pp. 45–57. DOI: [10.1098/rspa.1984.0023](https://doi.org/10.1098/rspa.1984.0023).

- Böhme, Gernot (2017). *The Aesthetics of Atmospheres*. Ed. J.-P. Thibaud. London: Routledge.
- Bourdieu, Pierre (1990). *The Logic of Practice*. Trans. Richard Nice; orig. *Le sens pratique*, 1980. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Cai, Yuanpei (1917). “On Replacing Religion with Aesthetic Education (以美育代宗教说)”. In: *New Youth* (新青年). Vol. 3. 6. Written 1917; appropriating Kantian and Schillerian aesthetics for Republican China.
- Certeau, Michel de (1984). *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Trans. Steven Rendall; orig. *L’invention du quotidien*, 1980. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Chatterjee, Anjan and Oshin Vartanian (2014). “Neuroaesthetics”. In: *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 18.7, pp. 370–375.
- Clark, Andy (2013). “Whatever Next? Predictive Brains, Situated Agents, and the Future of Cognitive Science”. In: *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 36.3, pp. 181–204.
- (2016). *Surfing Uncertainty: Prediction, Action, and the Embodied Mind*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Debord, Guy (1994). *The Society of the Spectacle*. Trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith; orig. *La société du spectacle*, 1967. New York: Zone Books.
- Dewey, John (1934). *Art as Experience*. Based on the William James Lectures, Harvard University, 1932. New York: Minton, Balch & Company.
- Dickie, George (1964). “The Myth of the Aesthetic Attitude”. In: *American Philosophical Quarterly* 1.1, pp. 56–65.
- Dōgen, Eihei (1996). *Instructions for the Cook* (典座教訓, *Tenzo Kyōkun*). Written 1237; trans. Anzan Hoshin and Yasuda Joshu Dainen, in *Cooking Zen*. Great Matter Publications.
- Eglash, Ron (2016). “An Introduction to Generative Justice”. In: *Teknokultura. Revista de Cultura Digital y Movimientos Sociales* 13.2, pp. 369–404. DOI: [10.5209/rev_TEKN.2016.v13.n2.52847](https://doi.org/10.5209/rev_TEKN.2016.v13.n2.52847).
- Foucault, Michel (1977). *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Trans. Alan Sheridan; orig. *Surveiller et punir: Naissance de la prison*, 1975. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Fricker, Miranda (2007). *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*. Testimonial and hermeneutical injustice. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Friston, Karl (2010). “The Free-Energy Principle: A Unified Brain Theory?” In: *Nature Reviews Neuroscience* 11.2, pp. 127–138.
- Gibson, James J. (1979). *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Gilbert, Charles D., Mariano Sigman, and Roy E. Crist (2001). “The Neural Basis of Perceptual Learning”. In: *Neuron* 31.5, pp. 681–697.
- Greene, Maxine (1995). *Releasing the Imagination: Essays on Education, the Arts, and Social Change*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Huang, Wanhong (2025). “The Sustainability of Intimacy: Poetic Generativity and Generative Justice”. *Philosophy of Intimacy and the Theory of Justice*, Paper IX.
- Husserl, Edmund (2001). *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis: Lectures on Transcendental Logic*. Trans. by Anthony J. Steinbock. Dordrecht: Kluwer.
- Kringelbach, Morten L. and Kent C. Berridge (2009). “Towards a Functional Neuroanatomy of Pleasure and Happiness”. In: *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 13.11, pp. 479–487.
- Lacan, Jacques (1978). *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis (The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI)*. Ed. Jacques-Alain Miller; trans. Alan Sheridan; seminar held 1964; orig. *Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse*, 1973. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Laozi (1963). *Tao Te Ching*. Trans. D. C. Lau. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Leddy, Thomas (2012). *The Extraordinary in the Ordinary: The Aesthetics of Everyday Life*. Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press.
- Lefebvre, Henri (1991). *The Production of Space*. Trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith; orig. *La production de l’espace*, 1974. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Lehman, Joel and Kenneth O. Stanley (2011). “Abandoning Objectives: Evolution Through the Search for Novelty Alone”. In: *Evolutionary Computation* 19.2, pp. 189–223.
- Marx, Karl (1959). *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. Trans. Martin Milligan; written 1844. Moscow: Progress Publishers.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice (1962). *Phenomenology of Perception*. Trans. Colin Smith; orig. *Phénoménologie de la perception*, 1945. London: Routledge.
- Noë, Alva (2004). *Action in Perception*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Norberg-Schulz, Christian (1980). *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture*. New York: Rizzoli.

- Norman, Donald A. (2013). *The Design of Everyday Things*. Revised and expanded edition; orig. 1988. New York: Basic Books.
- O'Regan, J. Kevin and Alva Noë (2001). "A Sensorimotor Account of Vision and Visual Consciousness". In: *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 24.5, pp. 939–1031.
- Pallasmaa, Juhani (2005). *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*. Orig. 1996. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons.
- Rancière, Jacques (2004). *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*. Trans. Gabriel Rockhill; orig. *Le partage du sensible*, 2000. London: Continuum.
- Read, Herbert (1943). *Education through Art*. London: Faber and Faber.
- Saito, Yuriko (2007). *Everyday Aesthetics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- (2017). *Aesthetics of the Familiar: Everyday Life and World-Making*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Saussure, Ferdinand de (1959). *Course in General Linguistics*. Trans. by Wade Baskin. Edited by Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye; translated by Wade Baskin; original French *Cours de linguistique générale*, 1916. New York: Philosophical Library.
- Schiller, Friedrich (1967). *On the Aesthetic Education of Man, in a Series of Letters*. Ed. and trans. Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby; English–German facing text; orig. *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen in einer Reihe von Briefen*, 1795. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Shklovsky, Viktor (1965). "Art as Technique". In: *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*. Ed. by Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis. Orig. 1917. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, pp. 3–24.
- Simon, Herbert A. (1971). "Designing Organizations for an Information-Rich World". In: *Computers, Communications, and the Public Interest*. Ed. by Martin Greenberger. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, pp. 37–72.
- Varela, Francisco J., Evan Thompson, and Eleanor Rosch (1991). *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Wanhong (2026a). "A Theory of Relational Reproduction". Working paper; five ordered ethical principles: generativity, co-reproduction, non-exploitation, counter-power, subject preservation.

- (2026b). “On the Emergence of Happiness and the Self-Continuation of Generativity: Stillness, Waiting, and the Fulfilment of Silence”. Philosophy of Intimacy and the Theory of Justice, Paper XIX. Working draft.
- Watanabe, Takeo and Yuka Sasaki (2015). “Perceptual Learning: Toward a Comprehensive Theory”. In: *Annual Review of Psychology* 66, pp. 197–221.
- Yanagi, Sōetsu (1972). *The Unknown Craftsman: A Japanese Insight into Beauty*. Adapted by Bernard Leach. Tokyo: Kodansha International.
- Zeki, Semir (1999). *Inner Vision: An Exploration of Art and the Brain*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

CHAPTER 6

The Emergence of Culture in Intimate Relation

致她——

For her—

那个属于森林与山之女孩，

the girl who belongs to the forest and the mountains,

与我共写一种只有我们懂得的语言。

with whom I write a language only we two understand.

致我最爱的人。 To the one I love most.

This paper develops an ontology, a phenomenology, and an ethics of culture as it emerges in intimate relation. Its guiding claim is that culture is misconceived when taken as a finished and transmissible object and is rightly conceived as a generation that does not close: the dialectical exteriorization, across the three registers of experience and under material constraint, of the interwoven generative history of relational subjects. The paper works first at the level of culture in general, passing through the major theories of cultural formation—transmission and collective representation, symbol and interpretation, structure and reproduction, culture as the encoding of power, the Chinese *wen-hua* tradition, and the dialogic—and locating within them a position they leave open. That position is stated as a variant of the Lacanian theory of the three registers, here called the *three-register dialectic of the relational Real*: the Real is granted a hitherto neglected relational form; culture is shown to span all three registers, none dispensable; and the registers are set into a materially driven, dialectical motion, so that culture has no final truth, is never static, and develops through the historical sublation of its own forms.

On this ground the paper turns to its proper subject, the emergence of culture in the intimate dyad, which it takes as the minimal and most exposed unit of cultural emergence. Five mechanisms are shown to belong to the dyad alone: the vacancy of any external authority to fix meaning, so that the two must serve as each other's symbolic authority; the mutual interweaving of two structures of desire; a density of shared living that lets culture sediment at a visible speed; the heightened, intimate configuration of the three registers; and a fragility by which a whole shared culture may collapse. A middle-scale case, the family ethos (*jiafeng*), is examined to draw out the epistemology of a dialectical view of culture and the study of power within it. The paper closes with the political economy and ethics of intimate culture: how such culture is produced under material conditions, how capital, having exhausted older frontiers, reaches into the bond itself to capture the value it generates, and on what the just generation of culture depends—namely, that the generation of value, which carries power, must in the same movement generate the counter-power that restrains power and prevents its entrenchment.

Beyond its revision of Lacan, the paper advances five theses of its own: the *non-transferability thesis*, that a relational culture's resistance to transfer rises with the depth of its anchoring in interwoven drive; the *vacancy thesis*, that the externalization of symbolic authority

sets a system's endogeneity and its stability in inverse tension; *capture-as-decoherence*, that capital captures a relational culture not by seizing it but by preserving its symbolic form while drawing off its coherence in the Real; the *counter-power criterion*, that a cultural form persists through changed conditions only insofar as it endogenously generates a counter-power against its own power; and the *real-anchoring thesis*, that a relational culture's resistance to power, capital, and time arises from its anchoring in the register of the Real.

Keywords: culture in intimate relation; generative relational being; the relational Real; the commodification of culture; generative justice.

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

Part One Ontology and Epistemology: How Culture Emerges

6.1. Introduction: The First Fissure and the Problem of *Wen* and *Hua*

A previous paper of this series closed not in synthesis but in a set of directed fissures, and the first of them pointed here. That paper concerned the aesthetics of the quotidian and the education of perception, and it argued that between two people turned toward a shared world a capacity for perceiving beauty may be cultivated that neither carries alone (Wanhong 2026c). It ended by observing that such a shared capacity, once it takes on a durable and transmissible form, has already crossed a boundary the aesthetic alone cannot name. When a gesture repeated between two people hardens into a rite, when a mistaken word is kept on purpose and becomes a name, when a way of seeing is sedimented into a way of living that can be handed on, something has emerged that is no longer a perception and not yet an institution. That something is culture, and this paper takes its emergence in intimate relation for its subject.

The word chosen for the subject is not innocent, and the paper begins by refusing to let it settle too quickly. In English *culture* carries an agricultural inheritance, from *colere*, to till, to tend, to cultivate; the metaphor is of a ground worked and a growth husbanded, and it leans, for all its life, toward the image of a thing cultivated and then possessed, a heritage held. The Chinese term for culture, *wenhua* (文化), carries a different charge, and the difference is instructive rather than decorative. It is built of two characters. *Wen* (文) is pattern, marking, the woven grain of a thing, the sign; *hua* (化) is transformation, generation, the bringing-to-live and bringing-to-form. *Hua* is verbal before it is nominal. To *hua* is to transform, to generate, to make live and live again, and the classical locus—“observe the patterns of the human, and by them bring the world to form”—reads culture not as a deposit but as an ongoing act of formation (Legge 1963). The tension between these two inheritances, the tended possession and the ongoing transformation, is not a matter of etymological curiosity. It is the whole problem of the paper in miniature, and it already announces the thesis: that culture is misconceived when it is taken as a finished and transmissible object, and rightly conceived when it is taken as a generation that does not close.

The question, and the special site at which it is asked

The general question is what culture is, ontologically and epistemologically: in what manner it exists, how it comes to be, and how it can be known. That question has a long literature, and the first part of this paper works through it, not to survey it but to locate a position within it that the existing accounts have left open. But the general question is not, for this series, the final one. This is a philosophy of intimacy, and its concern with culture is a concern with culture at its smallest and most exposed, in the relation between two people. The intimate dyad is the minimal unit of cultural emergence, the smallest system in which a culture can arise at all, and it is therefore the site at which the mechanism of emergence is most nakedly visible. What in a nation or an epoch is buried under the weight of institutions, laws, and the dead accumulation of centuries stands, in a couple, close enough to be watched as it happens. One can almost see the moment a private word is coined and accepted, the moment a shared silence acquires a meaning; and one can also see, with a clarity no macro-culture affords, what it costs when such a culture collapses. The particular is not here an application of the general arrived at late. It is the place where the general is legible.

This double structure organizes the paper. The general and the special are related as universality and the particularity that both instances and exceeds it. The first part develops a general ontology and epistemology of cultural emergence, and it is deliberately general: its claims about how culture comes to be, its dialectic of the material and the ideal, its account of culture across the registers of experience, are meant to hold of culture as such. The second part, which is the heart of the paper and the reason the series exists, descends into the intimate dyad and asks what the general framework becomes when the cultural unit is not a people but a pair, and it finds there mechanisms that belong to the dyad alone and appear nowhere else: the vacancy, between two people, of any external authority to fix meaning; the mutual implication of two structures of desire; a density of shared living that lets culture sediment at a visible speed; a fragility that can return a whole shared world to ruin. The third part turns from what culture is and how it is lived to how it is produced and how it is captured, tracing the material conditions under which intimate culture is generated and the means by which capital, having exhausted older frontiers, reaches into the relation itself to draw value from the very bond.

Three lines run through the whole

The argument is carried by three lines that are not confined to separate chapters but run through the whole, and it is worth naming them at the outset so that their recurrence is read as design rather than repetition. The first is the line of *historical materialism*: that culture, however much it exceeds its conditions, is produced under material conditions and cannot be understood apart from the forces and relations of its production. This line insists throughout that the emergence of culture is constrained, that its forms are historical rather than eternal, and that the manner of its production and of its capture is a question of political economy and not only of meaning. The second is the line of *the Hegelian dialectic*: that culture is spirit exteriorized, going out of itself into a visible form, coming to know itself in that form, and returning to itself altered, so that exteriorization is not loss but the necessary path of self-knowledge, and so that the movement of culture, including its estrangements, has the shape of a determinate negation rather than a mere succession. The third is the line of *psychoanalysis*: that culture is bound to drive, that it is the coding, the sublimation, the sedimented shared fantasy through which what cannot be directly said is given a transmissible form, and that in intimate relation, above all, culture is the sediment of two structures of desire woven into one. These three lines converge, in the meta-theoretical statement that opens the paper's second movement, on a single framework, a variant of the Lacanian theory of the three registers reworked so that the Real is granted a relational form, so that culture is shown to span all three registers, and so that the registers are set into dialectical and materially driven motion rather than left as a static topology. That framework, named in its place the *three-register dialectic of the relational Real*, is the theoretical spine on which the whole rests, and the introduction names it here only as a promise to be redeemed.

What the paper contributes, with its limits showing

The contribution can be stated plainly and with its limits in view. It is, first, an ontology of cultural emergence that locates culture neither in a transmissible object nor in a symbolic system nor in an encoding of power alone, but in the dialectical exteriorization, across three registers and under material constraint, of the interwoven generative history of relational subjects. It is, second, a phenomenology of intimate culture that takes the dyad seriously as a special site and describes the mechanisms proper to it, and this

is where the paper means to earn its place in the series, for these mechanisms have not, to the author's knowledge, been gathered and named. It is, third, an ethics and a political economy of intimate culture that shows how the value such culture generates is produced, how it is captured, and on what its just generation depends, joining this to the theory of generative justice the series has developed in exchange with Eglash (Eglash 2016). The paper does not offer a completed system, and it does not close its own central concept, which would contradict in its form the generativity the concept names. It offers a framework, a set of mechanisms, and a criterion, and it holds them open, in the manner its subject demands, toward what a later work must take up.

6.2. A Taxonomy of Definitions of Culture

Before the several theories of culture are taken up one by one, they should be laid out as a field, for they do not merely differ in emphasis but disagree at the root, in what they take culture *to be*. A theory of cultural formation always rests on a prior commitment about the mode of existence of its object, and it is at that level, and not at the level of particular findings, that the position of this paper is to be located. The purpose of this section is therefore cartographic. It sets two axes across which the major commitments can be plotted, places each of the traditions the following sections examine at its coordinate, and shows that the position this paper will occupy is not one more entry in a list but a region of the map the existing traditions have left vacant. To argue for the originality of a view by exhibiting an unoccupied coordinate is more honest than to assert it, because it makes the claim answerable: if the coordinate were already filled, the argument would fail, and it can be seen at a glance whether it is.

Two axes

The first axis concerns the *mode of being* of culture, and it runs from the settled to the generative. At one pole culture is a completed and transmissible entity, a heritage that exists in the manner of an object, handed from one bearer to the next and in principle the same across the handing. At the other pole culture is an ongoing process, unfinished by nature, existing only in the manner of an event that is always still occurring. This is the axis on which the etymological tension of the previous section, between the tended

possession and the ongoing transformation, becomes a theoretical variable.

The second axis concerns the *bearer* of culture, and it runs from the individual to the relational-or-structural. At one pole the individual is the unit that carries culture, its container or its vehicle, and culture is what is deposited in persons. At the other pole culture obtains between or above persons, in a structure or a relation that no single individual instances, so that the individual is an effect or a moment of the culture rather than its container. These two axes are not independent in practice, but they are distinct in principle, and plotting the traditions against both at once discloses a structure that neither axis alone would show.

The map

Plotted against these axes, the traditions examined in the following sections fall as the table records. Each row states, besides the coordinate, what the tradition takes culture to be, how it treats drive, and how it treats power, so that the two lines this paper carries through its ontology—the psychoanalytic and the question of power—can be seen entering, or failing to enter, each account.

Tradition	Coordinate	What culture is	Drive	Power
Transmission & collective representation <i>Tylor,</i> <i>Durkheim</i>	settled × collec- tive	a learned, trans- mitted whole; col- lective representa- tion, social fact	untouched; cul- ture as outer norm	unthematized; power hidden in the coercion of the “social fact”
Symbol & inter- pretation <i>Geertz, Cassirer</i>	settled × struc- tural	a prior web of meaning, a sys- tem of symbolic forms	symbolic order as big Other; the subject meets lack on entering lan- guage	the power di- mension of meaning left undeveloped
Structure & reproduction <i>Lévi-Strauss,</i> <i>Bourdieu</i>	settled-tending- dynamic × struc- tural	deep structure; cultural capital, accruable, convert- ible, extractable	desire organized by the logic of distinction, its drive-root undug	<i>central</i> : culture as the hidden mechanism of class reproduc- tion
Power as ontol- ogy <i>Gramsci, Fou- cault, Hall</i>	dynamic × struc- tural (power con- gealed)	the encoding of a power order; no culture outside power	inside the sym- bolic via the phallic signifier (the weld)	<i>ontological</i> : power structure defines culture structure
The dialogic <i>Bakhtin</i>	generative × dia- logic	the unfinished, generated in an- swering	answerability touches the other’s desire, unsystematized	heteroglossia implies a counter- hegemony, un- theorized
The Chinese <i>wen-hua</i> <i>Yijing, Confu- cian, Daoist</i>	generative × civi- lizational	<i>hua</i> : transforma- tion, bringing-to- form; culture as ongoing act	sublimation im- plicit in <i>liyue</i> (rites and mu- sic), undertheo- rized	pedagogy from above; the power face of <i>huacheng</i>

GRB (this paper)	generative × relational (va- cant)	the dialectical exte- riorization, ⁵⁴⁰ across three registers, of interwoven drive	<i>ground</i> : cul- ture as coding, sublimation,	power is inter- nal to culture, yet just genera- tion generates
---------------------	--	--	---	--

Reading the map

Read downward, the table shows a drift rather than a scatter. The mode of being moves from the settled toward the generative; the bearer moves from the individual and the structural toward the relational; and the two columns on the right, drive and power, move from the untouched toward the thematic, so that what the earliest traditions do not register at all becomes, in the lower rows, the explicit matter of the account. The lowest row, the position of this paper, occupies the coordinate the drift approaches but none of the existing traditions reaches: the generative and the relational together, with drive taken as the ground of culture and power taken as internal to it yet answerable, within the same generative movement, to a counter-power that prevents its entrenchment. That the phallic signifier appears in the drive column of the power tradition and the counter-power in the power column of this paper's own row is not incidental. It marks the two welds by which the psychoanalytic line and the line of power are joined to each other and to the whole, and both are redeemed in their places below.

Two uses follow, and they set the plan of the rest of Part One. The task of the antithesis, when it comes, will be to draw the upper six traditions from their several coordinates toward the vacant one, not by refuting each in turn but by exposing the presupposition they share and inverting it. The task of the synthesis will be to name and define the coordinate so reached. The sections that immediately follow, however, owe each tradition a fair hearing on its own terms before any of this can be earned, and they proceed in the order of the table, from the tradition that holds culture most nearly as a settled thing to the two that already lean, half a foot, toward the generation this paper will claim.

6.3. Transmission and Collective Representation

The first tradition is the one that gave the modern concept its founding definition, and it is placed first because it holds culture most nearly as a settled thing. When Tylor opened *Primitive Culture* in 1871 with the sentence that culture is “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (Tylor 1871), he did three things at once, and each has proved durable. He made culture a *whole*, an ensemble rather than a list, so that its parts are to be understood in their belonging together. He made it *acquired*, learned

rather than inherited in the blood, and so severed it from race and biology, which was the definition's great emancipatory achievement and remains its permanent contribution. And he made it acquired *by man as a member of society*, so that the individual receives culture from a collectivity that precedes him. Everything the definition gets right, this paper keeps. What it fixes, and fixes so naturally that the fixing is invisible, is the mode of being of the whole so defined. Culture, in this founding image, is something one *acquires*, and what can be acquired is a thing that was there to be had, standing ready before the acquiring, the same for the next person who will acquire it in turn. The verb quietly installs an object. The complex whole becomes a patrimony, a stock of acquirable items, and the work of the concept from that point forward is the work of transmission: how the stock passes, how it is kept, how it changes across the passing. Culture is modelled on inheritance, and an inheritance is by definition a thing that exists before and after the one who receives it.

Durkheim gave this image its deepest sociological form, and in doing so raised the collective from the background of Tylor's definition into the explicit ground of culture's existence. The concepts, categories, and beliefs by which the members of a society understand their world are, for Durkheim, *collective representations*: they are not the constructions of individual minds but products of the collectivity, which express, and in expressing sustain, the reality of the group itself (Durkheim 1995). Their mark is that they confront the individual from without and with a force he did not author, the defining property Durkheim assigned to the social fact, which is exterior to any given individual and endowed with a power of constraint (Durkheim 1982). This is a profound advance over Tylor, because it grasps that culture is not merely deposited in individuals but obtains at the level of the collectivity and bears down on the individual with the weight of an independent reality. It moves culture, in the terms of the previous section's map, from the purely individual toward the collective bearer. And yet it moves it only that far, and in one crucial respect it deepens the very fixity it inherits. For the collective representation, precisely by being exterior and constraining, is figured as a thing standing over against the individual, a structure he enters and by which he is formed, already there before him and outlasting him. The advance in the bearer is paid for by an entrenchment in the mode of being. Where Tylor's culture was an acquirable stock, Durkheim's is an exterior and coercive order, and both are, in the decisive sense, *already made*. The individual

meets culture as one meets a fact: it is given, it constrains, and its existence does not wait on his participation.

What this tradition sees, and what its presupposition costs

It would be an error, and the kind of error this paper is at pains to avoid, to treat this tradition as simply mistaken. It sees something real, and the seeing must be preserved. Culture *is* transmissible; it *does* sediment into durable forms that outlast particular occasions; it *does* confront the individual with the force of something he did not make and cannot simply revise at will. A private language between two people, once established, bears down on each of them with a version of exactly this exteriority: one cannot unilaterally decide that a word the two of you made together now means something else. The transmissibility and the sedimented durability that this tradition places at the centre are genuine features of culture, and any account that denied them, in the name of process and generation, would be a sentimentalism deserving the correction this tradition would administer to it. *Wen*—pattern, the durable mark—is not an illusion.

But the presupposition beneath the seeing exacts a price, and the price is the disappearance of the very thing this paper means to recover. By modelling culture on the acquirable stock and the exterior fact, the tradition renders unthinkable the moment of *emergence*: the event in which a culture that did not exist comes to be, between people who are making it, before it has hardened into anything transmissible or exterior at all. If culture is what is already there to be acquired, then the coming-to-be of the not-yet-there falls outside the concept. One can ask how a culture is transmitted, maintained, or eroded; one cannot, within this frame, ask how it is *generated*, because generation is precisely the passage from the not-yet-cultural to the cultural, and a theory that begins from the already-made has placed that passage before its own first page. And it is the moment of emergence, not the fact of transmission, that the intimate dyad exhibits with unique clarity and that this paper takes as its subject. Two people do not, in the first instance, *acquire* their shared culture; they *make* it, and one can watch them make it. The founding tradition, for all it correctly sees, cannot look at that making, because its concept of culture is built from the residue the making leaves behind. This is the sense in which it is the antithesis's main point of attack: not that transmission is unreal, but that transmission is the afterlife of an emergence the tradition cannot think, and that to

take the afterlife for the whole is to mistake the ash for the fire.

6.4. Symbol and Interpretation

The second tradition is the one this paper most nearly resembles and must therefore most carefully distinguish itself from, for it comes closest to the truth and misses it in the most instructive way. Its thesis is that culture is meaning, and that the medium of meaning is the symbol. Cassirer gave the thesis its widest philosophical frame: the human being is not so much a rational animal as a symbolic one, an *animal symbolicum*, and culture is the totality of the symbolic forms—language, myth, art, religion, science—through which a world is constituted at all rather than merely encountered (Cassirer 1944; Cassirer 1953–1957). On this view culture is not one region of human life but the medium in which human life as such takes place, since there is no access to a world except through some symbolic form that shapes it. Geertz brought the thesis down from the philosophy of forms to the practice of interpretation. Believing, with Weber, that the human being is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, Geertz took culture to be those webs, and the study of it to be not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning (Geertz 1973). Culture is public because meaning is public: it lives in symbols that can be read, and the reading, his *thick description*, is the patient recovery of the layered significance that separates a wink from a twitch, a significance that the physical motion alone cannot carry and that only the web of meaning supplies.

This is a great advance over the first tradition, and along the axis this paper cares about most it moves in the right direction. It sees that culture is not a stock of items but a texture of meaning; that meaning is relational, a matter of a sign's place in a web rather than of any property it carries in itself; and that culture is therefore closer to a language than to a patrimony. The metaphor of the web is almost the metaphor this paper wants, for a web is a structure of relations and not a heap of things. And Geertz's insistence that culture is spun by those suspended in it seems, for a moment, to grant exactly the generativity the first tradition denied: the web is woven, and weaving is an act.

Where the web hangs already spun

But the moment does not hold, and the reason it does not hold is the presupposition this tradition shares, beneath its advances, with the one before it. The web, in the end, is encountered as *already spun*. For all that Geertz says the webs are spun by those suspended in them, the suspension is prior in his account to any spinning one could observe: the individual is born into webs of significance that precede him, and interpretation, thick description, is addressed to meaning that is *already there* to be read, a public text the ethnographer arrives late to and construes. The generativity in the metaphor is grammatically present and analytically absent. One never, in this tradition, catches the web in the act of being woven; one finds it woven and reads it. And Cassirer's symbolic forms are still more nearly a priori: they are the standing conditions of any experience whatever, the forms a world must take to be a world, and as such they precede every particular act of meaning as its condition rather than issuing from it. In the terms of the map, the tradition has moved culture toward the relational and the structural in its account of the *bearer* of meaning—meaning lives in the web, between the signs—while leaving its *mode of being* settled: the web is a prior structure into which the individual is inducted, and meaning is found, decoded, interpreted, never watched as it comes to be. The symbolic system is treated as anterior to the subjects who move within it, and the subject is figured as one who enters a language already spoken.

The symbolic order and the lack it opens

It is exactly here, at the point where the symbolic system is granted priority over the subject, that the psychoanalytic line of this paper first enters, and it enters not to refute this tradition but to name a dimension the tradition leaves in the dark. For if the subject is inducted into a symbolic order that precedes him, then the relation between the subject and that order is not neutral, and psychoanalysis is the discourse that has taken the measure of what that induction costs. In the Lacanian account the symbolic order is the register of language and law, the treasury of signifiers that is there before the subject and that the subject must enter to become a speaking being at all; and this entry is not a gain only. To enter language is to submit what one is to what can be said of it, and since no signifier can ever say the whole of what the subject is, the entry opens, at the very heart of the subject, a constitutive lack, an emptiness that the

symbolic order institutes by the same act with which it constitutes the subject (Lacan 2006). The symbolic order that Cassirer and Geertz describe from the outside, as the medium of meaning, is described by psychoanalysis from the inside, as the big Other into which desire is inducted and by which it is marked with a lack it can never fill. This is the first appearance of a thesis the paper will develop at length: that culture, considered as a symbolic system, is not a neutral web of meaning but the very apparatus by which drive is first coded, and that the coding leaves a remainder. The interpretive tradition sees the web and reads its meanings; it does not see that the web is stretched over a hole, that the subject suspended in significance is suspended over its own constitutive lack, and that the meanings it spins are, among other things, ways of living beside that lack. What the tradition cannot see, because it stays at the level of the symbolic taken alone, is precisely what the later sections of this paper must recover: that culture spans more than the symbolic, and that beneath the web of meaning runs a register the web does not exhaust.

6.5. Structure and Reproduction

The third tradition asks a question the first two do not: not what culture is or how it means, but what culture *does*, and in particular what work it performs in holding a social order together and passing it on. Its two moments, the structural and the reproductive, are distinct, but they share the conviction that beneath the surface of cultural life lies a structure that organizes it, and that the structure is prior to and largely hidden from the agents whose practice it governs.

In its structural moment, associated with Lévi-Strauss, the thesis is that the diversity of cultural forms—myths, kinship systems, classifications—is the surface transformation of a small number of deep structures, ultimately grounded in the binary operations of the mind, so that the anthropologist’s task is to recover the invariant structure of which the visible culture is a permutation (Lévi-Strauss 1963). This is a powerful vision, and it sees something the interpretive tradition can underplay: that culture has a structure with its own logic, not reducible to the meanings its participants avow, a grammar that generates the sayable without being itself said. But it purchases this depth at the price of the agents entirely. The structure operates behind their backs and through them; they

are its bearers, not its authors; and the structure itself is timeless, a synchronic order from which history and emergence have been evacuated on principle. Culture here is at its most settled precisely where it is at its most sophisticated: the deep structure is the very type of a thing that is always already there.

Bourdieu's reproductive moment is the one this paper must engage most closely, because it is the sharpest and because its central concept, cultural capital, stands in the most direct opposition to what this paper will claim about intimate culture. Bourdieu set out to overcome the antinomy of structure and agency, and his instrument was the *habitus*: a system of durable, transposable dispositions, laid down in the body by a whole history of conditioning, which generates practices without being either free choice or mechanical determination, an incorporated structure that reproduces the objective structure that produced it (Bourdieu 1984). Around the habitus he built an economy of *capital* in several forms—economic, social, and, decisively, cultural—and showed how taste, comportment, and cultivation, far from being the free play of sensibility they present themselves as, function as *cultural capital*: assets, unequally distributed along class lines, that can be accumulated, that can be converted into economic and social advantage, and that are transmitted across generations through the family and the school so as to reproduce the class structure while concealing that reproduction behind the appearance of individual merit (Bourdieu 1986). This is a genuine and permanent achievement, and it is where the historical-materialist line of this paper first enters the argument. Bourdieu makes visible what the interpretive tradition leaves in shadow: that culture is not an innocent web of meaning but an instrument in the reproduction of social relations, that the power to say what counts as cultivation is a class power, and that the question of who owns and transmits cultural competence is a question of political economy. Any account of culture that forgot this—any celebration of intimate culture as a pure generative idyll—would have earned Bourdieu's contempt, and rightly.

The extractability of cultural capital, and the point of divergence

But the very concept that makes Bourdieu's analysis so powerful marks the exact place where this paper will part from it, and the point must be stated with precision, because a carelessness here would either concede too much or claim too much. The category *capital* imports into the analysis of culture the defining logic of capital as such: that it

is a value which can be accumulated, which can be converted across domains, and which can be made to yield a return. Cultural capital, on Bourdieu's account, is accruable, is convertible into economic and social advantage, and is, in its objectified and institutionalized states above all, extractable—made to work, cashed in, put to the reproduction of advantage. It is true, and Bourdieu is careful about this, that cultural capital in its embodied state cannot be handed over like a coin, since it is incorporated into a habitus over time and dies with its bearer; the point of divergence is not a claim that Bourdieu missed this nuance. The point of divergence is that for Bourdieu even embodied cultural capital, however slowly acquired, is still *capital*: it is oriented to accumulation and return, its value is its convertibility, and its cultural meaning is legible, in the last analysis, as position in a field of struggle. What Bourdieu's frame cannot register—because its founding metaphor forbids it—is a form of culture whose value is precisely *not* of this kind: a culture generated within a relation whose worth is non-accruable, non-convertible, and non-extractable, because it is not an asset that positions its holders in an external field but a real bond that exists only in and for the relation itself. This is the form of culture the intimate dyad generates, and it is the antithesis, term for term, of cultural capital: where cultural capital is transferable in principle and extractable in fact, intimate culture is non-transferable in principle and, this paper will argue, resistant to extraction at its core. The disagreement is recorded here and settled later, at the synthesis and again in the phenomenology of the dyad; for now it is enough to have marked that the strongest theory of culture-as-reproduction is built on a metaphor—capital—whose reach this paper means to bound, by exhibiting a culture that lies wholly outside it.

6.6. Power as the Ontology of Culture

The fourth tradition makes the strongest claim in the field, and it is placed last among the settled traditions because the antithesis will find it the hardest to answer. Its thesis is not the mild one that culture is influenced by power, which no one denies, but the radical one that power is the very being of culture: that culture, in its constitution and not merely in its uses, *is* the encoding of a power order, so that to analyze a culture just is to analyze the relations of domination it congeals and transmits. On this view there is no culture outside power, no cultural form that is not, at bottom, a sedimentation of

force, and the appearance of a culture that stands apart from power—an innocent web of meaning, a free play of taste, a private world between two people—is exactly the illusion by which power secures itself.

Gramsci gave the thesis its foundational form with the concept of *hegemony*. The rule of a dominant class, he saw, does not rest on coercion alone; it rests, more deeply and more durably, on the manufacture of *consent*, achieved in the domain of culture, where the worldview of the ruling class is diffused through the institutions of civil society until it is received by the subordinate classes as simple common sense, the natural order of things rather than the interested construction it is (Gramsci 1971). Culture, in this account, is the very medium in which domination is made to feel like nature, and its political function is not incidental to it but constitutive: a culture is a settlement of hegemony, a way of organizing consent to an order of power. Foucault radicalized the thesis by dissolving its remaining reference to a class that holds power. Power, for him, is not possessed but exercised, not concentrated in a ruler or a class but capillary, distributed through the finest grain of social life, and inseparable from knowledge: every ordering of knowledge is an exercise of power, every regime of power produces its knowledge, and the two are so bound that he wrote them with a single hyphenated name, *power/knowledge* (Foucault 1980). Discourse, on this account, does not describe a world so much as constitute the objects it appears to describe, and the subject itself, far from being the author of culture, is one of culture's products, formed by the disciplinary and discursive practices that traverse it (Foucault 1977). Stuart Hall carried the thesis into the analysis of contemporary culture, holding culture to be not a thing to appreciate but a critical site of social action where power relations are established and may be unsettled, and showing, in his account of encoding and decoding, how the meanings a dominant order encodes into its messages may be received, negotiated, or opposed by those who decode them (Hall 1980). Hall's is the most dialectical version, for it reopens, within the domain of cultural power, a space of contestation the others tend to close; but it remains within the tradition's founding thesis, that the field on which the contest occurs is a field of power through and through.

The evidence of the tradition, read from the Chinese material

The thesis is not an abstraction, and it can be seen with particular clarity in the cultural forms this series knows best. The Confucian order of *jun-chen-fu-zi*, ruler and minister, father and son, is a culture in the fullest sense, a whole texture of rite, sentiment, and meaning; and it is, at the same time and by the same texture, the encoding of a hierarchy of power, a distribution of authority naturalized into the order of the cosmos and the affections. The culture of divinity and the culture of imperial authority perform the same operation at the largest scale: the power of heaven and the power of the throne are written into the culture as the way things simply are, so that *tianming*, the mandate of heaven, installs a political order in the position of the ultimate authority, the place this series has learned from psychoanalysis to call the big Other. Read through this tradition, a vast amount of what any culture contains discloses itself as the sedimentation of a power order into the seemingly natural forms of meaning and feeling, and this reading is not false. It is one of the most powerful instruments of cultural analysis there is, and the antithesis of this paper will not pretend otherwise.

The weld: the phallic signifier

Before the tradition's radical consequence is drawn, one connection must be made, because it joins this tradition to the psychoanalytic line and shows that the two are not parallel tracks but a single one. If culture is a symbolic phenomenon, as the interpretive tradition holds, and if power is internal to culture, as this tradition holds, then the question arises how power is lodged *within* the symbolic, and psychoanalysis gives the answer in the concept of the master signifier, and at the deepest level the *phallic signifier*. In the Lacanian account the symbolic order is not a flat field of equivalent signs; it is organized around privileged signifiers that anchor its differences and orient its axis of authority, and the phallic signifier is the name for that which organizes the symbolic order's structure of power, the point around which the difference that founds hierarchy is arranged (Lacan 2006). This is the weld between the two lines this paper carries. Power does not enter culture from outside, as an external force bending a neutral medium; it is internal to the symbolic order's very constitution, lodged there through the phallic organization of the signifying chain, which is the same apparatus by which, as the interpretive section began to show, drive is coded and the subject's lack is opened. The line of power and the line

of drive are therefore one line, joined at the phallic signifier: the coding of drive and the encoding of power are the same operation of the symbolic order seen from two sides.

The radical consequence, and the threat to this paper

From the thesis, so welded, follows the consequence that makes this tradition the hardest the antithesis must face. If power is internal to the constitution of culture as such, and if there is no cultural form that is not a sedimentation of power, then there is *no outside*. There is no site from which a culture free of power could be generated, no position of pure critique standing clear of the relations of domination, because the very medium in which any culture or any critique would have to be made is already, constitutively, a medium of power. A certain strain of psychoanalytically informed critique states the consequence at its sharpest: there is no pure feminism, and more generally no pure emancipatory culture, not because emancipation is not worth wanting but because there exists no system of production and social relation that is not already traversed by power, and hence no cultural form, however oppositional, that is generated in a space power has not already structured. This is the reason the tradition is placed at the head of the antithesis's difficulties. This paper means to claim that intimate relation can generate a culture of its own, endogenously, and this tradition replies, before the claim is even made, that there is no endogenous space to generate it in, that the very intimacy in which the couple would build their private world is already shot through with the phallic organization of power, that the private is a fold of the public and not an exception to it. The claim of an endogenous intimate culture is, on this tradition's terms, a naivety, and the synthesis of this paper cannot proceed until the objection has been met head-on. It will not be met by denial. It will be met, when the time comes, by conceding that power is indeed internal to all culture and turning that very concession into the ground of a different answer; but that answer belongs to the synthesis, and the tradition is left here, at the close of the thesis, in possession of its full and undiminished force.

6.7. The Chinese *Wen-Hua* Tradition

The five traditions examined so far are Western, and they share, for all their differences, a common descent from the social sciences and the philosophy of the modern West. There

is a body of Chinese reflection on *wen* (文) and *hua* (化) that does not belong to that descent and is not, in the strict sense, a theory of culture in the modern disciplinary meaning at all: it is closer to a discourse on civilization, cultivation, and the forming of persons and a world. It is included here as an independent strand, and not merely as an epigraph, because its difference of concern preserves an insight the Western traditions, with the partial exception of the dialogic, tend to lose—and because the terms of the intimacy series have from the beginning drawn on this material. The section confines itself to what can be stated with confidence; where it would require a philological or exegetical judgement the author is better placed to make, it marks the place and leaves it open rather than filling it with a claim it cannot warrant.

What can be stated: the verbal force of *hua*

One observation can be made with confidence, and it is the one that matters most for the argument, because it is grammatical before it is interpretive. The modern compound *wenhua* is built of two characters whose senses pull in the direction this paper has been arguing. *Wen* is pattern, the woven grain, the mark or sign—the nominal, deposited face of culture, close to what the transmission tradition sees. *Hua* is transformation, and its force is *verbal*: to *hua* is to transform, to convert, to bring to form, to cause to change or grow. Where the Latin *cultura* leans, through its agricultural root, toward the tended growth that becomes a possession, *hua* names the transforming itself, the ongoing action rather than its settled product. This is not an exotic subtlety but a plain feature of the term, and it is exactly the feature the settled Western traditions let fall: that at the heart of the very word for culture, in one of its two components, stands a verb of generation. The Chinese compound thus holds, in its internal tension between *wen* and *hua*, the same tension this paper has set at the centre of its ontology, between the pattern that is deposited and the transformation that generates it; and it holds the generative pole in a term that will not let it be forgotten.

The locus classicus for reading culture as an act of formation rather than a deposit is the phrase from the *Tuan* commentary on the hexagram Bi (贲) in the *Book of Changes*—which may be rendered “observe the patterns of the human, and by them bring the world to form” (Legge 1963). What can be said with confidence, and only this, is that here *huacheng* (the bringing-to-form) names an ongoing cultivation of a shared world, rather

than the handing-on of a finished heritage: the character *hua* does the work of a verb of formation, consistent with the grammatical point just made. Any more particular claim about the passage—its place within the philosophy of the *Changes*, the commentarial tradition that reads it, its relation to the classical theory of *liyu* (rites and music), and the exact weight of *renwen* (the human pattern) in it—is a matter of exegesis the present author is better placed to supply, and it is left open here rather than asserted.

Marked and left open

The following are deliberately marked and left open, to be supplied or verified by the author, who has the classical competence the argument here requires; the section does not assert them, and states only the grammatical point above, which it can warrant.

- The Confucian account of *liyu* as a cultivation that forms persons and generates a relational order, and its bearing on the thesis that culture is generative rather than deposited — to be developed with the specific textual support the author judges apt.
- The Daoist material on *daosheng* (the Ways begetting) and *ziran* (self-so, spontaneity)—generation as spontaneous, non-coercive bringing-forth—and its connection to the treatment of water and of *xuande* (dark virtue) in the earlier papers of this series, stated only to the extent the author wishes to warrant.
- The exact sense in which *hua* is to be distinguished from mere change, and whether a stronger claim than the grammatical one above can be responsibly made.

The strand's function, and its internal tension

Whatever the detail with which the classical material is finally filled in, the strand's function in the argument can be stated now, for it is structural. It supplies, from outside the Western descent, the one thing that descent tends to lose: a conception of culture in which the generative, verbal, ongoing character of formation is not an afterthought but is lodged in the very term. In the map of the second section it therefore falls at the generative pole, near the dialogic, and it is a second witness—independent of Bakhtin, and older—to the truth that culture is process before it is product.

But the strand carries a tension that must be held, and it is the same dialectical caution the paper has applied to every tradition. The forming of a world and the cultivation of persons have, historically, also been instruments of a hierarchical order: a *huacheng* directed from above, a cultivation that forms subjects to their places in a structure of authority. The generative insight and the pedagogy of hierarchy have coexisted in this tradition, and to take the insight without noticing the hierarchy would be to commit, on Chinese material, exactly the naivety the power tradition of the previous section warned against. The strand is therefore not a refuge from the problem of power but another instance of it, to be evaluated dialectically: its conception of generative formation is a real gift to the argument, and its historical entanglement with a cultivation imposed from above is a real limit, and both are carried forward—the gift to the synthesis, the limit to the treatment of power and of cultural evolution that the synthesis will require.

6.8. The Dialogic and the Unfinished

The last of the traditions is the one that has already, as the map recorded, set half a foot across the line the antithesis will complete. It is the dialogic tradition of Bakhtin, and it is placed here, at the end of the thesis, because it is less an opposing view to be overcome than a near-ally whose insight the paper will take up and radicalize. Where the four preceding traditions, for all their differences, tend to render culture as something settled—an acquirable whole, a prior web, a deep structure, a congealed order of power—Bakhtin's thought is organized around the refusal of settlement, and its governing concepts name, one after another, the ways in which meaning declines to close.

The first is *dialogism*. For Bakhtin the word is never solitary and never first; every utterance is a link in a chain of utterances, shaped in advance by the words it answers and turned in advance toward the response it anticipates, so that meaning lives not in the utterance taken alone but in the relation between utterances, in the space of address and reply (Bakhtin 1981). An utterance is oriented, before it is even spoken, toward an addressee whose answering word it already reaches for; meaning is a matter of this orientation, this being-toward-the-other, rather than a content lodged in a sign. The second is *answerability*, the theme of his earliest work: the self is constituted in and as its responsiveness to the other, answerable in the double sense of being obliged to respond

and of being responsible in responding, so that subjectivity itself is a dialogic and ethical event before it is a substance. The third is *heteroglossia*, the internal stratification of any living language into a multiplicity of social voices—dialects, registers, professional and class and generational tongues—that coexist in tension and contend within every utterance, so that a language is never one but always a contested plurality, and its unity is an achievement of force rather than a natural fact (Bakhtin 1981). And the fourth, the deepest, is *unfinalizability*. Nothing conclusive, Bakhtin insists, has yet taken place in the world; the ultimate word about the world and about any self has not been and cannot be spoken; every apparently final word is penultimate, shadowed by the possibility of a response that would reopen it, and the self above all retains, against every external attempt to fix and complete it, the capacity to mean again (Bakhtin 1984). In his reading of Dostoevsky this becomes *polyphony*: a work in which a plurality of consciousnesses, each with its own validity, sound together without being merged into or subordinated to a single authorial voice, a whole that is genuinely a chorus and not a monologue in disguise.

Why the tradition leans toward this paper

It should be plain how far this tradition has already moved toward the position the paper will occupy. Its conception of culture, drawn out of these concepts, is of something generated in the between of address and answer, existing only in the ongoing exchange, and constitutively unfinished; and this is, in its formal shape, close to what this paper will claim of the culture generated in intimate relation. The dialogic word that is oriented toward its answer is not far from the private language that two people build in the alternation of speaking and being understood; the unfinalizable self that keeps the power to mean again is the self this series has always defended against the closures that would reduce it; and the polyphony that lets voices sound together without merging is a model, at the scale of the novel, of what a good relation lets its two members be. Of all the traditions surveyed, this is the one whose truth the synthesis will most nearly keep, and it is a second witness, alongside the verbal force of *hwa*, to the thesis that culture is process before it is product.

What it lacks, and why it is not yet the synthesis

But it is not yet the synthesis, and the difference is exactly what the antithesis and the meta-theoretical statement must add. Bakhtin gives the *form* of unfinished, dialogic generation without the apparatus that would explain its *depth* and its *stakes*. Three things are missing, and each is supplied by a line this paper carries. First, there is no theory of *drive*: the dialogic orientation toward the other touches, but does not systematize, the question of what in the subject reaches for the other's answer, and it is the psychoanalytic account of desire and its lack that gives the reaching its root, showing that the dialogue is not only an exchange of meanings but a circulation of desire around a constitutive emptiness. Second, there is no articulated theory of the *registers*: Bakhtin's dialogism lives almost entirely in the medium of the word, the symbolic, and does not thematize the imaginary body of identification or the real of the unsymbolizable bond, which the couple's culture, this paper will argue, inhabits no less than it inhabits language. Third, there is no *materialism* of the kind the paper insists on: heteroglossia registers that language is a field of social contention, and gestures thereby toward power, but it does not anchor the dialogic process in the forces and relations of production that condition which voices may be raised and which answers may be given. Bakhtin, in short, has the generativity and the unfinishedness, and lacks the drive, the registers, and the material ground that would turn a poetics of the unfinished word into an ontology of cultural emergence. The thesis therefore ends where it should, at a tradition that has named the destination without yet possessing the means to reach it. The means are the business of the antithesis, and the antithesis begins, as it must, not by adding one more view to these six but by stepping back to state the framework within which all six will be reread.

6.9. East and West: An Unactivated Resonance

Before the antithesis states its framework, one connection across the traditions just surveyed must be drawn, because it is the connection that motivates the framework and shows why a new one is needed. The six traditions do not merely occupy different coordinates on the map; two of them, arising on opposite sides of the world and out of wholly unrelated lineages, point toward the same buried truth, and the recognition of this convergence is the hinge on which the paper turns from thesis to antithesis. The

section that performs this turn is not a comparison offered for its own sake, a pairing of East and West laid side by side for balance. It is the identification of a resonance that has never been activated, and the claim that activating it requires precisely the apparatus the next section will supply.

The resonance

Set the dialogic tradition beside the verbal force of *hua*, and a single shape appears twice. Bakhtin's dialogism holds that meaning is generated in the between of address and answer and is constitutively unfinished, that nothing conclusive has yet been said and the ultimate word cannot be spoken (Bakhtin 1984). The Chinese *hua* holds, in the plain grammar of the term, that at the heart of culture stands a verb of transformation, an ongoing bringing-to-form rather than a settled deposit. These are not the same doctrine, and it would be a distortion to collapse them; the one is a twentieth-century poetics of the novel and of the utterance, the other a classical vocabulary of civilization and cultivation. But they converge on one thing, and they converge on it against the main current of the traditions around them: that culture is *process before it is product*, generation before deposit, the unfinished before the finished. What the settled traditions of the West most persistently lose—the moment of generation, the ongoing act, the refusal of closure—these two, from their opposite origins, independently preserve. The resonance is real, and it is the more striking for being unforced: a Russian theory of the dialogic word and a classical Chinese verb of formation, with no line of influence between them, agree that the being of culture is generative.

Why the resonance has not been activated

Yet the resonance has never done the work it could do, and the reason is that each of its two poles possesses the insight without the means to develop it. The Chinese tradition holds the generative conception of culture in a vocabulary of great depth, but it does not bring to that conception the analytic apparatus the modern question of culture requires: it does not thematize drive and its lack, it does not articulate the registers of experience, and it does not carry a critique of the material and political conditions under which culture is produced and captured. It has the insight and not the analysis. The Western traditions, conversely, have built exactly these analytic instruments—the psychoanalysis

of desire, the theory of the symbolic order, the political economy of cultural production—but have overwhelmingly put them at the service of the settled conception, using them to anatomize culture as a prior web, a deep structure, or a congealed order of power, and thereby burying the very generativity the dialogic strand alone, at the margin, kept alive. The West has the analysis and, mostly, not the insight. Each pole, in short, has half of what a complete account requires, and the two halves have never been joined, because joining them requires a framework that is neither simply Chinese nor simply Western, that can hold the generative conception of culture and the analytic apparatus of drive, register, and material condition in a single structure.

The framework as the activator

This is the office the next section's framework is built to perform, and naming that office is the business of this turn. The three-register dialectic of the relational Real is not offered as a reconciliation that splits the difference between East and West, nor as a synthesis that dissolves either into the other. It is offered as the apparatus that activates the resonance: a more fundamental ontology of relational generation within which each tradition's truth finds its place. The generative conception that the dialogic strand and the Chinese *hua* independently preserve becomes, within this framework, the basic character of culture as such—culture as the ongoing, unfinished exteriorization of a relational generativity. And the analytic instruments the West has built become the means of specifying *how* that generation works: drive as what is coded and sublimated in it, the three registers as the dimensions across which it is exteriorized, the material conditions as what constrains it, the phallic organization of the symbolic as where power enters it, and the counter-power of a just generation as what keeps that power from entrenching. The framework does not adjudicate between the traditions; it gives each its function within a generative ontology none of them, alone, possessed. With this office named, the thesis is complete and the antithesis can begin, not by adding a seventh view to the six, but by stating the framework within which all six are to be reread and each assigned its truth and its limit.

6.10. The Three-Register Dialectic of the Relational Real

The antithesis does not proceed by adding a seventh theory to the six. It proceeds by stating the framework within which the six are to be reread, each granted its truth and shown its limit, and within which the resonance the previous section identified can at last be activated. This section states that framework. It is a variant of the Lacanian theory of the three registers, and it is arrived at by four determinate revisions of that theory, each of which will be set out with its definition, its difference from orthodox Lacan, its justification, its positive claim, and what it yields for the theory of culture. The framework is named, at the close, the *three-register dialectic of the relational Real*.

Why Lacan, and why revised

The choice of Lacan as the host theory is not eclectic but motivated by a single property: integrative capacity. The Lacanian triad of the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real is one of the few conceptual apparatuses that can hold, within a single structure, everything this paper must relate—the non-symbolizable ground of experience (the Real), the order of language, law, and meaning (the Symbolic), the field of image and identification (the Imaginary), the organization of power (through the phallic signifier within the Symbolic), the economy of drive and its lack (through the objet petit a and the constitutive lack), and the phenomenology of the subject's experience across all three (Lacan 2006; Lacan 1978). Each of the six traditions grasps one facet of this and absolutizes it: the interpretive tradition takes the Symbolic alone, the power tradition takes the Symbolic-as-power alone, the transmission tradition takes a sedimented Imaginary-and-Symbolic and freezes it. The virtue of the Lacanian triad is that it can house them all at once and show each as partial. That is the reason to adopt it. The reason to revise it is that, left orthodox, it is a theory of the individual subject and a static topology, and this paper needs a theory of culture, of relation, and of historical motion. The four revisions convert the one into the other.

Revision One: the Real has a neglected relational form

Definition. Orthodox Lacan gives the Real chiefly a negative and individual face: the Real is what resists symbolization absolutely, the traumatic remainder, the ineffable that the signifier cannot reach, encountered by the subject as the abyss around which anxiety

turns (Lacan 1992). The first revision does not deny this face. It claims that the Real has, besides its negative traumatic form, a *positive relational form*: the non-symbolizable coupling generated between two subjects, the “us” that no signifier exhausts, is Real in the precise sense that it exceeds symbolization, yet it is not a trauma and not an abyss but a bond. Both forms of the Real coexist; the revision recovers the second, which the tradition, fixed on the first, left in shadow.

Difference from orthodox Lacan. The revision is deliberately moderate. It does not assert that all Reality is relational, which would be a wholesale ontological reconstruction the paper does not need and would have to defend against every instance of purely individual traumatic Real. It asserts only that alongside the individual traumatic Real there is a relational Real, a positive unsymbolizable borne in the coupling of subjects. This is consonant with a claim developed elsewhere by the present author, that relation is the unsymbolizable in its positive form.

Justification. The interpretive tradition (§6.4) locks culture in the Symbolic, and the power tradition (§6.6) locks it in power, precisely because neither has a relational Real to appeal to. Something in intimate culture is neither a meaning nor an encoding of force—the unsayable, unownable “between” of two people—and only a relational Real can name it. *Claim.* The relational form of the Real is the non-symbolizable core of a relational coupling; it is the anchor of culture outside both sign and power, standing beside the traumatic Real rather than replacing it. *Cultural yield.* Endogenous culture has, in the register of the Real, a root that power—whose organ, the phallic signifier, operates in the Symbolic—cannot reach.

Revision Two: the Real is not *completely* symbolizable

Definition. The relational Real, like the traumatic Real, resists complete symbolization: it always leaves a remainder that no sign exhausts and no accounting captures. This revision is a deliberate *retention* of what orthodox Lacan gets right, imported as a discipline against a naive constructivism that would make culture wholly a matter of signs.

Difference from orthodox Lacan. Almost none; the fidelity is the point.

Justification. Were the Real completely symbolizable, culture could in principle be fully encoded, fully captured, fully commodified, and the resistance that both experience and

justice testify to would be unintelligible. The remainder must be preserved. *Claim.* The Real core of culture resists symbolization and therefore resists commodification: this is the ontological ground of what a later section calls the decoherence of capture—the symbolic surface of a bond can be forged and sold while its Real coherence is drawn off and lost, because the surface is symbolizable and the core is not. *Cultural yield.* Intimate culture cannot be completely captured by capital; the claim now has a ground in the structure of the Real rather than resting on sentiment.

Revision Three: culture spans all three registers, none dispensable

Definition. Culture is not a Symbolic phenomenon alone. Every cultural phenomenon is constituted *at once and necessarily* across the three registers: in the Imaginary (image, identification, the aesthetic face), in the Symbolic (language, rule, institution), and in the Real (the non-symbolizable relational core). A “culture” present in only one register is a mutilated abstraction; the presence in each register is substantial and non-derivative.

Difference from orthodox Lacan. The triad, in Lacan, structures the *subject*; here it structures *culture*, a relational object, extending the device as the intimacy series has already extended it to relational trust across the three registers. *Justification.* The transmission tradition seizes an Imaginary-Symbolic sediment, the interpretive tradition the Symbolic web, the power tradition the Symbolic-as-power; each absolutizes one register. To span all three is the sublation of their several one-sidednesses. *Claim.* Culture has a substantial mode of being in each register; any theory that treats only one is partial. *Cultural yield.* This directly answers the power tradition (§6.6): if culture were only Symbolic, Foucault and Gramsci would win, for the phallic signifier organizes the Symbolic; but because culture has a substantial, non-derivative existence in the Real—where, by Revisions One and Two, a relational and non-symbolizable core resides—culture possesses an anchor the organ of power cannot reach, and is therefore not locked shut by power. This is the ground the sublation of power (§6.15) will stand on.

Revision Four: the three registers are not static but in materially driven, dialectical motion

Definition. In orthodox Lacan of the late topology, the three registers are knotted in a Borromean structure, a synchronic and relatively stable form in which each ring is necessary and none superior, the whole holding the subject together (Lacan 1975). The fourth revision sets this structure into *motion*, and the motion has a determinate form with three components. The first is the *direct dialectic between the registers*: the Symbolic continually works to capture the Real—to name it, to rule it, to render the unsayable “between” into a sign, a rite, at the limit a commodity—while the Real continually overflows the Symbolic, exceeding every naming and returning as the remainder that requires a new form; the Imaginary is the mediating field and the battleground on which this contest is fought. The second is the *deep dialectical form*, Hegelian rather than merely oppositional: the three registers may be read as moments of a self-unfolding of relational spirit—the Imaginary as immediacy (the unmediated image, the specular identification), the Symbolic as mediation and determinate negation (the image cut and negated by the sign), the Real as the negation of the negation (what returns, after the failure of symbolization, as a higher unsymbolizable that is now a mediated Real and not the original one). The third is the *material motor*: this motion is not a self-movement of pure spirit, which would be idealism, but is driven by material conditions—which signifies the Symbolic has to capture the Real with, and in what form the Real overflows, are conditioned by the forces and relations of production, so that media determine the available symbolic forms and material conditions determine the possible forms of relation. This is the joint at which historical materialism and Lacan are welded: the dialectic of the registers has a material engine.

Difference from orthodox Lacan. The synchronic, relatively stable Borromean topology is converted into a diachronic, materially driven contradiction; the Real ceases to be a static resistant remainder and becomes an active moment that overflows and demands new symbolization.

Justification. A static triad yields the *structure* of culture but not its *history*. Only registers in materially driven contradiction, with the Real perpetually overflowing, can ground—ontologically—the claims that culture has no final truth, is never static, and develops.

Programmatic claim (a disciplined historical dialectic, not the slogan that culture has “no truth”): *The truth of culture is historical and non-terminal. Every cultural form is, under specific material conditions, one capture by the Symbolic of the relational Real, and is to be evaluated dialectically: one acknowledges its progressive significance under its own historical conditions, and one recognizes the limit it discloses when conditions change and the Real overflows anew. Culture therefore develops—not by converging on an absolute truth, but by the historical sublation of its own prior forms, through the materially driven motion of the three registers. To criticize a cultural form and to acknowledge its former progressiveness are two faces of one dialectical evaluation.*

Cultural yield. Cultural evolution is the diachronic unfolding of this contradiction; every form is an incomplete capture of the relational Real; capital’s commodification is the extreme form of Symbolic capture and necessarily meets the Real’s resistance; the encoding of power likewise cannot lock culture shut. This revision supplies the ontological ground for the dialectical sublation of power (§6.15) and the dialectic of cultural evolution (§6.16). By way of illustration: in criticizing an old culture—a rite, a hierarchy of rank—one nonetheless acknowledges, dialectically, its progressive meaning under the conditions that produced it.

The position, and the chain it unlocks

Taken together the four revisions constitute a nameable position, the *three-register dialectic of the relational Real*: a Lacanian variant in which the Real is granted a relational form, in which that Real remains not completely symbolizable, in which culture spans all three registers without any being dispensable, and in which the registers move in a materially driven dialectic. The position unlocks a single chain that is the theoretical spine of the whole paper: the dialectic of the three registers means the Real perpetually overflows the Symbolic; because the Real overflows, culture cannot be locked shut by either power or capital, both of which operate by Symbolic capture; because it cannot be locked shut, culture can develop historically and dialectically; and because its development is bound at once by the resistance of the Real and by the criterion of justice, it has direction without a terminus—no final truth, but not mere drift either. Along this chain the psychoanalytic line is promoted from a mere “ground in drive” to the very skeleton of the framework, the three registers, within which drive, power, and the Real each find their place; and

along this same chain the lines of historical materialism and of the Hegelian dialectic are welded to that skeleton, the one as the material motor of the registers' motion, the other as its form. With the framework stated, the antithesis can do its proper work: expose the presupposition the six traditions share, and invert it.

6.11. The Shared Presupposition and Its Inversion

With the framework stated, the antithesis can do the work the map assigned it: to draw the traditions from their several coordinates toward the vacant one. It does this not by refuting each in turn, which would be tedious and would miss what unites them, but by exposing the single presupposition they share beneath their disagreements and inverting it. The six traditions dispute almost everything—whether culture is a whole or a web or a structure or an encoding of power, whether it means or reproduces or dominates—but underneath the dispute they agree, with the partial exception of the two that lean toward the generative, on one thing: that culture is, in its mode of being, a *thing already made*. An acquirable heritage, a prior web of meaning, a deep structure operating behind the agents' backs, a congealed order of power into which subjects are inducted—each of these is a culture that stands *before* the individual, who enters it, bears it, is formed or dominated by it, but does not, in the analysis, make it. The individual is the container of culture or its effect, never, at the moment the theory looks, its generating source.

The inversion

The framework of the previous section inverts this presupposition at its root. Culture is not a prior object into which individuals are inducted; it is a process that relational subjects continually generate in their coupling. It is not a web the individual falls into but a weaving the relation performs, and—this is the decisive addition—a weaving that turns back to weave the relation in its turn, so that the subjects who generate the culture are themselves generated, as these subjects, by the culture they generate. The priority the six traditions grant to the made-thing over the making is exactly reversed: the making is primary, and the made-thing, the sedimented culture that the traditions take for the whole, is the residue the making leaves behind and the material the next round of making takes up. What the transmission tradition called an acquirable stock is the ash of a fire it

never watched burn; what the interpretive tradition called a web already spun is a weaving caught at a late moment and mistaken for a finished textile; what the structural tradition called a deep structure behind the agents is the sedimented regularity of a generation the agents are even now carrying on.

This inversion is, in its logical form, the Hegelian moment the second line of the paper supplies, and naming it as such shows that the inversion is not a mere reversal of emphasis but a determinate movement. Culture is spirit exteriorized: the relation goes out of itself into a visible, sedimented form—a word, a rite, an institution—and this going-out is not the loss the traditions implicitly treat it as, a congealing of living process into dead thing, but the necessary path by which the relation comes to know itself. The exteriorized culture is the relation's self-objectification, in which it can see what it has become and from which it returns to itself altered, entering the next round of generation already changed by having beheld its own work. The sedimented forms the traditions describe are real, then, and the inversion does not deny them; it relocates them, as moments in a movement, from the status of the thing culture *is* to the status of the residue culture *leaves* and the mirror in which it knows itself. Exteriorization, not as fall but as self-knowledge: this is the form of the inversion, and it is why the paper can keep everything the traditions correctly saw while denying the priority they granted it.

What is kept and what is discarded

The inversion is not a wholesale rejection, and fairness to the traditions requires that its takings and leavings be stated exactly. Each tradition saw something real; the framework keeps the seeing and discards only the presupposition of the made-thing's priority. The table records this, tradition by tradition.

Tradition	Kept (absorbed)	Discarded / sublated
Transmission & collective representation	transmissibility and sedimentation are real features of culture	its <i>static, already-made</i> mode of being
Symbol & interpretation	culture is a web of meaning, relational, read by thick description	the absolutizing of the Symbolic; meaning as prior to the subjects
Structure & reproduction	culture does reproduce and does have structure	the <i>extractable / transferable</i> premise of cultural capital
Power as ontology	power is internal to all culture (the anti-naïve lesson)	sublated: that culture <i>is</i> Symbolic power-encoding with no outside
The dialogic (Bakhtin)	<i>kept most</i> : dialogism, unfinishedness, generation in answering	only what it lacks is added—drive, the registers, the material ground
The Chinese <i>wen-hua</i>	the verbal, generative force of <i>hua</i> ; process before product	its historical entanglement with a cultivation imposed from above

Read across, the table shows that the dialogic strand is the framework's near kin, from which most is taken, and the power tradition the one that is not discarded but *sublated*—its clear-eyed insistence that power is internal to all culture is kept in full, while its conclusion that culture is therefore nothing but Symbolic power-encoding, with no outside, is negated by the relational Real that the framework installs in a register power cannot reach. The remaining three each surrender only the presupposition of the already-made, in the specific form each gave it: the frozen heritage, the pre-spun web, the extractable asset. With the shared presupposition inverted and each tradition's truth reassigned its place, the antithesis can proceed from this general reversal to the two specific developments the framework demands: the account of culture as the exteriorization of drive, and the dialectic of the material and the ideal on which the whole rests.

6.12. Culture as the Exteriorization and Organization of Drive

The general inversion must now be given its content, and the first content is the one the psychoanalytic line supplies: that what culture exteriorizes is, at bottom, *drive*. The

interpretive tradition began to show, without following it through, that the symbolic order into which the subject is inducted opens a constitutive lack; the framework of the registers lets that beginning be completed. Culture is not the exteriorization of a neutral content, a stock of meanings that might just as well have been otherwise. It is the exteriorization of drive: the giving of a transmissible, shareable form to what in the subject presses toward satisfaction and can never simply attain it, what circles the constitutive lack without filling it. This is the deepest sense in which culture is generated rather than given—it is generated out of the drive's need to find, in the field of the Other, forms through which it can circulate—and it is the sense the settled traditions, working at the level of meaning or structure or power, could not reach, because the drive is precisely what does not appear at the level of meaning taken alone.

Coding and sublimation

Two operations name how drive becomes culture. The first is *coding*: the drive, which is not itself sayable, is given form in the signifier, and the whole apparatus of the symbolic order is, seen from this angle, the coding by which an unsayable pressure is rendered into a circulable sign. What the interpretive tradition saw as a web of meaning is, from the side of the drive, the coded deposit of a desire that had to find some form or remain mute. The second is *sublimation*, in the precise sense Lacan gave it: the raising of an object to the dignity of the Thing, the investment of a made object—a work, a rite, a phrase—with the weight of that lost and impossible object around which the drive turns (Lacan 1992). Sublimation is the operation by which the drive's relation to its impossible object is given a cultural body: the poem, the ritual, the shared practice is a sublimation in this sense, an object lifted into the place of the Thing, and this is why cultural forms carry a charge out of all proportion to their manifest content. They are not decorated meanings; they are the drive's impossible object, given a form in which it can be approached without being seized. Culture, coded and sublimated, is the drive's exteriorization into a form that can be shared and handed on.

Shared fantasy: the interweaving in the couple

It is in intimate relation that this account reaches its sharpest and most distinctive form, and the distinction is the seed of the whole second part of the paper. Orthodox

psychoanalysis writes the subject's relation to its object in the formula of fantasy, the barred subject in relation to the objet petit a, the object-cause of desire that veils the constitutive lack and lets desire run (Lacan 1978). In intimate relation this structure is not doubled side by side, as though each partner ran a private fantasy in parallel; it is *interwoven*. Each becomes implicated in the other's fantasy, enters the place of the other's objet a, so that the object-cause around which each one's desire turns is no longer wholly private but is bound up with, and partly occupied by, the other. The private culture of a couple—its idioms, its private jokes, its rites—is the sediment of this interwoven fantasy. A private joke is funny to exactly two people because its charge is anchored in a shared coordinate of desire that only those two occupy; translated to a third, it is not diminished but simply absent, because the third does not stand in the fantasy that gives it its charge. This is the psychoanalytic mechanism of the *non-transferability* the paper claimed against Bourdieu's cultural capital: the couple's culture cannot be handed over, not by an accident of privacy, but because its value is lodged in an interweaving of drive that does not exist outside the relation and cannot be carried out of it. What is transferred, if the outer form is copied, is a shell without its charge—the words of the joke without the desire that made them funny.

The reciprocal turn: culture organizes the drive that generates it

The account would be incomplete, and would fall back into a one-way determination, if it stopped at the drive generating culture. The relation runs both ways, and the reciprocity is essential. Culture is generated by drive and *in turn organizes* the drive that generated it. The idioms and rites a couple make do not merely record a pre-existing structure of desire; they shape it, channel it, give it paths it did not have before, so that the desire of each is progressively formed by the culture the two of them generate. This is the drive-level correlate of the Hegelian return of the previous section: the exteriorized culture comes back to constitute the subjects whose drive exteriorized it. A shared rite does not only express the bond; it deepens and directs the desire that sustains the bond, so that the partners come to want along the channels their shared culture has cut. Culture is thus neither the mere expression of a prior drive nor an autonomous order imposed on drive from without, but the exteriorized form in which drive organizes itself, through the detour of a shared world, into something more determinate than it was.

The material constraint on the forms of fantasy

Here the historical-materialist line enters, to forbid the account from floating free into a pure psychology of desire. The forms in which drive can be coded, the objects that can be raised to the dignity of the Thing, the shared fantasies a couple can weave, are not arbitrary and not unconditioned. They are constrained by material conditions: by the media available to give the drive a form (what can be written, recorded, shown, sent), and by the relations of production that shape which fantasies are livable and which are foreclosed. A shared culture built around objects a market supplies is a different exteriorization of drive from one built around objects the two people make, and which is possible for a given couple is not a free choice but a fact about their material world. The economy of the drive and the economy of production are joined here, at the point where the forms available for the exteriorization of desire are set by the material conditions of a time. This joining is stated now and developed in Part Three, where the capture of intimate culture by capital is shown to operate precisely by supplying, and thereby colonizing, the forms in which the couple's drive would otherwise have found its own exteriorization. For now the point is only that the drive does not exteriorize itself into culture in a vacuum, and that the psychoanalytic account of culture, to be true, must be a materially conditioned one.

6.13. The Dialectic of the Material and the Ideal

The antithesis closes with the dialectic on which the whole framework balances, and which the two preceding sections have each leaned on without stating: the relation between the material and the ideal in culture. The account of culture as the exteriorization of drive, and before it the inversion that made culture a generation rather than a deposit, both require that culture be at once produced by material conditions and irreducible to them—an ideal form with its own efficacy, yet never floating free of the material ground that conditions it. This double requirement is the site of the two vulgarizations the paper must refuse, and refusing both is what its position on the material and the ideal amounts to.

Two vulgarizations refused

The first vulgarization is *mechanical determinism*: the reduction of culture to a passive reflection of the economic base, a mere epiphenomenon that registers material conditions and does nothing back. On this view the culture a couple generates would be simply the shadow their material circumstances cast, and to explain the circumstances would be to explain the culture entirely. This is the error against which Engels warned in his later correspondence, and the warning is worth stating in his own terms because it is often forgotten by those who invoke historical materialism most loudly. The ultimately determining element in history, Engels wrote to Bloch in 1890, is the production and reproduction of real life; but to twist this into the claim that the economic element is the *only* determining one is to transform the proposition into a meaningless, abstract, senseless phrase (Engels 1890). The economic situation is the base, but the elements of the superstructure exert their own influence on the course of struggles and in many cases preponderate in determining their *form*. Culture, that is, has a *relative autonomy* and a genuine reciprocal action upon the conditions that produce it; it is determined in the last instance, not in the first, and the space between the last instance and the first is exactly the space in which culture does its own work. This relative autonomy is not a concession that weakens the materialist thesis; it is what gives the thesis a culture worth explaining rather than a shadow.

The second vulgarization is the opposite error, *idealism*: the treatment of culture as a self-generating order of meaning or spirit that spins itself out of its own resources, owing nothing essential to the material conditions of its production. This is the error the Hegelian line of the paper, taken alone, would tempt one toward—for if culture is spirit exteriorizing and knowing itself, one might forget that the exteriorization is always into a material medium and under material constraint, and imagine a self-movement of pure relational spirit generating culture out of itself. The framework refuses this as firmly as it refuses the first error. The dialectic of the registers has a material motor, as the meta-theoretical statement insisted: which signifiers are available to capture the Real, which fantasies are livable, which forms the drive can take, are set by the forces and relations of production, and no movement of the registers occurs except in and through a material medium that conditions it.

The dialectical position: constrained but not determined

Between these two refusals stands the position the paper holds throughout, and it can now be stated as a thesis about the material and the ideal as such: culture is *materially constrained but not materially determined*. The distinction is not a verbal hedge but the precise content of the dialectic, and it is the same distinction the intimacy series has maintained in its treatments of trust and of power, that a condition may bound a range of possibility without selecting a point within it. Material conditions set what is possible—they fix the outer limits of the forms culture can take, foreclose some exteriorizations of drive and enable others, supply the media and the relations within which any cultural generation must occur—and within those limits the generation is genuinely open, genuinely the work of the relational subjects whose drive and history it exteriorizes, and genuinely capable of reacting back upon the conditions that bounded it. The material is the floor and the walls; it is not the choreography. To say culture is constrained is to deny idealism: there is no cultural generation that escapes its material conditions, and the couple that imagines its private world a pure creation owing nothing to its circumstances is deceived. To say culture is not determined is to deny mechanism: the material conditions do not select which culture will be generated within the range they permit, and the couple's generation is a real generation and not the mere playing-out of a material script. Both denials are needed, and holding them together is the dialectic.

Why this closes the antithesis

This dialectic closes the antithesis because it secures, at the level of the material and the ideal, exactly what the whole antithesis was for. The inversion made culture a generation; the account of drive gave the generation its content; and this dialectic gives the generation its correct relation to the material world, neither cut loose from it into idealism nor collapsed into it as its shadow. It is on this basis that the synthesis can define cultural emergence in a way that is at once materialist—bound to the forces and relations of production, historical rather than eternal—and non-reductive—a real generation with its own efficacy, carrying the exteriorized drive of relational subjects across the three registers. The synthesis can now be stated, for the ground it requires is complete: an inversion of the shared presupposition, a psychoanalytic account of what culture exteriorizes, and a dialectic of the material and the ideal that keeps the exteriorization honest. The definition

of the emergence of culture in intimate relation follows.

6.14. The Emergence of Culture in Intimate Relation: A Definition

The synthesis can now state its definition. The thesis surveyed the traditions and mapped their common presupposition; the antithesis inverted that presupposition, gave the inversion its content in the exteriorization of drive, and secured it in a dialectic of the material and the ideal, all within the framework of the three-register dialectic of the relational Real. What these yield, gathered into a single formulation, is a definition of what culture is and how it emerges—general in its statement, and about to be made special, in the second part, to the intimate dyad from which the paper takes its name.

The definition

Definition. *Culture*, in its mode of being, is generated as the dialectical exteriorization, by relational subjects and under the constraint of material conditions, of their interwoven structure of drive and their shared history of generation, into transmissible and re-enactable forms—idioms, rites, private references, understandings—across the three registers of the imaginary, the symbolic, and the real; a generation that, returning upon the relation that carries it, organizes and sustains that relation in turn.

Every clause of this definition carries a result established earlier, and the definition is best read by unfolding them. *The dialectical exteriorization*: culture is spirit going out of itself into a visible form and returning altered, the Hegelian movement of §6.11, not a deposit laid down once but a going-out that is a coming-to-self. *By relational subjects*: the unit is neither the individual nor the collectivity but the relation, the coupling in which and for which the culture is made; this is the coordinate the map left vacant and the framework filled. *Under the constraint of material conditions*: the exteriorization is materially constrained but not materially determined, bounded in its range by the

forces and relations of production and open within that range, the dialectic of §6.13. *Of their interwoven structure of drive*: what is exteriorized is drive, coded and sublimated, and in intimate relation the drive of the two is interwoven rather than parallel, so that the culture is the sediment of a shared fantasy, the result of §6.12. *And their shared history of generation*: culture is not only the exteriorization of a present structure but the sedimentation of a history, the accumulated record of what the relation has generated, folded into forms that can be taken up again. *Into transmissible and re-enactable forms*: the sedimented side the traditions correctly saw is preserved here, as the residue and the material of generation rather than its whole—the idiom that can be repeated, the rite that can be performed again. *Across the three registers*: the forms are not symbolic only but imaginary, symbolic, and real at once, none dispensable, per the third revision; the culture lives as image and identification, as language and rule, and as the non-symbolizable relational core. *At once generated by the relation and, returning upon it, organizes and sustains it*: the reciprocal turn, in which the exteriorized culture comes back to form the very subjects and shape the very drive that generated it, so that culture is not a product the relation has but a process by which the relation continues to be what it is.

What the definition distinguishes and secures

Two distinctions the definition draws are worth making explicit, because the rest of the paper turns on them. The first distinguishes culture from the aesthetic field treated in the preceding paper of this series. The aesthetic, there, was the field of present perception, the beauty generated in the relational event of a shared seeing; culture, here, is what that field becomes when it is sedimented over time and made transmissible and re-enactable—the aesthetic field’s temporal sedimentation and passage into form. Beauty is generated in the moment of shared perception; culture is generated when such moments deposit into idioms and rites that can be carried forward, so that culture stands to the aesthetic field as the sedimented and repeatable stands to the present and singular. This locates the present paper exactly with respect to its predecessor: where that paper asked how a relation generates present beauty, this one asks how a relation generates a durable world.

The second distinction concerns scale, and it must be stated with the caution the paper has reserved for it. The definition is general; it is meant to hold of culture as such, at any scale. But the paper claims only a *weak analogy*, not a structural identity, between the

micro-culture of the intimate dyad and the macro-culture of a people or a symbolic order. The mechanism of emergence—relational subjects exteriorizing interwoven drive and shared history across the registers, under material constraint—may be stated generally, and the general statement illuminates both scales. But the specific features that make the intimate dyad the paper's subject, above all the vacancy of the big Other and the two-person structure that the second part will develop, do not scale up: a people has a full big Other in its traditions and institutions, where a couple has none, and the analogy between the scales must therefore be drawn as an illumination and not pressed into an identity. The definition holds generally; the phenomenology that follows is of the special case, and the special case is special in ways the general definition does not capture. It is to that special case—the emergence of culture in the intimate dyad, in its irreducible particularity—that the paper now turns, and it is there, and not in the general definition just stated, that the paper means to make its distinctive contribution.

6.15. The Dialectical Sublation of Power

The synthesis has stated its definition, but it has not yet discharged the debt the thesis left it. The strongest of the traditions, the one that held power to be the very ontology of culture, raised an objection before the paper's central claim was even made: that there is no outside, no site free of power from which an endogenous culture could be generated, and that the claim of a private world between two people is therefore a naivety, since the intimacy in which the couple would build it is already shot through with the phallic organization of power (§6.6). This objection must be met before the phenomenology of intimate culture can proceed, and it must be met, as promised, not by denial but by sublation—by conceding what is true in it and turning that concession into the ground of a different answer.

The concession

The concession is total and unhedged: power *is* internal to all culture. The paper does not claim that intimate relation is a sanctuary outside power, a pure space where two people generate a culture untouched by domination. This would be exactly the naivety the power tradition diagnosed, and the framework of the previous sections forbids it, for

the same reason the tradition gives: culture spans the symbolic, the symbolic is organized by the phallic signifier, and the phallic signifier is the organ of power within the symbolic order. A culture that spans the symbolic therefore carries power in its very constitution. More than this: the process of generation itself produces power. Wherever value is generated, an asymmetry of contribution, of recognition, of dependence, is generated with it, and this asymmetry is power in its elementary form. There is no generation of culture, not even between two people who love each other, that does not generate power along with it. The psychoanalytic clear-sightedness the tradition shares—that there is no pure emancipatory space because there is no system of production and relation not already traversed by power—is accepted in full. Intimate relation generates power as surely as it generates culture, because generating the one is generating the other.

The turn: the objection was already answered by the fourth principle

But the concession, which looks like a surrender, is the pivot of the reply, for the generation of power was already provided for in the ethics this series built before the objection was raised. The fourth of the five principles of just relational reproduction states that, since the generation of value carries power, a just generation must in the same movement generate the *counter-power* that restrains power and prevents its entrenchment (Huang 2025b). The objection assumed that to concede power's internality was to concede the game—that if power is everywhere, then the dominated is everywhere and the endogenous culture is a fold of domination like any other. The fourth principle denies the inference. That power is internal to all generation does not entail that all generation is unjust; it entails that the justice of a generation lies not in the absence of power, which is impossible, but in whether the same process that generates power also generates the force that keeps that power from congealing. The question is not *whether* there is power in the couple's culture—there always is—but whether the culture generates, alongside its power, the counter-power that prevents that power from entrenching into fixed domination. Justice is not purity; it is the internal generation of the restraint.

The mechanics: friction and the force that changes direction

The mechanism can be given a form, and a mechanical image makes it exact. Power entering culture is like a body set moving on a surface. One cannot abolish the surface—

one cannot generate culture without generating power, as one cannot have motion without a ground. But justice requires two forces to act upon the moving body. The first is a *friction*, a counter-force that resists the unlimited accumulation of power and prevents it from running away into entrenched domination; without it, power accelerates along whatever gradient it finds and congeals into a fixed hierarchy, and the culture degrades into a mere reproduction of that hierarchy—the naturalized rank, the settled hegemony the power tradition described. The second is a *force that changes direction*, a counter-force of non-entrenchment that keeps the structure re-orientable, able to be turned and re-formed rather than locked onto a single axis of authority. A culture with neither force is a body sliding down the gradient of its own power, and this is the fate the power tradition took for the destiny of all culture. A culture that generates both forces—friction against accumulation, and the power to change direction against fixation—is a culture in which power is present but not entrenched, exercised but not congealed. The two forces are not imported from outside the relation; they are generated within it, by the same process that generates the culture and its power, when that process is just.

The ontological deepening of power-to and power-over

This gives the distinction between power-over and power-to, which an earlier paper of this series drew, an ontological depth it did not yet have (Wanhong 2026a). That distinction is often heard as a contrast between a bad power that dominates and a good power that enables, as though power-to were simply the absence of power-over, a benign capacity with no coercive edge. The present account shows that this is not quite right, and that the truth is stronger. Power-to is not the absence of power; it is power whose accumulation is met by an internally generated friction and whose direction is kept open by an internally generated force of re-orientation. Endogenous intimate culture is not a culture *without* power—no culture is—but a culture in which power is *non-dominating*, held in the condition of power-to by the continual internal generation of its own counter-power. The difference between a couple whose shared culture liberates and one whose shared culture dominates is not that the first has escaped power and the second has not; it is that the first generates, with its power, the friction and the re-orientation that keep the power from entrenching, and the second does not. With this, the objection of the power tradition is not evaded but answered on its own ground: yes, power is internal to

all culture, including the most intimate; and precisely because the intimacy series built, into its ethics of relational reproduction, the requirement that just generation generate its own counter-power, the internality of power is not the end of the endogenous but the condition it must meet. The phenomenology of intimate culture can now proceed, no longer under the shadow of an objection it has not answered.

6.16. The Dialectic of Cultural Evolution

One question remains before the synthesis is complete and the paper can descend into the intimate dyad: how culture, so defined, *changes*. The definition gave culture's mode of being and the sublation of power secured its justice, but a culture that is generation rather than deposit must have an account of its own movement through time, and that account must avoid two opposite errors as carefully as the dialectic of the material and the ideal avoided its two. This section gives the dialectic of cultural evolution, and in giving it completes both the synthesis and the Hegelian line that has run through the whole part.

Two errors about cultural change

The first error is the model of *linear progress*: the idea, inherited from the evolutionary anthropology that stands behind the very first tradition, that culture develops along a single ascending track from lower to higher forms, each stage an advance on the last, the whole tending toward a terminus of completion or truth. This is the error that reads the history of culture as a march, and it is refused by everything the paper has established: if the truth of culture is historical and non-terminal, if every cultural form is one materially conditioned capture of a Real that overflows it, then there is no single track and no terminus, and the notion of a highest culture toward which all others are steps is a projection of one form's self-image onto the whole of history. The second error is the opposite: the model of *mere reproduction*, the pessimistic determinism that reads cultural change as no change at all, only the endless recirculation of a power order that reproduces itself under cosmetic variation, so that what looks like development is always the same domination in a new dress. This is the error to which the power tradition, taken without its dialectical corrective, tends: if culture is nothing but the encoding of power,

then its history is nothing but the reproduction of power, and the appearance of the new is an illusion. The first error sees only ascent; the second sees only the wheel. Both miss the actual movement, which is neither a line nor a circle but a dialectic.

Evolution as the contradiction of power-generation and counter-power-generation

The actual movement can be stated as a contradiction, and it is the contradiction the previous section prepared. Cultural evolution is the movement of *power-generation against counter-power-generation*. Every cultural form, in generating value, generates power, and that power tends toward entrenchment—toward congealing into a fixed order, a hierarchy naturalized, a hegemony settled. This is the moment of truth in the reproduction model: left to itself, the generation of culture would indeed tend toward the reproduction of an entrenching power. But the generation of power is met, in a just generation, by the internal generation of counter-power, the friction and the re-orientation of the previous section; and this counter-power is the negation that the entrenching power calls forth from within the same process. The culture generates the power; the power tends to entrench; the generation, if just, generates against its own entrenching power a counter-power that negates the entrenchment; and this negation, in turn, opens the culture to a new form, which generates its own power, which tends to entrench, which calls forth its own counter-power, and so on. This is not a line, because it does not ascend toward a terminus; it is not a circle, because the counter-power does not return the culture to where it began but opens it to a form that did not exist before. It is a spiral of determinate negation, and its motor, as always in this paper, is material: which powers entrench and which counter-powers can be generated against them are set by the forces and relations of production, so that the dialectic of cultural evolution is a materially driven contradiction and not a self-movement of spirit.

The negation of the negation, materialized

This is the point at which the Hegelian line of the paper reaches its completion, and it should be named as such. The movement just described is the negation of the negation, the deepest figure of the dialectic, here given a material body and a cultural content. The first negation is the entrenchment of power: the generated culture goes out of itself into a power that congeals, that stands over against the generativity that produced it, that

threatens to fix the living relation into a dead hierarchy—the moment of estrangement, of exteriorization become domination. The second negation, the negation of this negation, is the counter-power generated from within: not a return to an original innocence before power, which never existed, but a determinate negation of the entrenchment that carries the culture forward to a new form, a form that preserves what the entrenched power had generated while negating its fixity. Estrangement is thus not the end of the story, as the reproduction model would have it, but a moment in a movement that passes through it; the exteriorized culture that has become a dominating power can be negated in its turn and taken up into a form in which the relation reclaims what its own power had captured. This is why the paper can hold, at once, that power is internal to all culture and that culture is not doomed to the reproduction of domination: because the internality of power is the first negation, and the internal generation of counter-power is the second, and the second is as native to a just generation as the first is to generation as such.

Evaluating a culture historically

From this follows the mode of evaluation the fourth revision announced, and stating it completes the synthesis. A cultural form is to be evaluated neither by its distance along a track of progress nor by its mere function in reproducing power, but dialectically, by its place in this movement. One asks of a form both what it generated and how its power stood: whether, under the material conditions that produced it, it was a genuine advance, a capture of the Real that let the relation generate more than it could before—and whether the power it generated was met by a counter-power or allowed to entrench. The same form may be, under its own conditions, a real progress, and, when conditions change and the Real it captured overflows anew, a fetter to be negated. To criticize an old cultural form and to acknowledge its former progressiveness are therefore, as the programmatic claim held, two faces of one dialectical evaluation: the form was the negation its moment required, and it becomes, in a later moment, the negation to be negated.

From this the paper draws a fourth thesis of its own, a criterion of cultural persistence that stands alongside the geometric criterion of the good cycle developed earlier in the series. Call it the *counter-power criterion*: whether a cultural form can continue to generate across a change in the conditions that produced it turns on whether it generates, endogenously, a counter-power against the power it itself carries. A form that transmits

its power without transmitting the means of that power's revision entrenches, and when its conditions change it passes from a form that generated into a form that fetters; a form that carries, with its power, a counter-power that keeps that power open to re-orientation can be turned to conditions its authors did not foresee, and so continues to generate where the rigid form breaks. The criterion does not equate persistence with the presence of counter-power, as though the one were the other; it holds that the endogenous generation of counter-power is what conditions the possibility of persistence through change, the difference between a form that bends and a form that breaks. It is the temporal and evolutionary counterpart, at the scale of a culture's history, of the requirement the sublation of power stated for a culture's justice: the just culture generates the counter-power that keeps its power from entrenching, and the persisting culture is the one whose counter-power lets it be re-oriented rather than broken when its moment passes.

This is the disciplined historical eye the paper has claimed throughout, neither the celebration of a march nor the cynicism of the wheel, but the evaluation of each form by its place in a materially driven spiral that has direction without a terminus. With this, the synthesis is complete: culture is defined, its power is answered, and its evolution is given its dialectic. The general ontology and epistemology of cultural emergence are established, and the paper turns to the particular for which the general was built—the emergence of culture in the intimate dyad.

Part Two Phenomenology: Cultural Phenomena in Intimate Relation

6.17. Intimate Relation as a Special Site of Cultural Emergence

The first part established what culture is and how it emerges, in general. This part turns to the site for which the general account was built and from which this series takes its name: the intimate relation between two people. The turn is not a change of subject but a descent from the universal to the particular that both instances it and exceeds it, and the descent is the heart of the paper. For if the general ontology of the first part is right, then the intimate dyad is not merely one instance of cultural emergence among others, a small example of a large phenomenon; it is the *minimal and most exposed* instance, the smallest system in which a culture can arise at all, and therefore the site at which the mechanism of emergence, buried elsewhere under institutions and centuries, can be watched almost as it happens. The disproportion the introduction noted—that a philosophy of intimacy should have discussed culture in general at such length and the intimate case so little—is corrected here, and corrected deliberately, for the general was the long approach and the particular is the destination.

Why the dyad is a special site, not merely a small one

It would be possible to treat the intimate dyad as simply a culture in miniature, subject to the same account as any other culture only at a smaller scale, and to read off its features by shrinking the features of macro-culture. This is exactly what the paper does *not* do, and the refusal is the methodological hinge of the whole part. The dyad is not a small culture; it is a *special* one, possessed of structural features that belong to it alone and appear in no larger cultural formation, features that do not scale up and cannot be derived by shrinking the large. The reason was given, in outline, at the close of the definition: the mechanism of emergence may be stated generally, but the specific conditions under which it operates in the dyad—above all the absence of any external authority to fix meaning, and the two-person structure itself—have no counterpart at the scale of a people, which possesses a full apparatus of traditions and institutions where the couple possesses nothing but the two of them. The dyad is therefore special in the strict sense: not a reduced version of the general case, but a case with its own irreducible mechanisms, which the general account illuminates but does not exhaust. To describe those mechanisms is the work of this part, and it is where the paper means to make its

distinctive contribution, for these mechanisms have not, to the author's knowledge, been gathered and named as the mechanisms of a culture.

The five pillars

Five such features organize the phenomenology that follows, and they are named here in advance so that their treatment is read as the articulation of a single structure rather than a list of observations. The first is *the dyad and the vacant big Other*: the intimate relation is the minimal cultural unit, two people with no external third—no tradition, no institution, no majority—to fix the meaning of what they generate, so that the two must serve as each other's symbolic authority, which is at once what makes their private culture possible and what makes it fragile. The second is *the double interweaving of drive*: the two structures of desire are not parallel but mutually implicated, each entering the other's fantasy, so that the culture they generate is the sediment of an interweaving that exists nowhere outside the relation. The third is *high-density sedimentation*: the density of shared living—daily, bodily, high in frequency and long in duration—lets intimate culture sediment at a speed no other cultural formation approaches, so that one can almost watch a private form come into being. The fourth is *the special configuration of the three registers*: in intimate relation the imaginary, the symbolic, and the real are configured with a closeness and intensity found in no other cultural site, so that the three-register account of the first part reaches here its fullest embodiment. The fifth is *fragility and reversibility*: an intimate culture can collapse entire, in a way a macro-culture cannot, because its whole existence depends on the continued participation of exactly two people, and this fragility is the price of the very features that make it possible.

Method: a return to the phenomena

One methodological commitment governs this part, and it should be stated before the description begins. The first part was theoretical; it argued, mapped, defined. This part suspends that posture, as far as it can, and returns to the phenomena themselves—to intimate culture as it is actually lived, experienced, and understood, before it is theorized. This is the phenomenological *epoché* in the modest sense the paper can honor: a bracketing of the theoretical apparatus so that the mechanisms may be allowed to show themselves from the phenomena rather than be deduced from the framework. The

framework of the first part is not abandoned—it is what lets the phenomena be understood once they have shown themselves—but it is held back at the moment of description, so that the account earns its mechanisms from the lived material and does not merely stamp the general theory onto a smaller case. The order of the part follows this commitment: first the epistemology of intimate culture, how such culture is known and by whom; then its mechanisms, the five pillars in their working; then its hermeneutics, how the meaning of intimate culture is interpreted, and how, at its edge, it is drawn back into negotiation with the outer symbolic order, which returns the particular to the general and opens the way to the ethics and political economy of the final part. The description begins with the phenomena as they are given, and asks first not what they are but how they are known.

6.18. The Description of Private-Cultural Phenomena

The description begins with the phenomena themselves, and they are so familiar that their strangeness is easily missed. Any relation of sufficient depth generates, over time, a texture of forms that belong to it and to no one else, and the first task is simply to see this texture for what it is: a culture, in the full sense the first part gave the word, generated between two people and bearing every mark the definition named, only at the smallest scale and with the greatest intimacy. The phenomena are small and are usually beneath notice precisely because they are so intimate, but catalogued plainly they compose an unmistakable cultural whole.

The inventory

There is, first, a *private lexicon*: words that mean, between these two, what they mean nowhere else. A word coined for a thing that has no public name; a public word bent to a private sense; a mispronunciation kept on purpose until it becomes the right pronunciation; a name for a mood, a look, a recurring situation, that the two of them share and no dictionary holds. There are *private references*: the compressed allusion to a shared past event, a place, a person, a disaster, a joke, that carries in a word or a glance a whole history the two of them lived and no one else was present for. There are *inside jokes*, which are private references raised to the pitch of the comic, a charge that discharges in laughter for exactly two people and is inert for any third. There are *private names*,

the appellations the two use for each other that no one else uses and that would sound wrong, even faintly transgressive, in another mouth—the diminutive, the epithet, the animal or the object that has become, between them, a name. There are *micro-rites*: the small repeated ceremonies of a shared life, the particular way a departure or a return or a nightfall is marked, the gesture that must be made or the phrase that must be said, whose omission is felt as a wrongness though no external rule requires it. And there are *understandings*: the wordless coordinations, the shared silences that are not empty but full of a determinate content both parties read, the glance across a room that communicates a complete judgement, the gesture that means, to these two, a paragraph. Taken together these are not a scattering of habits; they are the imaginary, symbolic, and real substance of a culture—the images and identifications, the coded signs, and the unsayable “between”—in the concentrated form the dyad alone produces.

How they are given: the first- and second-person structure

What is most distinctive about these phenomena is not their content but the *structure of their givenness*, and it is here that the phenomenology begins to disclose the mechanisms the later sections will name. These forms are given only in the first- and second-person: they exist as, and only as, *our* idiom, spoken by *me* to *you* and understood by you as from me. They have no third-person mode of existence in which they could be surveyed from outside without loss, because their meaning is not a content lodged in them but a charge that exists only in the circuit between the two who share them. This is not true of macro-cultural forms in the same way. A national custom, a public rite, a widely shared idiom has a third-person existence: an outsider can learn it, describe it, come to understand what it means to those who practise it, and though something of the lived sense may escape the outsider, the form itself is there to be studied in the third person, a public object. The private forms of an intimate culture are different in kind. There is no third-person standpoint from which the charge of an inside joke can be observed, because the charge *is* the circuit between the two, and to stand outside the circuit is not to see the charge imperfectly but not to be in its presence at all. The outsider does not understand the private form less well than the two; the outsider is simply not one of the two for whom alone it is a form. This is why the phenomena are given in the first and second person irreducibly: they are addressed, they live in address, and an addressed

meaning surveyed from the position of a non-addressee has ceased to be the thing it was.

The temporality of the forms

One further feature of the phenomena must be marked before their knowing is taken up, because it will matter for the mechanism of sedimentation. These forms have a distinctive *temporality*: each of them was, at some moment, *new*, and became, over some stretch of shared time, *settled*, and the passage from the new to the settled is short enough, in the dense medium of an intimate life, to be within living memory of both parties. A couple can often recall, with a precision impossible for any macro-cultural form, the occasion on which a private word was coined, the event a private reference compresses, the first time a micro-rite was performed before it was a rite. The forms carry their own origins with them; they are sedimented, but the sediment is recent enough that its laying-down is remembered. This is the phenomenological trace of a mechanism the later section on sedimentation will describe: that intimate culture emerges at a speed which brings the moment of emergence itself within the horizon of experience, so that the couple are not only the bearers of their culture but the witnesses of its coming-to-be. With the phenomena thus described—their inventory, their first- and second-person givenness, their remembered temporality—the question can be asked that the epistemology of this culture turns on: how, and by whom, such forms are known.

6.19. Participatory Knowing and Epistemic Exclusivity

The phenomena described in the previous section pose, by the very structure of their givenness, an epistemological question: how is such a culture known, and by whom? The question is not idle, for the answer discloses a mechanism. If the private forms of an intimate culture are given only in the first and second person, then the knowing of them cannot be the knowing appropriate to a third-person object, and the difference is not a matter of degree but of kind. This section draws out that difference, and shows that the peculiar way intimate culture is known—and the peculiar way it resists being known from outside—is not an incidental feature but direct evidence for the mechanism the pillars will name.

Participatory knowing versus objectifying knowledge

There are two ways a cultural form can be known, and intimate culture admits only the first. The first is *participatory*: one knows the form by standing in the circuit it constitutes, by being one of the two for whom it is a form, by generating and re-enacting it from within. To know an inside joke, in this sense, is to be one of the two people it is funny to; to know a private rite is to be one of the two who perform it and feel its omission as a wrongness. This knowing is not the possession of information about the form; it is participation in the form's ongoing generation, a knowing that is indistinguishable from being a party to the culture known. The second way is *objectifying*: one knows the form as an external object, surveys it, describes it, catalogues its features, explains its function—the knowing an ethnographer brings to a custom, an analyst to a symptom, an outsider to a practice not their own. Macro-cultural forms admit both kinds of knowing; their participants know them from within, and outsiders may know them, with some loss, from without. Intimate culture admits only the first. There is no objectifying knowledge of an intimate culture that is knowledge of *it*, because the object objectifying knowledge would grasp—the charge, the meaning, the “ours”—exists only in the participatory circuit and is precisely what objectification steps outside of. One can objectify the outward form, the sound of the private word, the motions of the micro-rite; one cannot thereby know the culture, because the culture was never in the outward form but in the circuit the form serves, and the circuit is closed to all but the two.

Exclusivity as evidence, not accident

The decisive point is that this epistemic exclusivity is not a contingent fact about privacy—not a matter of the couple keeping secrets, or of outsiders lacking access they might in principle be granted—but structural evidence for the mechanism of intimate culture. An outsider cannot come to understand a couple's private forms the way an anthropologist comes to understand a foreign custom, however long the outsider observes, because the barrier is not one of information. The anthropologist's difficulty is that the custom's meaning is hard to gather from outside; enough patient observation reduces the difficulty, because the meaning, though hard to reach, is there in the public practice to be reached. The outsider to an intimate culture faces a difficulty of a different order: the meaning is *not there in the observable form at all*, because it is lodged in the interwoven structure

of drive that only the two occupy, and no quantity of observation can supply what is missing, since what is missing is not information about the form but a place in the fantasy that charges it. This is why an inside joke explained to a third party is not thereby made funny to them: the explanation supplies the information and withholds the only thing that mattered, which was never information but position. The exclusivity, then, is evidence. It shows that the meaning of intimate culture is anchored not in a public symbolic system, where more observation would yield more understanding, but in a private coordinate of drive, where observation from outside yields nothing, because there is nothing of the relevant kind outside to observe. The knowability of a culture only from within is the epistemic signature of a culture whose substance lies in the register of a relational Real that the participatory circuit alone touches.

Understanding as recognition, and its failure as objectification

Read through the Hegelian line, participatory knowing has a further character that objectifying knowledge lacks: it is a knowing that is at the same time a mutual recognition. To know the culture from within is to know oneself in it and to know the other as the one with whom it is shared, so that the understanding of the shared form is inseparable from the recognition of the self and the other whom the form binds. Understanding an intimate culture is thus a moment of the mutual self-knowledge the relation carries on through its exteriorized forms: in reading the shared idiom rightly, each knows again who they are to the other. And the failure that corresponds to this understanding has a name in the same line: it is the *objectification* that treats a living, generated form as a finished thing to be surveyed, the misrecognition that mistakes the residue for the culture and the outward form for the charge. When one party comes to treat the shared culture as an object—to survey it, to hold it at the distance of a thing possessed rather than a process shared—the participatory knowing has lapsed into an objectifying one, and the culture, at that moment, has begun to die in that party's hands, for it lived only in the participation that the objectifying stance has withdrawn. This is the epistemological form of a danger the ethics of the final part will name: that a culture whose being is participatory can be killed by being treated as a thing, and that the treatment as thing is a failure of recognition before it is anything else.

The material mediation of understanding

The historical-materialist line adds its qualification here, as it did to the account of drive, and for the same reason: to prevent the phenomenology from floating free into a pure account of consciousness. Even the participatory understanding of an intimate culture is materially mediated. The forms in which a couple can generate and re-enact their private culture, and therefore the forms in which they can understand it from within, are conditioned by their material circumstances—by the time they have to share, the spaces they inhabit, the media through which they communicate when apart, the consumer scripts that press upon their sense of what a shared life should look like. The participatory knowing is not a pure meeting of two consciousnesses in a vacuum; it is a knowing carried on in and through a material world that shapes what can be understood and how. This qualification does not diminish the exclusivity or the participatory character just established; it locates them in the material world, and in doing so it prepares the passage, at the end of this part, from the phenomenology of intimate culture to the political economy of its production and capture, where the material mediation of understanding becomes the material colonization of it. For now the epistemology is established: intimate culture is known only from within, its exclusivity is evidence of its anchorage in the relational Real, its understanding is a mutual recognition that objectification kills, and even this knowing is mediated by the material conditions in which the relation is lived.

6.20. The Dyad and the Vacant Big Other

The mechanisms of intimate culture can now be set out, and they are the heart of the paper. The first is the most fundamental, for the others depend on it: the intimate relation is a *dyad*, the minimal cultural unit, two people and no more, and this bare fact of number has consequences for the being of the culture a dyad generates that no larger formation shares. The consequences are drawn out here in two registers, the sociological and the psychoanalytic, which turn out to describe the same structure from two sides.

Simmel: the dyad has no super-individual structure

Simmel saw, with a clarity that has not been improved upon, that the step from two to three is not a step in degree but a change in kind, and that the dyad is therefore

sociologically unique (Simmel 1950). In a group of three or more, a super-individual structure arises that does not depend on any single member: a majority can form, a third can mediate between two, coalitions can shift, and the group persists as a structure even as its members change or one departs. The dyad has none of this. There is no majority possible where there are only two; there is no third to mediate; there is no super-individual structure that could outlast either member. The consequences Simmel drew are exactly the ones that matter here. Neither member can hide behind a collectivity, because there is none: each stands fully exposed to the other, each bears the whole of the relation's existence, and each holds, in effect, a veto, since the withdrawal of either does not diminish the group but ends it. The dyad rests entirely on its two members and can appeal to nothing above them. It is the purest form of sociation and the least stable, intense in proportion to its exposure and fragile in proportion to its intensity.

The psychoanalytic translation: the big Other is vacant

Translated into the framework of this paper, Simmel's sociological observation becomes a claim about the register of the symbolic, and specifically about the big Other. In the generation of any culture, meaning must be fixed—a word must come to mean this and not that, a rite must count as performed or not—and the question is what fixes it, what stands as the authority to which meaning can appeal. In macro-culture the answer is the big Other in its ordinary form: the tradition, the institution, the majority, the accumulated weight of a symbolic order that precedes the individuals and stands above them, guaranteeing that a word means what it means and a rite is what it is. This is the full big Other, the third term to which any two members of a large culture can appeal over each other's heads. In the intimate dyad this third term is *vacant*. There is no tradition of the couple older than the couple, no institution of their private language, no majority of speakers to settle a disputed private meaning, no symbolic authority above the two to guarantee that the word they coined means what they take it to mean. The place of the big Other, which in macro-culture is filled, is in the dyad empty—or rather, it is filled only by the two themselves, who must serve, for each other, as the symbolic authority that no external order supplies. Each is, for the other, the only guarantor there is that the shared culture means what it means.

What the vacancy makes possible, and what it costs

This vacancy is the condition of both the possibility and the fragility of intimate culture, and the two follow from it together. It is the condition of *possibility* because it is exactly what frees the dyad to generate a culture wholly its own. Where a full big Other governs, the meanings available to a culture are constrained in advance by the symbolic order that guarantees them; one cannot simply coin a word or institute a rite, because meaning must answer to the standing authority. In the dyad, with no such authority above the two, the two are free to be their own authority, to make a word mean whatever they can bring each other to accept it as meaning, to institute a rite by the sole warrant of their mutual agreement. The endogeneity the paper has claimed for intimate culture—its capacity to generate forms genuinely its own, not drawn from an external stock—rests on precisely this vacancy: the couple can generate their own culture because there is no big Other above them dictating what their culture may contain. They legislate their private symbolic order themselves, and can do so because the legislative seat is empty and theirs to occupy.

But the same vacancy is the condition of *fragility*, and this is where the pillar connects to the fifth. Because the meaning of the couple's culture is guaranteed by nothing above the two, it is guaranteed by the two alone, which is to say by the continued participation of both. A macro-culture's meanings survive the withdrawal of any individual, because the big Other that guarantees them stands above all individuals; the dyad's meanings have no such guarantor, and so the withdrawal of either member does not merely diminish the culture but removes the very authority that held its meanings in place. When one of the two ceases to participate, the private word does not become a word the other can still use with half its meaning intact; it loses its guarantor entirely, and reverts from meaning to mere sound, or worse, to a sound that now signifies only the absence of the one who gave it meaning. The vacancy of the big Other is thus a single structural fact with two faces: it is what lets the couple be the free authors of their own culture, and it is what makes that culture unable to survive either of them. The freedom and the fragility are not separable features to be weighed against each other; they are the same feature, the empty seat of the symbolic authority, seen from the side of generation and from the side of collapse.

This yields a second thesis of the paper's own, and one that reaches beyond the dyad to cultural generation at any scale. Call it the *vacancy thesis*: the more fully a system of cultural generation devolves its symbolic authority upon an external institution, the more its capacity to generate an endogenous culture is suppressed, and the more its culture is stabilized against the withdrawal of its members; the two move inversely with the same variable, so that endogeneity and stability stand in a tension that forbids their joint maximization. A macro-culture, with its full external big Other, sits near one pole: high stability, low endogeneity, its meanings guaranteed against any defection and, for that reason, not the couple's own to author. The intimate dyad sits near the other: high endogeneity, low stability, its meanings authored freely and, for that reason, guaranteed by nothing that outlasts the two. The thesis does not assert an equation between authority's externality and either quantity; it asserts a structural tension, in which a gain in the one is purchased at a cost in the other, and it is this tension, not a defect of the dyad, that the fragility of intimate culture expresses. A couple cannot have both the freedom to make a world wholly their own and the security of a world guaranteed to outlast them, because the very vacancy that grants the first denies the second.

This is the foundational mechanism, and the four pillars that follow specify how, within this vacancy, the couple's culture is woven, sedimented, configured across the registers, and finally exposed to ruin.

6.21. The Double Interweaving of Drive

The second pillar specifies what, within the vacancy the first established, is actually woven. The general account of Part One held that culture is the exteriorization of drive; the phenomenology of the dyad now shows that in intimate relation the drive so exteriorized has a structure found in no other cultural formation, and that this structure is the mechanism behind the non-transferability the paper has claimed since its engagement with Bourdieu. The structure is a *double interweaving*: the two structures of desire are not exteriorized side by side, in parallel, but are mutually implicated, each entering into the other, so that the culture they generate is the sediment of a single interwoven fantasy rather than the sum of two private ones.

From parallel fantasies to an interwoven one

Orthodox psychoanalysis writes desire as the subject's relation to its object-cause, the objet petit a around which the drive turns and which veils the constitutive lack. Two people in proximity might, on a thin account, be imagined as two such structures running in parallel: each with a private fantasy, each pursuing a private object-cause, the relation a matter of two desires that happen to have taken each other as their occasion. This is not what an intimate relation is, and the difference is the pillar. In intimate relation each partner comes to occupy, for the other, the place of the object-cause itself, or a part of it: the other is not merely the occasion of a desire whose cause lies elsewhere but is woven into the cause, so that what each desires around is no longer a wholly private object but one in which the other is implicated. The fantasy that structures each one's desire has the other inside it. This is why the desires of two intimate partners cannot be cleanly separated and returned to each as private property: they have grown into each other at the level of the object-cause, and the culture they generate together is the exteriorization not of two adjacent desires but of one interwoven desiring, in which neither partner's drive can be specified without reference to the other.

The private culture as the sediment of the interweaving

The private forms catalogued earlier are the sediment of exactly this interweaving, and reading them through it explains features that would otherwise be merely charming. A private joke is the crystallization of a shared coordinate of desire: it discharges in laughter because it touches, in a compressed form, the interwoven fantasy the two have built, and it touches it for these two alone because the coordinate it touches exists only in their interweaving. A private name is a condensation-point of the interwoven fantasy: it names the other from within the place the other occupies in one's own object-cause, which is why it would be wrong, even faintly obscene, in a third mouth—the third has no standing in the fantasy the name arises from. A micro-rite is a channel the interwoven desire has cut for itself, a repeated form through which the shared drive circulates. The whole private culture, read this way, is not a collection of shared tastes or agreed conventions but the exteriorized, sedimented form of a fantasy that two people have woven into one, and its every element carries the charge of that interweaving. This is what the outsider cannot reach and the explanation cannot supply: not information about the forms, but a place

in the interwoven desire that alone gives the forms their charge.

The mechanism of non-transferability

With this the paper can state precisely the mechanism of the non-transferability it claimed, against Bourdieu's cultural capital, in Part One. Cultural capital is transferable in principle—accruable, convertible, extractable—because its value is a position in an external field, and a position can, in principle, be occupied by another. The private culture of a couple is non-transferable in principle, and the reason is now exact: its value is lodged in an interweaving of drive that exists only in this relation and cannot be carried out of it. To transfer the culture would require transferring the interwoven fantasy that charges it, and the interwoven fantasy is not a portable content but a structure that came to be only in and as this relation. What can be transferred is the outward form—the sound of the word, the shape of the rite—and what cannot is the charge, because the charge is the interweaving, and the interweaving does not exist outside the two whose desire is interwoven. This is why a couple's private culture, copied by others, is a shell: the others can reproduce the form and cannot reproduce the interwoven desire that made the form a culture rather than a mannerism. Non-transferability is not a contingent privacy that better observation could breach; it is a structural consequence of the fact that the culture's substance is an interweaving of drive proper to one relation.

This can be stated as a thesis, the first of several the paper advances as its own, beyond its revision of Lacan. Call it the *non-transferability thesis*: the degree to which a relational cultural form resists transfer and extraction rises with the depth at which its charge is anchored in the interwoven structure of the participants' drive; and where that anchoring reaches into the unsymbolizable core of the bond, in the register of the Real, what a transfer can carry is the symbolic shell alone, the charge remaining behind because it was never a portable content but the interweaving itself. The thesis is not an identity between transferability and anchoring but a graded relation between them: forms anchored shallowly, in shared convention alone, can be carried off with much of their sense intact, as a borrowed idiom can; forms anchored in the interwoven Real cannot, because the transfer would have to carry an interweaving that exists only in and as the one relation. This is why the non-transferability of an intimate culture admits of degrees, and is most complete for exactly those forms—the private name, the inside joke, the charged silence

—that reach deepest into the interwoven drive, and least complete for those that borrow most from the public stock.

The interweaving across the three registers

The interweaving is not confined to a single register, and marking its span connects this pillar to the fourth. It runs across all three. In the *imaginary*, it is the mutual identification, the way each comes to see themselves in and through the other's image of them, the specular circuit by which two self-images are woven into a shared imago of the couple. In the *symbolic*, it is the private lexicon and the shared references, the coded signs through which the interwoven desire is given a sayable form. In the *real*, it is the unsymbolizable core of the interweaving itself, the "us" that no private word quite captures and that is the relational Real of this particular bond. The double interweaving of drive is therefore not merely a symbolic-order phenomenon, a matter of shared signs, but a structure that runs through the imaginary body of identification and down into the real of the unsymbolizable bond. This is why the account of it required the framework of the three registers and could not be given in the terms of the symbolic alone, and it is why the next pillar, having established that the interweaving is what sediments and that it spans the registers, must turn to the distinctive temporality of the sedimentation—the speed at which, in the dense medium of an intimate life, this interwoven drive deposits into the durable forms of a culture.

6.22. High-Density Sedimentation and Accelerated Time

The third pillar concerns the temporality of intimate culture: the speed at which it emerges. The previous pillars established what is woven, in the vacancy left by the absent big Other; this one establishes how fast the weaving sediments into durable form, and shows that the answer is peculiar to the dyad and has a consequence no other cultural formation affords—that the moment of cultural emergence is brought within the horizon of lived experience, so that the couple are not only the bearers of their culture but the witnesses of its birth.

The density of shared living

The rate at which a culture sediments is a function of the density of the shared living from which it precipitates, and the intimate dyad is the densest medium of shared living there is. The density has several dimensions, and they compound. There is the density of *time*: intimate partners share not scheduled intervals but the continuous duration of a shared life, mornings and nights and the unstructured hours between, a volume of shared time no other relation approaches. There is the density of *body*: intimate relation is carried on in bodily proximity, in touch, in the sharing of space and sleep and the physical routines of a life, so that its medium is not only spoken but corporeal. There is the density of *frequency*: the interactions are not occasional but constant, iterated many times a day, so that any form has abundant occasions to be repeated and confirmed. And there is the density of *stakes*: what passes between intimate partners matters to them as almost nothing else does, so that each interaction carries an affective charge that fixes it in memory and makes it a candidate for repetition. These densities together make the intimate dyad a medium in which the precipitation of shared living into cultural form occurs faster than anywhere else, because every condition that favors sedimentation—time, repetition, bodily co-presence, affective stakes—is present at its maximum.

Emergence brought within the horizon of experience

The consequence is the distinctive feature of this pillar: intimate culture emerges at a speed that brings the moment of emergence *within the horizon of lived experience*. In macro-culture the emergence of a cultural form is never witnessed; it occurs across generations, below the threshold of any individual's experience, so that the form is always already there when any given person meets it, and its origin is a matter for historical reconstruction rather than memory. No one witnessed the birth of a national idiom or the first performance of a folk rite; these emerged too slowly and too diffusely for emergence to be an object of experience. The intimate dyad is different in kind. Because its culture sediments at the speed the density affords, the couple can often witness, and later recall, the very moment a form was born: the occasion on which a private word was coined and, in the same evening, accepted; the first time a gesture was made that would become a rite; the moment a shared glance was found to carry a meaning both had, without saying so, arrived at. The emergence of culture, which in every larger formation lies below the

horizon of experience, rises in the dyad above it. This is why the intimate dyad is the privileged site for a phenomenology of cultural emergence: it is the one cultural formation in which emergence is not reconstructed but witnessed, the one place where one can watch a culture being born.

The moments of self-encoding

These witnessed moments have a structure worth describing, for they are the phenomenological appearance of the exteriorization the first part defined, caught in the act. What happens, in such a moment, is that something that occurred once—a contingent event, an accident, a joke that landed, a mistake, a shared perception—is, by both parties at once, taken up and marked as *significant*, as belonging to them, as a form to be kept and repeated rather than a happening to be let go. The moment has a double structure. First there is the contingent occurrence, which might have passed and been forgotten. Then there is the mutual, often silent, recognition—a look exchanged, a laugh that both know they will return to, a repetition offered by one and accepted by the other—in which the occurrence is lifted out of the flow of forgettable events and installed as a form. This second act is the moment of *self-encoding*: the relation, in it, encodes a piece of its own generative history into a form it can re-enact, and does so through the simultaneous recognition of both parties. It is the Hegelian exteriorization made visible: the relation goes out of itself into a form, in the very instant of the mutual recognition that constitutes the form, and one can see it happen. That the encoding requires both parties at once—that a private form cannot be instituted by one alone but only by the two together, in a recognition each reads in the other—is the trace, at the level of the emergence-moment, of the vacancy of the big Other established in the first pillar: with no external authority to institute the form, the two must institute it themselves, together, and the moment of self-encoding is the moment they do.

Speed and fragility

One consequence of this accelerated sedimentation must be marked, because it qualifies the pillar and connects it to the fifth. The same speed that lets intimate culture emerge within the horizon of experience also makes it, in a certain sense, thin in its foundations. A macro-culture's forms are sedimented over so long a time and through so many bearers

that no single event and no single defection can unsettle them; they have the stability of the deeply laid. The dyad's forms are laid down fast, by two people, over a time short enough to remember, and what is deposited quickly can be disturbed quickly. The accelerated emergence that makes the dyad the privileged site of witnessed cultural birth is the same accelerated temporality that leaves its culture without the deep foundations time alone can give, and therefore exposed, as the fifth pillar will show, to a reversibility no macro-culture faces. The speed is a gift and a vulnerability at once: it brings emergence within experience, and it denies the culture the ballast of slow sedimentation. Having established what is woven, that it spans the registers, and the speed at which it sediments, the phenomenology turns to the register in which all of this is most intensely configured, before it turns, finally, to the fragility the speed has already foreshadowed.

6.23. The Special Configuration of the Three Registers

The fourth pillar returns the three registers of the framework to the intimate dyad and shows that here, and nowhere else among cultural formations, they attain their fullest and most intense configuration. The meta-theoretical statement claimed that culture spans the imaginary, the symbolic, and the real, and that the three move in a materially driven dialectic; the intimate relation is the site where this claim is most completely embodied, because in no other cultural formation are the three registers configured with the closeness, the intensity, and the mutual pressure they have between two people who share a life. This pillar describes that configuration register by register, and then shows the dialectic among them running at a pitch the macro-scale never reaches.

The three registers at their most intense

The *imaginary* is, in intimate relation, unusually thick. The register of image and identification, of the body and the specular relation, is nowhere more charged than between two people bound by desire: each is an image for the other of extraordinary power, each sees themselves reflected and altered in the other's regard, and the bodily, visual, identificatory life of the couple—how they appear to each other, how each is formed by the other's image of them—is intense in a way no macro-culture's imaginary approaches. A nation's imaginary, its images and identifications, is diffuse and mediated; a couple's is

concentrated in a single face.

The *symbolic* is, as the earlier pillars showed, the register of the private lexicon, the shared references, the names and rites and promises through which the interwoven desire is given sayable form. Here the intimate symbolic reaches its highest instance in the vow—the promise two people make to each other, which this series has treated at length as the non-binding vow whose whole force is that it appeals to no external enforcement but institutes, between the two, a symbolic order they legislate themselves (Huang 2026). The couple’s symbolic is not a fragment of the public symbolic order but a private one, coined and instituted in the vacancy of the big Other, and the vow is its constitutional act.

The *real* is, in intimate relation, exposed as it is almost nowhere else. The register of the unsymbolizable is present in the couple’s life in its most naked forms: in sexuality, where the drive meets what no signifier orders; in the traumatic, where the bond meets what cannot be assimilated; and above all in the “us” itself, the non-symbolizable core of the bond that no private word quite captures, which is the relational Real this paper has placed at the center of its ontology. Intimate relation is one of the few sites of human life where the Real is not held at a distance by a thick symbolic mediation but is met closely, in the body and in the bond, so that the relational Real is not a theoretical postulate here but a lived and constant presence.

This grounds the fifth thesis the paper advances as its own, which gathers into a single claim what the earlier theses have each drawn on. Call it the *real-anchoring thesis*: the resistance a relational culture offers to power, to capital, and to time arises from its anchoring in the register of the Real, and the firmness of that anchoring rises with the thickness of what, in the participants’ interwoven drive, exceeds symbolization. Resistance, on this thesis, is not an added property a culture might have or lack, a defensive feature bolted onto its forms; it is the persistence of the culture’s root in the Real under the symbolic erosion that power and capital work. Where a culture is anchored only in the symbolic—in convention, in transferable form—it offers little resistance, because the symbolic is precisely the register in which power organizes and capital extracts; where it is anchored in an interwoven Real that exceeds symbolization, it resists, not by opposing a force to these operations but by lying, in part, outside the register on which they operate.

The thesis does not equate resistance with anchoring depth as one quantity with another; it locates the source of the one in the other, and makes the degree of resistance vary with the thickness of the unsymbolizable rather than fixing it. The other four theses can be read through this one: non-transferability, decoherence, the vacancy's fragility, and the counter-power of persistence all turn on where, and how deeply, a culture is anchored in a Real that the symbolic operations of transfer, capture, guarantee, and entrenchment cannot reach.

The dialectic of the registers, at full intensity

Because the three registers are configured so closely and so intensely in the dyad, the dialectic among them—which the fourth revision set at the center of the framework—runs here at a pitch found nowhere else, and it can be watched in the couple's culture with unusual clarity. The dialectic, in its direct form, is the contest between the symbolic's drive to capture the real and the real's overflow of every symbolic capture. In intimate relation this contest is continuous and intense. Each private word, each name, each rite, each vow is an attempt by the couple's symbolic to capture the "us," to give the unsymbolizable bond a sayable and repeatable form—and each such capture is, necessarily, incomplete, because the relational Real of the bond overflows every form the couple can give it. The lovers name the bond and the name is precious and the name is not the bond; they institute a rite to hold what passes between them and the rite holds some of it and not all; they make a vow that says what they are to each other and the vow reaches toward but does not exhaust the real of their being-for-each-other. This incompleteness is not a failure to be corrected by a better word; it is the structural condition the fourth revision named, the Real's constitutive overflow of the symbolic, and in intimate relation it is felt directly, as the perpetual insufficiency of every expression to the bond it would express, and the perpetual generation of new expressions to chase what the last one could not hold. The couple's culture is never finished precisely because the relational Real it tries to capture overflows it, and this is why intimate culture develops, continually, generating new forms as the old ones prove unequal to the "us" they were made to hold.

Why the dyad embodies the framework most fully

This is the sense in which the intimate dyad is the fullest embodiment of the framework's central claim, and marking it completes the pillar. The three-register dialectic of the relational Real was stated in Part One as a general ontology of culture, holding of culture at any scale. But it holds of the intimate dyad with an intensity and a directness it has nowhere else, because in the dyad the three registers are configured at their maximum—the imaginary concentrated in a single face, the symbolic legislated privately in the vacancy of the big Other, the real met nakedly in body and bond—and the dialectic among them, the symbolic's capture and the real's overflow, runs at a pitch that makes it visible in the ordinary life of the couple. What in macro-culture is a slow and buried process is, in the dyad, an intense and nearly witnessable one: the perpetual chase of the symbolic after a relational Real that will not be caught, generating, in its perpetual insufficiency, the perpetual development of the couple's culture. The framework was built to be general; the dyad is where it is most fully true. And the same overflow that keeps the culture developing—the Real's refusal to be captured—is what will, in the register of loss, expose the culture to the collapse the final pillar must now describe.

6.24. Fragility and Reversibility

The fifth pillar names the price of the other four. Everything that makes intimate culture what it is—the vacancy of the big Other that lets the couple author their own world, the interweaving of drive that gives their culture its incommunicable charge, the accelerated sedimentation that brings its emergence within experience, the intensity of the three registers met at close range—every one of these is also a condition of a fragility that no macro-culture faces. Intimate culture can collapse entire. It can pass, and often does, from a living world to a field of ruins, and the passage is not a gradual erosion but a structural reversal that the preceding pillars fully explain. This pillar describes that reversal and its mechanism, and in doing so completes the phenomenology of the dyad.

The asymmetry with macro-culture

A macro-culture does not collapse when individuals leave it. Its forms are guaranteed by a big Other that stands above any individual—the tradition, the institution, the community

of speakers—and the withdrawal or death of any member, or of many, leaves the culture's meanings in place, held by the super-individual structure that Simmel saw the dyad to lack. A language does not lose a word when a speaker dies; a rite does not cease to mean when a participant departs. The intimate dyad is, once again, different in kind, and the difference is the one the first pillar established. Because the couple's culture is guaranteed by no big Other above the two, but only by the two themselves, its entire existence is staked on the continued participation of both. The withdrawal of either member is not, as in macro-culture, the loss of one bearer among many; it is the removal of one of the only two guarantors there are, and since it takes both to hold the private meanings in place, the withdrawal of one does not halve the culture but ends it. This is Simmel's veto raised to the level of culture: as either member can end the dyad, so either member can end the culture the dyad generated, and the culture has no existence that survives the relation whose culture it was.

The mechanism of collapse: from meaning back to the Real

The mechanism of the collapse can be stated precisely, in the terms the pillars have built, and it is more than the mere cessation of a shared activity. Recall that in the intimate dyad the place of the big Other, the authority that guarantees meaning, is occupied by the partner: each is, for the other, the guarantor of the private symbolic order they have built together. When one partner withdraws—through departure, betrayal, or death—the private symbolic order does not simply lose a user; it loses its guarantor, the very authority that held its signs in the position of signs. And a signifier that has lost the authority guaranteeing its meaning does not become a neutral, disused sign; it reverts. The private word, no longer guaranteed by the one who authorized it, falls from meaning back toward the Real: it becomes, first, a mere sound, emptied of the charge the interweaving gave it; and then, worse, a sound that signifies precisely the absence of the one who is gone, a marker of the void where the guarantor stood. The idioms that were the very substance of a shared world become, in the collapse, the sharpest instruments of grief, because each of them is now a private sign whose meaning was the bond and whose only remaining reference is the bond's destruction. This is why the ruins of an intimate culture are not neutral debris but actively painful: the private language does not fade into meaninglessness but is transformed, by the withdrawal of the partner who

guaranteed it, into a language all of whose words now say the same thing, which is that the one who made them mean is gone. The collapse is a decoherence in the precise sense the framework gave the term: the symbolic forms remain, as sounds and gestures, while the real coherence that charged them is withdrawn, and what remains is the shell of a culture haunted by the bond it can no longer carry.

Exit costs and the asymmetry of collapse

The collapse need not be symmetrical, and here the pillar connects to an analysis the series has developed elsewhere. The withdrawal that collapses the culture is not always mutual, and the two partners are not always equally exposed to the ruin. Where the exit costs are asymmetric—where one partner can leave at less cost than the other, whether because the interweaving was less deep on one side, or because the material and social conditions of the two differ, or because one has alternatives the other lacks—the collapse falls harder on the one for whom the exit cost was higher, who is left holding a private culture whose guarantor has departed at less cost to himself (Wanhong 2026a). The one who leaves at low cost may re-enter the wider symbolic order, where public meanings are guaranteed by a big Other no single defection can unsettle; the one who leaves at high cost, or who does not leave but is left, remains among the ruins of a private symbolic order whose meanings have reverted to the Real. This asymmetry of exposure to collapse is the dyadic-cultural form of the asymmetry of power the series has analyzed under the heading of exit costs, and it shows that the fragility of intimate culture is not only a structural fact about dyads in general but a site at which the power asymmetries between two particular partners are registered and can be exploited.

Fragility as the price of endogeneity

The pillar closes by returning fragility to its source, for it is essential that the fragility not be read as an unfortunate defect that a better-built intimate culture might avoid. The fragility is the price of the endogeneity, and the two are inseparable. A culture that a couple authors themselves, in the vacancy of any external authority, is by that very fact a culture with no external authority to preserve it when they falter; a culture whose charge is an interweaving of drive proper to two people is by that very fact a culture that cannot survive the unweaving of that pair; a culture sedimented fast, by two,

over a rememberable time, is by that very fact a culture without the deep foundations that would let it outlast its makers. The freedom to make a world of one's own with another and the exposure to losing that world entire are the same condition seen from two sides, exactly as the possibility and the fragility were one in the first pillar. There is no intimate culture rich enough to be worth having that is not, by the very features that make it rich, exposed to collapse; the endogenous world and its fragility are bought together or not at all. This completes the phenomenology of the dyad's mechanisms, and the phenomenology turns now from the mechanisms to the interpretation of what they generate—to the hermeneutics of intimate culture, and to the negotiation, at its edge, with the outer symbolic order that the final part will show to be the site of its capture.

6.25. The Hermeneutics of Private Culture

The mechanisms of intimate culture have been set out; the phenomenology closes with the question of how the meaning of what they generate is interpreted. This is the hermeneutic layer, and it is not a mere appendix to the account of mechanisms, for it discloses something the mechanisms alone do not: that the meaning of an intimate culture is not a content its forms contain but an activity its participants continually perform, and that this fact has consequences, ethical as much as epistemological, which the final part will take up. The section describes the interpretive life of intimate culture, the two ways it fails, and the recognition that its right interpretation is.

Meaning as an activity, not a content

The private forms of an intimate culture do not contain their meaning the way a vessel contains a liquid, such that the meaning would be there in the form to be extracted by anyone who opened it. Their meaning is generated, and continually regenerated, in the ongoing interpretive activity of the two who share them—in the living use, the re-enactment, the mutual reading by which a private word is again meant and again understood. A private idiom is meaningful only so long as it is actively meant and taken; the meaning is not stored in it between uses, waiting, but is remade each time the two enact the little circuit of address and understanding that the idiom serves. This is why the interpretation of intimate culture is not, in the end, separable from its generation: to

interpret a private form rightly is to participate in the activity that keeps it meaningful, and the interpretation is itself a continuation of the generating. It follows that intimate culture is meaning only in the present tense of its interpretation. When the interpretive activity stops—when the two no longer actively mean and take their shared forms—the meaning does not persist in the forms as a dormant content that might later be revived; it ceases, because it never was a content but only ever an activity, and an activity that has stopped is simply not occurring. This is the hermeneutic face of the fragility the previous pillar described: the culture dies when its interpretation stops, because its life *was* the interpreting.

The two misrecognitions

Against this account of meaning as living activity, two characteristic failures can be defined, and both are forms of *misrecognition*—the mistaking of a living, generated process for a finished thing. The first is *reification* in the direction of possession: the treatment of the shared culture as an object one *has*, a possession to be held and surveyed, rather than a process one *does* with the other. When a partner comes to regard the private culture as a thing they own—an inventory of idioms and rites that exists, complete, to be pointed at—the living interpretive activity has been replaced by the contemplation of a supposed object, and the culture begins to die in that partner's hands, for it lived only in the doing that the having has suspended. This is the failure the epistemological section already glimpsed, in which participatory knowing lapses into objectifying knowledge; here it is named as an interpretive failure with an ethical edge, for it is a way of ceasing to participate while appearing to honor the culture, a withdrawal disguised as possession.

The second misrecognition runs in the direction of exhibition, and it points directly toward the capture the final part will analyze: the treatment of the relation's internal meaning as a *capital* to be displayed and converted, an asset to be shown to others for recognition or advantage. When the private forms of a bond are taken outside the circuit that charges them and put on display—performed for an audience, exhibited as evidence of the relationship's quality, converted into a currency of social standing—they have been misrecognized as the very thing the paper argued they cannot be: transferable, extractable, a capital. This misrecognition is not merely a category error; it is the point of entry for the capture of intimate culture by forces outside the couple, for it is precisely

by inducing the partners to treat their bond's meaning as an exhibitable and convertible asset that the outer order draws that meaning out of the circuit where it lived and into a market where it can be valued and extracted. The two misrecognitions are thus the hermeneutic form of the two dangers the paper tracks: reification toward possession is the death of the culture from within, and reification toward exhibition is the door through which it is captured from without.

Interpretation as recognition

Set against these failures, the right interpretation of an intimate culture has, in the Hegelian line, a determinate character: it is a mutual recognition. To interpret the shared culture rightly is not to decode a content but to participate in the activity in which each, reading the shared form, recognizes again who they are to the other and who the other is to them. The private idiom rightly interpreted is a mirror in which the relation knows itself: in meaning and taking the shared word, each affirms the bond the word arose from and re-cognizes the other as the one with whom the word is shared. Interpretation, in this sense, is the ongoing self-knowledge of the relation carried on through its exteriorized forms, the moment in the Hegelian circuit at which the relation, having gone out of itself into a culture, returns to itself in the reading of that culture and knows itself there. And the two misrecognitions are, correspondingly, the stalling of this movement: reification toward possession stops the return by freezing the exteriorized culture into a dead object that no longer reflects the relation back to itself, and reification toward exhibition diverts the return outward, into a display for others, so that the relation no longer knows itself in its culture but seeks to be known by others through it. Right interpretation keeps the circuit turning; misrecognition, in either direction, stops it. With this the interpretive life of intimate culture is described, and the phenomenology can take its final step, to the edge where the couple's culture meets, and must negotiate with, the outer symbolic order—the edge at which the second misrecognition becomes the doorway to capture, and at which the particular returns to the general the final part requires.

6.26. Emergence-Moments and the Outer Symbolic Order

The phenomenology closes at the edge where the couple's culture meets what lies outside it. Two things are treated here, and they are joined: first, the interpretive structure of the emergence-moment, the instant in which a private form is born and given its meaning; and second, the negotiation between the couple's endogenous culture and the outer symbolic order that surrounds and presses upon it. The first completes the account of how intimate culture is interpreted from within; the second opens the passage to the final part, for it is at this edge that the culture becomes vulnerable to the capture that the political economy of the last movement will analyze. The particular, having been developed in its irreducibility, is here returned to the general, and the return is not a retreat from the intimate case but the discovery, within it, of the point at which the outer world enters.

The co-signification of the emergence-moment

The moment in which a private form emerges, described earlier as a moment of mutual self-encoding, has an interpretive structure that deserves to be drawn out, because it is where the couple's authority over their own meaning is most concentrated and most exposed. When a contingent occurrence is lifted into a form—when a mistaken word, a chance gesture, a shared perception is taken up and kept—the lifting is an act of *co-signification*: the two, together, confer meaning on the occurrence, decide, usually without saying so, that this shall mean something and shall be kept. The co-signification is genuinely joint; it cannot be performed by one alone, for a form one party declared meaningful and the other did not take up would not be a shared form but a private wish. It requires the simultaneous assent of both, each reading in the other the recognition that the occurrence is to be kept, and this double assent is the couple exercising, at its purest, the authority the vacancy of the big Other left to them. In the emergence-moment the couple are their own big Other: they, and no external order, confer the meaning, and the fact that they can do this—that two people can, between them, make a thing mean—is the endogeneity of intimate culture caught at its source. This is the couple's freedom at its most concentrated, and, for the same reason, the point at which the outer order, if it can insert itself into the co-signification, gains the deepest purchase on the culture.

Negotiation with the outer symbolic order

For the couple's culture does not emerge in a vacuum, and the endogeneity the paper has insisted on is never absolute. Around every intimate relation stands the outer symbolic order—the vast public stock of meanings, scripts, images, and expectations concerning what love is, how it is expressed, what a couple does, what a bond should look like—and the couple's culture is generated not in isolation from this order but in continual negotiation with it. The private forms a couple makes are made against a background of public forms they did not make: the culture supplies ready-made scripts for romance, for the marking of anniversaries, for the gestures of devotion, for the shape a shared life should take, and these press upon the couple's own generation, offering themselves as the forms the couple might adopt in place of generating their own. Every intimate culture is thus a mixture, in some proportion, of the endogenously generated and the externally supplied, and the proportion is not fixed but negotiated, continually, as the couple either takes up the public script or makes something of its own in its place. This negotiation is not in itself a corruption; a couple may take up a public form and make it genuinely theirs, charging the borrowed script with their own interwoven desire until it becomes, whatever its origin, a real part of their endogenous culture. The negotiation becomes corruption only when the public form is not appropriated but substituted—when the couple ceases to generate its own meaning and merely consumes the meaning the outer order supplies, so that the co-signification that should have been theirs is performed, in advance and elsewhere, by the market that made the script.

The doorway to capture

It is here, precisely, that the phenomenology hands over to the political economy of the final part, and naming the handover completes the second movement. The point of vulnerability is the co-signification. Because the couple's meaning is conferred in the joint act of co-signification, and because that act can be colonized—its ready-made materials supplied, its outcomes pre-scripted, its very sense of what is worth keeping shaped in advance—the outer order has a route into the heart of the endogenous culture. It does not capture the culture by force, from outside; it captures it by supplying the forms in which the couple's own co-signification is carried out, so that the couple, generating what they take to be their own culture, are in fact re-enacting a script written elsewhere and

owned by another. This is the mechanism the final part will anatomize as the capture of intimate culture by capital: not a seizure of a finished culture but a colonization of its generation, an insertion into the co-signifying moment of materials the market supplies and from which it draws its return. The second misrecognition of the previous section—the treatment of the bond’s meaning as an exhibitable, convertible capital—is the subjective face of this capture, the disposition the outer order cultivates in the partners so that they will carry their own meaning out to the market; and the negotiation just described is the objective structure through which the capture operates.

The particular returned to the general

With this the phenomenology of the dyad reaches its limit and returns the particular to the general from which it descended. The intimate culture, developed through this part in its irreducible specificity—its vacant big Other, its interwoven drive, its accelerated sedimentation, its intense registers, its fragility, its participatory hermeneutics—is shown, at its edge, to be embedded in and negotiated with an outer symbolic order that is itself, as the first part established, produced under material conditions and traversed by power and capital. The couple’s private world is not a sanctuary outside the general history of culture but a particular site within it, connected to the whole at the point of negotiation, and therefore subject, at that point, to the forces the general account named. The third part takes up those forces directly. It asks how culture, including the intimate culture just described, is produced under the forces and relations of production; how capital, having exhausted its older frontiers, reaches through the negotiation just described into the couple’s generation itself to capture the value it produces; and on what, in the end, the just generation of an intimate culture depends. The phenomenology has shown what intimate culture is and how it lives and dies; the political economy and ethics must now show how it is produced, how it is captured, and how it might be defended.

Part Three Ethics and Praxis: Production, Capture, and Its Lessons

6.27. Family Ethos as a Middle-Scale Case: *Jiafeng*

The argument has established a general ontology of cultural emergence and a phenomenology of its most intimate instance, and it is about to turn to the political economy of production and capture. Between these stands a case worth examining in its own right, because it occupies a scale the paper has so far left empty: the scale between the intimate dyad and the macro-culture of a people. That case is the *family ethos*—in Chinese *jiafeng* (家风), the “wind” or manner of a household, the distinctive culture a family generates and transmits across generations. The family ethos is chosen not as an illustration of the theory but as an object through which two questions the theory has raised but not settled can be worked out: how a culture is to be *known* historically, which is a question of the epistemology of a dialectical view; and how power *constitutes* a culture without exhausting it, which is a question of what may be called the study of power in culture. The case is the thread; the epistemology and the power-analysis are drawn from it as they arise.

The family ethos as a middle-scale culture

The family ethos sits, in the terms of this paper, at a scale between the two the argument has treated. It is more durable and more transmissible than the culture of a dyad, for it passes across generations and outlives the particular members who bear it at any moment; and it is more endogenous than the culture of a people, for it is generated within a bounded relation—the family—that can author its own manner in a way a whole society cannot. It has both faces the paper’s opening set in tension: a *wen*, the sedimented pattern of transmissible forms, and a *hua*, the ongoing cultivation by which each generation is formed and forms the next. Its designs, across civilizations, fall into recognizable types. There is the *textual* type, which sediments the ethos into written instruction: the Chinese tradition of *jiaxun* (家训), family instructions, of which Yan Zhitui’s sixth-century *Family Instructions for the Yan Clan* is the earliest surviving and most influential, a book-length letter to his sons on conduct, learning, and the management of a household (Yan 2021). There is the *unwritten-exemplary* type, which transmits the ethos not by text but by modeled example and remembered saying: the Roman *mos maiorum*, the “way of the ancestors,” an unwritten code carried across generations through ritual, oratory, and the

exemplary deeds of the *maiores*, in dynamic complement to written law rather than as a codification of it. And there is the *virtue-and-model* type, which sediments the ethos into a named set of dispositions embodied in the elder—diligence, frugality, honesty, the “farming-and-reading” ideal of the scholar household—transmitted less by precept than by the standing example of a life. These types are not exclusive, and most family ethical traditions mix them; they are named here to show the range of designs by which a family gives its manner a transmissible form.

The dialectical evaluation, and the epistemology it requires

The family ethos is the ideal case for the disciplined historical evaluation the synthesis required, because its forms are old enough to have changed their meaning as their conditions changed, and evaluating them tests what a dialectical view of culture actually demands of the one who holds it. Consider the “farming-and-reading” ethos, the ideal of the household that works the land and cultivates learning together. Under the material conditions that produced it—a smallholding agrarian economy with a channel of advancement through examination and letters—this ethos was a genuine advance: it encoded a real emancipatory impulse, the aspiration of a family to lift itself, through cultivation, beyond the bare necessity of the soil, and it generated, in those conditions, more than it foreclosed. To evaluate it only by a later standard, as a quaint or constraining traditionalism, would be to commit the error a dialectical view forbids. Consider, on the other side, an ethos organized around a strict hierarchy of elder over younger, of one generation’s authority over the next. Under the conditions of a lineage-based agrarian order, such an ethos stabilized the reproduction of the household and had, in its setting, a coordinating function that was not mere domination. Yet as the material conditions change—as economies industrialize, as households become mobile and nuclear, as the young acquire, through education and independent livelihood, a standing the old order did not grant them—the same ethos that once coordinated can become a fetter, its hierarchy losing the material basis that once made it functional and persisting as bare constraint. The one ethos was progressive under its conditions and is to be criticized under changed ones; and to criticize it now and to acknowledge its former progressiveness are, as the framework held, two faces of one evaluation, not a contradiction.

This is the point at which the case yields its first theoretical moment, the *epistemology*

of a dialectical view. To evaluate a family ethos as this evaluation requires is to occupy a difficult epistemic position, defined by its refusal of two easier ones. It refuses *presentism*, the judging of a past form by present standards as though its conditions were irrelevant, which would convict every old ethos of failing to be modern. And it refuses the *historicist relativism* that would say a form can be understood only within its own conditions and never evaluated across them, which would leave one unable to criticize any ethos at all and would collapse into the position that whatever was, under its conditions, was right. The dialectical view is the third position, and its possibility rests on a specific ground: that the standard of evaluation is neither an external absolute imported from the present nor the form's own self-image, but *generativity* itself—whether the ethos, under its conditions, let the family generate more than it foreclosed, and whether the power it carried was met by a force that kept it from entrenching. This standard is internal enough to respect the form's conditions and general enough to evaluate across them, and it is what lets the dialectical view avoid both presentism and relativism. The epistemology has a further requirement, which the debate over the fate of the Confucian tradition makes visible. Where one influential reading held the incongruity between Confucian traditionalism and modernity to be so clear-cut that the coming of the modern entailed the tradition's demise (Levenson 1968), another held that the tradition does not simply die but undergoes transformation, passing through epochs in which it is reinterpreted rather than abolished (Tu 1986). The dialectical view sides with neither the thesis of demise nor the thesis of an unchanging essence; it holds that a cultural form is known rightly only from the tension of two temporal positions at once—the position of its own moment, in which it was the negation its conditions required, and the position of the later moment, in which it becomes the negation to be negated. To know a family ethos historically is to hold both positions together, and the refusal to hold both is the epistemic error that produces, on one side, the verdict of mere demise, and on the other, the illusion of a timeless tradition.

One further epistemic point the case forces into view: the one who evaluates a family ethos is not outside it. The evaluator was formed by some family ethos, shaped in their very capacity to evaluate by a culture of the kind they now assess, and the dialectical view must include this reflexive recognition on pain of relapsing into the idealist fiction of a knower standing outside history. This connects the epistemology of the dialectical view to the account of participatory knowing given earlier: as intimate culture is known

only from within its circuit, the historical knowing of a family ethos is carried on by a knower who is themselves a product of such cultures, and whose evaluation is therefore a moment in the very history it evaluates, not a view from beyond it.

Power in culture, and the force that re-orient it

The case yields its second theoretical moment when the same ethos is examined for how power runs through it, and this is the point at which the family ethos becomes a middle-scale test of the paper's central claim about power and culture. On one side, the family ethos confirms, with unusual clarity, the thesis that power is internal to culture: an ethos of generational hierarchy plainly encodes a power order, naturalizing an authority of elder over younger into the very manner of the household, so that the power tradition's insight is vindicated at this scale as much as at the scale of a people. A family ethos is, among other things, an encoding of who defers to whom. On the other side, the family ethos equally confirms the limit of that thesis, for an ethos is manifestly not reducible to its encoding of power: the same ethos carries real cultivation, genuine virtues, an actual formation of persons, and a real bond of familial love that belongs to the register of the relational Real, and no analysis that dissolved the ethos wholly into a power order would capture what it is. The family ethos thus stands as a middle-scale confirmation of both the power tradition and its sublation: power constitutes the ethos, and does not exhaust it, because the ethos spans registers a pure analysis of power cannot reach.

Between these, the case makes legible—more legible than the dyad could—the distinction between power that entrenches and power that is kept open, and it yields, in doing so, a generalizable proposition about power in culture. A family ethos that encodes only a hierarchy, only the question of who obeys whom, is an ethos of *power-over*: it fixes the young into a determined position and reproduces, generation upon generation, the authority it naturalizes, and such an ethos, absent any internal check, tends toward the pure reproduction of domination. But some family ethical traditions encode, alongside the authority they transmit, a *force that re-orient that authority*: the “reading” in the farming-and-reading ideal is exactly such a force, for the cultivation of learning gives the next generation the capacity to question, to exceed, and to re-orient the very ethos that formed them; and the place some traditions reserve for remonstrance—the recognized standing of the younger to admonish the elder—institutionalizes, within the ethos, a

counter-power against the entrenchment of the authority the ethos also carries. Such an ethos is one of *power-to*: it transmits authority and, in the same transmission, transmits the means of that authority's own revision. And the historical observation the case supports is precise and generalizable beyond the family: the family ethical traditions that have persisted across changing conditions without hardening into mere oppression are not, on the whole, the most rigid, but those that encoded within themselves a mechanism of their own revision—a force by which each generation could re-orient the ethos to conditions its authors could not foresee. An ethos that transmits only its authority entrenches and, when conditions change, becomes the fetter that must be broken; an ethos that transmits also the power to revise it develops, bending to new conditions without breaking. This is the sublation of power, established in the synthesis for culture in general, confirmed at the scale of the family: the just and the durable ethos is not the one without power, which does not exist, but the one that carries, with its power, the counter-power that keeps that power from entrenching.

From this the general study of power in culture takes a methodological principle, which the case has earned rather than assumed. The task of a critical analysis of culture is not to seek a culture free of power, which is a naivety the power tradition rightly dismisses, nor to conclude, from power's ubiquity, that all culture is equally and irredeemably domination, which is the opposite error. It is to discriminate, within a culture shot through with power as all culture is, between the entrenchment of power and its re-orientation—to ask, of any cultural form, not whether it contains power but whether it contains, with its power, the force that keeps that power open. The family ethos, examined at its own scale, is where this principle becomes visible, because in the family one can see, across generations, both the ethos that hardened into the reproduction of an authority outlived by its conditions, and the ethos that carried within it the means of its own generational revision. The middle scale is the scale at which the difference between power-over and power-to in culture is most clearly read, and reading it there confirms, for culture in general, that the presence of power is not the end of the analysis but its beginning.

The bridge to production and capture

The family ethos, finally, returns the argument to the scale question and hands it forward to the political economy that follows. It shows, against the weak analogy the paper has

held to, that endogenous cultural generation does occur above the scale of the dyad—that a family, and not only a couple, can author a culture of its own, generated within its bounded relation and transmitted across its generations. It does not show that the same holds at the scale of a whole symbolic order, and the caution the paper has reserved for that further step remains in force; the family is a middle term, not a bridge all the way to the macro-scale. But it establishes that the endogenous is not confined to the smallest unit, and that the dialectic of power and counter-power the synthesis described operates wherever culture is generated, at the scale of the family as at the scale of the couple. And it hands the argument forward, for the family ethos is produced under material conditions, as the next section will insist of all culture, and is, in the present, as subject to capture as any other endogenous culture—its manner supplied ready-made by a market in family lifestyles, its cultivation outsourced to purchased instruction, its transmission mediated by platforms that own the means through which the generations now communicate. The production and capture of culture, to which the argument now turns, reach the family ethos as they reach the culture of the dyad, and the case just examined becomes, in the sections that follow, one more site at which the endogenous generation of culture meets the material conditions that constrain it and the capital that would draw its value off.

6.28. The Production of Culture

The third part turns from what intimate culture is and how it is lived to how it is produced and how it is captured, and it begins, as historical materialism requires, with production. The phenomenology treated the couple's culture largely from within, as it is generated and interpreted by the two; this part sets that internal life in the field of material forces that condition it from without, and asks the questions the first part's materialist line prepared: under what forces and relations of production is culture generated, who owns and transmits it, and how does it function in the reproduction of an order? The account proceeds through three layers—the forces of production, the relations of production, and ideology—and closes on the sharp contrast between two ways a subject can be produced, which is where the political economy meets the ethics of the series.

The forces of production: the materiality of the medium

Culture is generated in a medium, and the medium is material. What forms a culture can take, how far they can travel, who can participate in making them, are set in the first instance by the forces of production—by the material means available for giving culture a body. The history of culture is inseparable from the history of its media: the passage from oral to written, from manuscript to print, from print to the electronic and the digital, is at each step a transformation of what culture can be, because each medium reconstitutes what can be recorded, how widely it can be shared, and who has access to the making. This is not a background fact but a condition internal to cultural production, and it bears on intimate culture as much as on the culture of a people. The forms a couple can generate and sustain are conditioned by the media through which they live and communicate: whether they share a household or are separated by distance, whether their communication passes through their own bodies and voices or through the platforms of others, whether the record of their shared life is kept in forms they control or in forms owned by another. The materiality of the medium is the first determinant of what an intimate culture can be, and it is, as the last sections of this part will show, the first point at which an external owner can insert itself into the couple's cultural production.

The relations of production: ownership and the position of the producer

Beyond the forces of production stand the relations of production, and they raise the questions of ownership and of the producer's position that are decisive for a political economy of culture. Who has the leisure to generate culture; whose cultural production is recognized and whose is not; to whom the products belong; who holds the authority to interpret and to license—these are questions of the relations within which culture is produced, and their answers vary with the mode of production as sharply as the answers to the corresponding questions about material goods. A culture produced under aristocratic patronage, a culture produced in the guild, a culture produced under the culture industry, differ not only in content but in their whole relation of production: in who owns the product, who is positioned as its producer, and who is excluded from production altogether. For intimate culture the question of ownership seems, at first, not to arise—the couple generate their culture and it is theirs—but the appearance is deceptive, and the deception is the theme of this part. The question of who owns the

medium through which the couple's culture is produced and recorded, who owns the platforms on which their shared life is increasingly lived, who is positioned to draw value from the culture they generate, turns out to be as live for the intimate dyad as for any other cultural producer, and the illusion that intimate culture stands outside the relations of production is precisely the illusion under cover of which it is captured.

Ideology: interpellation and the production of the subject

The third layer is ideology, and it is the layer at which the production of culture becomes the production of subjects. Althusser gave this its sharpest form in the concept of *interpellation*. Ideology, for Althusser, is not a set of ideas floating above the economic base but a material practice, embodied in institutions he called ideological state apparatuses—among which he named, decisively for this paper, the family—and its fundamental operation is to constitute individuals as subjects by *hailing* them, calling to them in a way that, in the turning-to-answer, makes them the subject the hail addressed (Althusser 1971). The one hailed becomes, in recognizing themselves as the one called, a subject fitted to the order that called them; and this interpellation is, at bottom, the mechanism by which the relations of production reproduce themselves, producing the subjects they require. Culture, seen through this layer, is not innocent even in its most intimate forms, for the scripts of love, of the couple, of the shared life are among the hailings by which individuals are constituted as the subjects a given order needs—the subjects who will desire what the order supplies, mark their bonds in the forms the market sells, and reproduce, in their most private world, the relations of production that produced them.

Two ways to produce a subject: interpellation and generation

Here the political economy meets the ethics of the series, at a contrast that must be drawn sharply, for it is the hinge on which the whole third part turns. There are two ways a subject can be produced in and through culture, and they are opposites. The first is interpellation in Althusser's sense: the production of a *fitted* subject, hailed into a pre-existing position, constituted from without to occupy a role the order requires, formed as the subject that the relations of production need. This is the production of a subject as an effect, a congealing of the individual into a determined position, and it is, in the terms the series has developed, an operation of *power-over*: the subject is produced by a

power exercised upon it, fixed into the shape the order dictates. The second way is the one the whole of this paper has described: the generation of a subject within a relation, the coming-to-be of the relational subject through the culture it and its partner generate together. This is not the hailing of an individual into a fixed position but the generation of a subject that did not exist before, formed not from without by an order but from within by a relation, in the reciprocal movement by which the culture the couple generates comes back to constitute the couple. This is an operation of *power-to*: an enabling generation, not a fixing subjection. The distinction is the ethical center of the political economy that follows. Interpellation produces the subject the order needs, from outside, by power-over; endogenous intimate culture generates the subject the relation becomes, from within, by power-to. And the capture of intimate culture by capital, which the next sections analyze, is precisely the operation by which the second is bent into the service of the first—by which the couple's own endogenous generation is colonized and made to produce, under the appearance of a freely generated intimate world, the fitted subjects the order requires. The Hegelian line names the danger exactly: production is objectification, the going-out of the subject into a made world, and objectification becomes *alienation* when the made world is turned against its maker, when what the couple generates is owned by another and returns to them as a power over them rather than a world of their own. It is to that alienation, in its specific form as the capture of intimate culture by capital, that the argument now turns.

6.29. The Capture of Intimate Culture by Capital

Production having been laid out, the argument turns to capture: to the means by which capital draws value from culture, and, in the end, from the intimate culture the second part described. The account proceeds through three historical stages, each a deeper reach of capital into culture, and the third is the one that touches intimate relation directly. The stages are not offered as a complete history but as a deepening, each stage taking as its raw material something the previous stage left untouched, until the last reaches the bond itself.

Stage one: the culture industry

The first stage is the commodification of culture as such, analyzed by Adorno and Horkheimer under the name of the *culture industry*. Culture, in their account, becomes an industry in the strict sense: its products are manufactured on the model of factory production, standardized and streamlined, and the individuality they appear to offer is a *pseudo-individuality*, a spurious uniqueness stamped onto a standardized product to simulate a diversity that the underlying standardization has abolished (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002). What is captured, in this stage, is the aesthetic longing itself: the desire that, in the terms of this paper, reaches toward the Real, toward the impossible object around which the drive turns, is intercepted and filled with a standardized commodity that offers itself as the object of that longing. In the terms the series has developed, this is a degradation at the level of value: a real value, oriented to the unsymbolizable, is forced into the form of a symbolic-commodity value that can be exchanged, and the longing is drawn off into the purchase. The culture industry captures culture by manufacturing its objects and selling them to a desire it has first standardized.

Stage two: the society of the spectacle

The second stage, analyzed by Debord as the *society of the spectacle*, is a deeper reach, for it captures not merely cultural objects but social relations themselves. In the spectacle, capital no longer only sells cultural commodities; it organizes the whole of social life into a vast accumulation of spectacles, so that the relation between people is mediated by images, and lived directly relations give way to relations between images of relations (Debord 1994). What is captured here is relation itself, in its represented form: the direct coupling that this paper places at the center of intimate culture is replaced, in the spectacle, by a mediated pseudo-relation, a relation to the image of a bond in place of the bond. This is a decisive step toward the capture of intimate culture, for it installs, between the two who would generate a culture of their own, the mediating image supplied by capital, and it teaches the couple to relate to the representation of their relation—to how their bond appears, to its image displayed and consumed—in place of the relation itself.

Stage three: affective and attentional capitalism

The third stage is the one that reaches intimate relation directly, and it is the living frontier of the present. Contemporary platform capitalism takes intimacy, companionship, and affective connection themselves as raw material to be extracted. The forms are familiar and multiplying: dating platforms that render the search for a bond into a monetized funnel, engineered to be entered and re-entered rather than concluded; social platforms that turn the display of intimacy into a stream of engagement to be harvested; the quantification of affective life into metrics of participation, likes, and attention, so that the bond itself becomes a source of data and revenue. In the terms of political economy, this is the *real subsumption* of the most private region of human life: the drive's interweaving in the couple, which the second part showed to be the very substance of intimate culture, is here taken up as the raw material of an extraction, drilled into as the richest available source of value precisely because it lies nearest the constitutive lack. This stage is the direct capture of the intimate, and it operates, as the phenomenology's final section showed, through the colonization of the couple's own co-signification: it supplies the scripts, owns the platforms, and shapes the sense of what a bond should be, so that the couple, generating what they take to be their own culture, generate value for the owner of the field.

The mechanism of capture, and an independent treatment

The precise mechanism by which capital captures relational value—the formal chain by which a relational property is stripped from its relation, reified into an attribute, bound to a commodity, and made to yield extraction through the necessary failure of the object of desire—has been analyzed at length by the present author in an independent work, to which the reader is referred and on which this section does not depend (Wanhong 2026b). That work stands on its own and is not a part of the present argument; it is cited here because it anatomizes, in detail this section need not repeat, the psychoanalytic structure of the capture whose cultural form is here at issue. The point to be retained for the present argument is the one the psychoanalytic line has insisted on throughout: that the capture reaches its object through the drive. Capital captures intimate culture most powerfully because the interwoven drive that charges that culture lies nearest the constitutive lack, and to divert a desire that circles so near the empty place mobilizes far

more than any surface preference; the intimate bond is thus the richest fuel for capture, and the most destroyed by it, since the ore is destroyed in the extracting.

Why the capture cannot be total

The section closes by marking the limit that the framework of Part One established and that the next sections will develop. The capture of intimate culture, however deep, cannot be total, and the reason is the one the second revision of the framework secured: the Real is not completely symbolizable, and the relational Real at the core of the bond therefore resists the symbolic capture that commodification is. What capital can capture is the symbolic surface of intimate culture—the forms, the scripts, the displays, the data—and what it cannot capture is the relational Real those forms served, because that Real is not a symbolizable content that could be extracted but the unsymbolizable core of the bond itself. The capture, at its most complete, is therefore a *decoherence*: it preserves the sign of the bond and draws off its substance, keeping the outward cultural form while the real coherence that charged it is lost.

Here the paper advances a third thesis of its own, one that distinguishes its account of capture from the account of the capture of relational value given in the author's independent work. Call it *capture-as-decoherence*: capital's capture of a relational culture succeeds not by seizing the culture itself but by decohering it—by preserving the symbolizable symbolic form while drawing off its coherence in the register of the Real, so that what remains is a shell whose charge has been withdrawn. Where the independent treatment analyzed capture as a rerouting of desire toward a substitute object, the mechanism marked here is the extraction of coherence: the sign of the bond is kept in circulation and made to yield value, while the real coherence it once carried is dissolved in the keeping. This is why the capture can approach completeness in the symbolic register and yet meet, in the register of the Real, a limit it cannot pass: the symbolic form, being symbolizable, is available to be preserved and sold, and the real coherence, not being symbolizable, is not available to be extracted but only to be lost. Decoherence names exactly this asymmetry, that the capture takes everything of the culture that can be represented and destroys, rather than acquires, what cannot—so that the market ends holding the form of a bond whose substance its own operation has dissolved.

This is why the captured intimate culture is a shell, and why the capture, for all its power, meets a limit it cannot cross. The couple that has surrendered its culture to the market retains, in the relational Real that no market can reach, the possibility of generating again a culture of its own—a possibility the final sections must now examine, first in the constraint that bounds but does not determine, then in the ethics of a cultural practice that would reclaim what capture draws off.

6.30. The Closed Loop Back into Intimate Relation

The capture described in the previous section is not a process that occurs elsewhere and leaves intimate relation untouched. It closes a loop: the value drawn from culture returns, as a force, into the intimate relation from which, at the last stage, it was drawn, and it alters that relation, eroding the very capacity for endogenous cultural generation that the second part described. This section traces the closing of that loop, the feedback by which the capture of intimate culture reaches back into the couple and changes what they can generate and who they can become.

Mediation: the supplying of ready-made forms

The first moment of the feedback is *mediation*. Increasingly, the forms through which intimate relation is conducted—its idioms, its rites, its expectations, its very sense of what love is and how it is expressed—are supplied ready-made by the culture industry and its successors, rather than generated by the couple from within. What romance is, how a proposal is made, how devotion is shown, what an anniversary requires, what a shared life should look like: these are furnished as scripts, and the couple is invited, at every turn, to adopt the supplied form in place of generating its own. The negotiation with the outer symbolic order that the phenomenology described has, under this feedback, tilted decisively toward substitution: the couple ceases to generate its own culture and instead consumes the culture supplied to it, so that the co-signification that should have been theirs is performed in advance, by the market that wrote the script. This is the colonization of intimate culture from within its own generation, and it is, in the terms of the previous part, the second misrecognition—the treatment of the bond’s meaning as an exhibitable, convertible asset—installed as the ordinary condition of intimate life. This

connects the diagnosis to the analysis of the symbolic order's colonization of the relational interior that the series has developed elsewhere, under the heading of the seepage of external regimes into the dyadic interior.

The deepening of the hollow subject

The second moment is the deepening of a hollowing the series has diagnosed from its beginning. When the meaning of intimate relation is outsourced to consumer symbols—when the couple no longer generates its own forms but consumes the forms supplied—the relation loses its capacity to generate its own meaning, and with it the subject loses one of the last sites in which it might have come to be through a generation genuinely its own. The mother paper of this series diagnosed the modern condition as a crisis of symbol and subject, an inflation of signs accompanied by a hollowing of the subject, and the capture of intimate culture is the reaching of that crisis into the last interior (Huang 2025a). If the subject is generated in relation, as the whole of this paper has argued, and if the relation's capacity to generate is colonized by a market that supplies its meanings ready-made, then the subject is hollowed at the very site where it might have been filled, generated as the fitted consumer of supplied meanings rather than as the relational subject of an endogenous generation. The hollow subject is not only a consumer of public culture; it is now a consumer of its own intimate culture, deprived of the generation through which it might have become someone in particular, with someone in particular.

The artificial intelligence turn

This deepening is redoubled by a development the mother paper marked and the present moment makes acute: the arrival of systems that can supply not only the forms of intimate culture but the generative act itself. Where the culture industry supplied the scripts and left the couple to perform them, there now arise systems that offer to perform the generation—to compose the message, to craft the endearment, to supply the words of devotion, to generate the very idiom that was to have been the couple's own. The final interiority that even the culture industry left to the couple—the act of generating their own forms, however much the raw materials were supplied—can now be outsourced to a machine. This is the capture reaching its innermost point: not merely the supplying

of the forms the couple adopts, but the supplying of the generative act by which forms are made, so that even the coining of a private word, the making of a private meaning, is delegated to a system that owns the process and returns the product. The danger is precise, and it is not that such systems produce nothing of worth; it is that they offer to perform the one act—the endogenous generation of a shared meaning—on which, this paper has argued, the whole worth of intimate culture depends, and that a couple which delegates that act retains the form and loses exactly what made the form a culture rather than a purchase.

Alienation completed

Read through the Hegelian line, the closed loop is the completion of alienation, and naming it as such gathers the section. Production, the first line established, is objectification: the going-out of the subject into a made world, which is the necessary path of its self-knowledge. Alienation is what objectification becomes when the made world is taken from its maker and turned against them—when what the subject produced stands over against it as an alien power, owned by another, ruling the very subject whose activity produced it. The closed loop is exactly this. The couple generates intimate culture; the culture is captured, its forms supplied and owned by the market, its generation colonized, at the limit its generative act itself delegated to a machine; and the captured culture returns to the couple as an alien power, a set of forms they consume rather than make, ruling their intimate life from a position they no longer occupy. What was to have been the couple's exteriorization—their going-out into a shared world in which they would know themselves and return to themselves enriched—becomes, under capture, an alienation: the shared world is owned by another, and it returns to them not as their own work reflecting them back to themselves but as a foreign power shaping them to its ends. The exteriorized culture that should have been the couple's self-knowledge becomes the instrument of their subjection. This is the darkest point of the paper, and it is the point at which the argument must turn: for if the framework of Part One is right, the alienation cannot be total, and the turn from diagnosis to the conditions of recovery begins with the principle the next section states—that the material conditions constrain but do not determine, and that the capacity for endogenous generation, though colonized, is never wholly destroyed.

6.31. Constrained but Not Determined

The previous section reached the darkest point of the argument, the completion of alienation in the closed loop of capture. This section is the turn. It does not undo the diagnosis or soften it; it locates the diagnosis correctly, and the correct location is itself the ground of a recovery. The turn rests on the single dialectical principle the series has maintained throughout, and which the first part established for culture in general: that material conditions constrain but do not determine. Applied to the capture just described, this principle yields two consequences that together open the way from diagnosis to ethics, and it is the office of this brief but pivotal section to draw them.

The capture is a historical form, and its alienation is material

The first consequence is that the capture of intimate culture, however deep, is a *historical form* and not an eternal condition. It is the specific shape that the production and capture of intimate culture take under the present relations of production, and its alienation is therefore material and historical—produced by a particular arrangement of ownership and medium, and, like every such arrangement, particular to its conditions rather than written into the nature of intimate relation as such. This is not a consolation offered against the diagnosis but a precise dating of it. The alienation the previous section described is real, and it is the real form of intimate culture under present conditions; but to see it as a historical form is to see that it is not the truth of intimate culture for all time, not a fate inscribed in the structure of the bond, but the effect of a determinate material arrangement that had a beginning and can have an end. The disciplined historical eye the fourth revision required is turned here upon the present itself: the capture is to be evaluated as a form produced under its conditions, which means it is neither to be mistaken for the permanent nature of intimacy nor to be treated as a doom against which nothing can be done, but understood as what it is, a historical form of alienation, material in its origin and therefore material in its possible supersession.

The capacity for endogenous generation is never wholly destroyed

The second consequence is the decisive one, and it follows from the framework's account of the Real. The capture colonizes the couple's generation, supplies its forms, at the limit

delegates its generative act; but it cannot wholly destroy the capacity for endogenous generation, because that capacity is rooted in something the capture cannot reach. The second revision secured that the relational Real is not completely symbolizable, and the capture operates by symbolic means—by supplying symbolic forms, scripts, and now generative processes, all of which are of the order of the symbolic. What lies in the register of the Real—the unsymbolizable core of the bond, the “us” that no supplied script and no generative machine can compose, because it is not a symbolic content to be composed but the real coherence of a particular coupling—remains beyond the reach of a capture that works by symbolic supply. However completely the forms of a couple’s intimate culture are colonized, the relational Real at the core of the bond is not colonized, because it is not of the order the colonization operates on; and so long as it remains, the couple retains the ground from which an endogenous generation could begin again, the anchor in the Real from which a new symbolic form, genuinely their own, could be generated in place of the supplied one. The capacity for endogenous generation is never wholly destroyed because its root is in a register the capture cannot symbolize and therefore cannot own.

The negation of the negation

Read through the Hegelian line, these two consequences are the second negation, and naming them as such completes the dialectical figure the paper has been building. Alienation was the first negation: the exteriorized culture, going out of the couple into a made world, was captured and turned against them, standing over against its makers as an alien power—the negation of the couple’s generativity by its own product, seized by another. The turn of this section is the negation of that negation. It is not a return to an imagined state before capture, an innocence of intimate culture that never existed and could not be recovered; it is a determinate negation of the alienation, which carries the couple forward, not back, to a generation that has passed through capture and reclaimed the generative act from it. The exteriorized culture that had become an alien power can be reclaimed, taken up again by the relation whose product it was, and returned to the movement of the couple’s self-knowledge from which the capture had diverted it. This is why the diagnosis of alienation is not the paper’s last word, and cannot be: because alienation, in the dialectical account, is a moment and not a terminus, the first negation that calls forth its own negation, and the reclamation of the captured culture is the sec-

and negation that the framework not only permits but requires. The material conditions constrain, and under present conditions the constraint takes the form of a deep capture; but the conditions do not determine, and the undetermined remainder—the relational Real the capture cannot reach, the endogenous capacity it cannot destroy—is the ground on which the negation of the negation stands. What that reclamation asks of the couple, in the way of a cultural practice and an ethics, is the subject of the section that follows, which turns from the conditions of recovery to the practice of it.

6.32. The Ethics of Cultural Cognition and Practice

The turn of the previous section, from the diagnosis of capture to the conditions of recovery, opens onto a normative question the paper must now face directly. If the capacity for endogenous generation is never wholly destroyed, and if the reclamation of a captured culture is possible, then the question arises what it would mean to know and to practise intimate culture rightly—what ethics attaches to the cognition and the practice of a culture once it is understood as the endogenous, generative sediment the paper has shown it to be. This section states that ethics, in two layers, the cognitive and the practical, and shows that they are, at bottom, one.

The cognitive layer: culture is not an object to be possessed

The ethics begins in cognition, because how one knows intimate culture already carries a normative weight. The paper has shown that intimate culture is not a content its forms contain but an activity its participants perform, known only from within, in the participatory circuit that its meaning consists in. From this it follows that to *know* an intimate culture rightly is not to objectify it—not to hold it at the distance of a thing surveyed, inventoried, possessed—but to participate in the generative activity that is its life. And this cognitive fact is already an ethical one, for the misrecognition that treats a living, generated culture as a possessable object is not merely an error but a failure of the right relation to the culture and to the other with whom it is shared. To treat the bond's culture as a thing one has is to have already withdrawn from the participation in which alone it lives; to treat it as an asset one can exhibit and convert is to have already delivered it toward the capture that draws its substance off. The cognitive error and the

ethical failure are the same act seen twice: mistaking the generated for the given, the activity for the object, the participation for the possession. The first requirement of the ethics is therefore cognitive: to know intimate culture as what it is, a generation to be participated in, and not as what the misrecognitions would make it, a thing to be had or shown.

The practical layer: non-possessive generation

From the cognitive requirement follows the practical one, and it can be stated as a single principle: the practice proper to intimate culture is a *non-possessive generation*. The culture is to be generated and re-generated, continually, in the participatory activity that is its life; and it is to be generated without being possessed—without being seized by either party as a thing they own, without being extracted as an asset, without being turned into an instrument of one party's power over the other. Non-possessive generation is the practice in which the culture is made and kept alive precisely by not being grasped as a made thing: made continually, held by neither, owned by no one, because its mode of being is the activity of its generation and not the possession of its product. The classical tradition of this series offers, as one resource among others for naming this practice, the conception of a generation that does not possess what it generates—that produces without owning, acts without holding onto, brings to maturity without ruling over—and the reader familiar with that tradition will recognize the resonance; but the principle stands on the argument of this paper, and does not depend on the classical formulation, which is invoked here as an illumination and not as a ground. What the argument requires is only this: that intimate culture, being a generation and not a possession, is rightly practised only in a generation that refuses to possess, and that every grasping of it as a possession—whether toward private hoarding or toward public exhibition—is a lapse from the practice its being demands.

The power dimension: non-possession and non-entrenchment are one posture

This practical ethics joins, at its root, the ethics of power the synthesis established, and marking the junction shows that the paper's normative claims form a single posture rather than a list. The sublation of power held that a just intimate culture must generate, alongside the power its generation carries, the counter-power that prevents that power

from entrenching—the friction against accumulation and the force of re-orientation. The ethics of non-possessive generation is the same requirement seen from another side. To possess an intimate culture—to grasp it as a thing one owns—is precisely to entrench a power in it, to fix the generative process into a possessed structure that one party holds and the other is held by; and to refuse possession, to keep the culture in the condition of ongoing generation owned by neither, is precisely to prevent that entrenchment, to keep the power in the culture in the condition of power-to rather than power-over. Non-possession and non-entrenchment are therefore not two requirements but one posture, seen in the register of ownership and in the register of power respectively: the refusal to possess the culture is the refusal to entrench the power, and the practice of non-possessive generation is the practice of a culture in which power remains enabling rather than dominating. The two ethical claims the paper has made, the one about ownership and the one about power, are one claim about the single posture proper to a generative intimacy.

Against cultural capital, once more

The ethics can be sharpened by setting it against the concept it has opposed since Part One. Bourdieu's cultural capital is the very type of a possessed and entrenched culture: it is accrued, held, converted, deployed as an asset in a field of struggle, and its whole being is possession and the power that possession confers (Bourdieu 1986). The ethics of non-possessive generation is the exact negation of this: a culture whose worth is not in its possession but in its generation, not in the advantage it confers on its holder but in the world it opens between its participants, not extractable because not possessable, not a capital because not a thing. The contrast is not merely conceptual but ethical, for it marks two ways of standing toward what one shares with another: the way of the asset, which holds, converts, and extracts, and the way of the generation, which makes, participates, and lets be. The whole of this paper's ethics can be compressed into the choice between these two, and the choice is not neutral. To practise intimate culture as cultural capital is to have already begun to capture it oneself, to stand toward one's own bond as the market stands toward it, holding its meaning as an asset to be converted; to practise it as non-possessive generation is to keep it in the register of the relational Real that no market can reach, generated and re-generated between two who own it by

not owning it. The reclamation the previous section showed to be possible is, in practice, exactly this: the return, from the possession and exhibition that deliver intimate culture to capture, to the non-possessive generation in which it lives.

6.33. Cross-Scale Retrospect and Envoi

The argument has run its course, from the general ontology of cultural emergence, through the phenomenology of the intimate dyad, to the political economy and ethics of its production, capture, and reclamation. It remains to look back across the scales the paper has traversed, with the caution the paper has reserved for that looking, and then to close, as the series closes its papers, by returning to the word with which it began.

The cross-scale retrospect, as a weak analogy

The paper has held throughout to a weak analogy, not a structural identity, between the micro-culture of the intimate dyad and the macro-culture of a people or a symbolic order, and the retrospect must honor that restraint. What can be said is this: the endogenous generation of culture in the intimate dyad, described in this paper in its irreducible particularity, may *illuminate*, by analogy and not by identity, the question of how a wider symbolic order might be regenerated from below. The mother paper of this series diagnosed the present as a crisis of the symbolic, a hollowing of the shared meanings by which a world is held together (Huang 2025a); and the account of intimate culture offered here suggests, cautiously, that the regeneration of meaning, if it is possible, has the form of an endogenous generation of the kind the dyad exhibits at its own scale—a making of shared meaning from within a relation, non-possessive and unentrenched, rather than a supply of meaning from above or a capture of it from without. This is offered as an illumination and not as a program, and the caution is not a formality. The features that make the dyad the paper’s privileged site do not scale up: the vacancy of the big Other, which frees the couple to author their own culture, has no counterpart at the scale of a people, which possesses a full apparatus of traditions and institutions; the two-person structure, with its interweaving of drive and its particular fragility, is proper to the dyad and cannot be enlarged into a model of collective culture without distortion. The analogy illuminates and must not be pressed. What the intimate dyad shows is that

culture can be generated endogenously, non-possessively, from within a relation, against the supply from above and the capture from without; whether and how anything of this holds at the scale of a symbolic order is a question this paper raises by its analogy and leaves, deliberately, open.

Return to *Hua*

The paper began with the tension in its word, between the *wen* that is pattern and deposit and the *hua* that is transformation and generation, and it can now return to that tension as to a thing resolved in the only way it admits of resolution, which is not by choosing one term but by rightly ordering the two. Culture is both *wen* and *hua*, both the sedimented pattern and the ongoing transformation; the error the paper has fought is the error of taking the *wen* for the whole, of mistaking the deposited pattern for the being of culture and forgetting the *hua* that generates it and that the pattern is only the trace of. The whole argument may be read as the restoration of the *hua* to its priority: as the demonstration that culture is not, in its being, a pattern deposited and possessed, but a transformation ongoing and generated, of which the pattern is the residue and the record. *Huacheng*, the bringing-to-form, the ongoing cultivation of a shared world, which is what two people do when they generate between them a culture that is theirs. The word held the thesis from the beginning, in the verbal force of its second character, and the paper has been the unfolding of what that character already knew.

Envoi

It remains only to say, in closing, what the whole has been about, and to say it plainly, as an envoi rather than an argument. Between two people who turn toward a shared world there emerges, over time, a culture: a private language, a set of rites, a store of references, a way of understanding that belongs to them and to no one else. This paper has tried to say what that culture is—not a possession they acquire but a world they generate, exteriorized from an interweaving of their desire, sedimented across the registers of image and word and the unsayable bond, generated under the conditions of their material life and yet not determined by them, carrying a power that a just love keeps from entrenching, and vulnerable, by the very features that make it precious, to a capture that would draw its substance off and to a loss that would return it to ruin. And this paper has tried to

say what such a culture asks of the two who make it: that they know it for what it is, a generation and not a possession; that they practise it as a generation, made continually and grasped by neither; that they keep it in the register of the Real that no market can reach, where alone it is safe, because there alone it is not a thing. The truth of such a culture is not in what it has deposited but in that it is still being generated; its life is the generating, and its death is the moment the generating stops. Spirit completes itself, the philosopher said, in returning to itself from its own exteriorization; and a shared culture completes itself, if it does, in the same way—in the return of the two, through the world they have made, to a knowledge of themselves and of each other that the making alone could give. The culture is not the monument they leave. It is the world they are still, so long as they are turned toward each other, in the act of making. 化而未成—forming, and not yet finished; which is to say, alive.

References

- Althusser, Louis (1971). “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)”. In: *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. Ed. by Louis Althusser. Trans. by Ben Brewster. Translated by Ben Brewster; essay first drafted 1969–1970. New York: Monthly Review Press, pp. 127–186.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail (1981). *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Ed. by Michael Holquist. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- (1984). *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*. Ed. by Caryl Emerson. Trans. Caryl Emerson; orig. 1929, rev. 1963. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre (1984). *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Trans. Richard Nice; orig. *La Distinction*, 1979. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- (1986). “The Forms of Capital”. In: *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*. Ed. by John G. Richardson. New York: Greenwood Press, pp. 241–258.
- Cassirer, Ernst (1944). *An Essay on Man: An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- (1953–1957). *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*. 3 vols.; trans. Ralph Manheim; orig. *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen*, 1923–1929. New Haven: Yale University Press.

- Debord, Guy (1994). *The Society of the Spectacle*. Trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith; orig. *La société du spectacle*, 1967. New York: Zone Books.
- Durkheim, Émile (1982). *The Rules of Sociological Method*. Ed. Steven Lukes, trans. W. D. Halls; orig. *Les règles de la méthode sociologique*, 1895. New York: Free Press.
- (1995). *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. Trans. Karen E. Fields; orig. *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*, 1912. New York: Free Press.
- Eglash, Ron (2016). “An Introduction to Generative Justice”. In: *Teknokultura. Revista de Cultura Digital y Movimientos Sociales* 13.2, pp. 369–404. DOI: [10.5209/rev_TEKN.2016.v13.n2.52847](https://doi.org/10.5209/rev_TEKN.2016.v13.n2.52847).
- Engels, Friedrich (1890). *Letter to Joseph Bloch, 21 September 1890*. In *Marx and Engels: Selected Correspondence*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1975.
- Foucault, Michel (1977). *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Trans. Alan Sheridan; orig. *Surveiller et punir*, 1975. New York: Pantheon Books.
- (1980). *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977*. Ed. by Colin Gordon. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Geertz, Clifford (1973). “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture”. In: *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. New York: Basic Books, pp. 3–30.
- Gramsci, Antonio (1971). *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. Ed. by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith. New York: International Publishers.
- Hall, Stuart (1980). “Encoding/Decoding”. In: *Culture, Media, Language*, pp. 128–138.
- Horkheimer, Max and Theodor W. Adorno (2002). *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*. Ed. by Gunzelin Schmid Noerr. Trans. Edmund Jephcott; orig. *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, 1944/1947. “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception”. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Huang, Wanhong (2025a). “Responding to the Crises of Symbol and Subject in Modernity: Towards a Generative Nomos of Relational Presence”. OSF, doi:10.17605/OSF.IO/5R6CD; year to be finalized (2024 preprint / 2025).
- (2025b). “The Sustainability of Intimacy: Poetic Generativity and Generative Justice”. Philosophy of Intimacy and the Theory of Justice, Paper IX.
- (2026). “The Causality of the Non-Binding Vow: On Trust, Promise, and the Generation of Expectation in the Absence of the Other’s Sword”. Philosophy of Intimacy and the Theory of Justice, Paper XIII.

- Lacan, Jacques (1975). “Le Séminaire, Livre XXII: R.S.I.” Seminar of 1974–1975; the Borromean knot of Real, Symbolic, and Imaginary.
- (1978). *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI*. Ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller. Trans. by Alan Sheridan. New York: W. W. Norton.
 - (1992). *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959–1960: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII*. Ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller. Trans. by Dennis Porter. New York: W. W. Norton.
 - (2006). *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*. Trans. by Bruce Fink. Trans. Bruce Fink; orig. *Écrits*, 1966. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Legge, James (1963). *The I Ching: The Book of Changes*. Trans. by James Legge. New York: Dover Publications.
- Levenson, Joseph R. (1968). *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate: A Trilogy*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude (1963). *Structural Anthropology*. Trans. Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf; orig. *Anthropologie structurale*, 1958. New York: Basic Books.
- Simmel, Georg (1950). “Quantitative Aspects of the Group”. In: *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*. Ed. by Kurt H. Wolff. Part Two; page span to be confirmed against a copy. Glencoe, IL: The Free Press.
- Tu, Weiming (1986). “Toward a Third Epoch of Confucian Humanism: A Background Understanding”. In: *Confucianism: The Dynamics of Tradition*. Ed. by Irene Eber. New York: Macmillan.
- Tylor, Edward Burnett (1871). *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art, and Custom*. London: John Murray.
- Wanhong (2026a). “Generativity Under Power: Trust, Asymmetry, and Estrangement in Intimate Relations”. Philosophy of Intimacy and the Theory of Justice, Paper XVII. Working draft.
- (2026b). “Relational Value under the Symbolic Crisis”. Independent working paper (generative relational being framework).
 - (2026c). “The Aesthetic Philosophy of the Quotidian and the Cultivation of Perception”. Philosophy of Intimacy and the Theory of Justice, Paper XXIII. Working draft.

Yan, Zhitui (2021). *Family Instructions for the Yan Clan and Other Works by Yan Zhitui (531–590s)*. Trans. Xiaofei Tian. *Yanshi jiaxun* 颜氏家训, the earliest surviving Chinese “family instructions”. Berlin: De Gruyter.

CHAPTER 7

Optimization Theory and Rationality in Intimate Relations

致她——

For her—

那个属于森林与山之女孩，

the girl who belongs to the forest and the mountains,

我从未计算过值不值得，

whom I have never once weighed for whether she was worth it,

因为那从来不是一个可以计算的问题。

because that was never a question one could compute.

致我最爱的人。 To the one I love most.

This paper argues that optimization is not a law of the universe, and that morality and the manner of being of intimate relation are not, in their structure, optimization problems. It proceeds in two movements that it is careful to keep apart. The first is a formal proof, carrying no value judgment, that intimate relation furnishes no well-defined optimization problem: the value at stake is in part non-structurable, since the drive, which any complete objective must include, resists representation as a term; it is relational, generated within the relation and existing only there, so that no external standpoint could fix the objective; it is incommensurable, so that to price certain goods is to betray rather than mismeasure them; and the subject is constituted within the relation rather than given before it, so that the optimizer the model presupposes is a product of the process it is meant to stand outside of. Each failure strikes a distinct precondition, and any one leaves the operation of maximization undefined.

The second movement takes that result as given and criticizes the imposition of the frame regardless. To optimize where no optimization problem exists converts a value that should circulate into one that can be settled and drawn off, in the manner the theory of generative justice names as extractive computation; it is a symptom of the crisis of the symbolic and of a life-world habituated to the logic of capital, under which a local, historical operation is projected onto the cosmos as its law; and it mistakes the kind of thing morality is, since an optimizing practice, even a successful one, may fail as an ethics, the optimal and the good being orthogonal. The paper then recovers a rationality that responds rather than maximizes, described through response, attunement, and the sustaining of generation, and it closes in polyphony, refusing to name a new master objective, since to do so would reinstate the frame. That refusal is the paper's positive claim, enacted in its form.

Keywords: optimization; incommensurability; relational value; generative justice.

AI usage statement: AI assistants were used for drafting and discussion. The claims and the theoretical framework are the author's own, and the author takes full responsibility for the content.

Part One The Problem: Optimization as a Worldview

7.1. Introduction: An Operation Mistaken for a Law

A question can be so widely presupposed that it is never asked, and the presupposition of this paper is one of these. In the ordinary speech of the present, a certain family of words recurs with the confidence of the self-evident. One speaks of the *optimal* choice, of the *efficient* arrangement, of whether a thing was *worth it*, of getting the *most* out of a day, a career, a marriage. The words are not idle. They carry a picture, and the picture has hardened, over the century in which it became the native tongue of economics, management, and much of the science of decision, into something close to a metaphysics. On this picture there is, for any situation in which one might act, a quantity to be made as large as possible; the situations of a life are so many landscapes, and to live well is to climb them; and the good, wherever it is found, is whatever sits at the summit. The picture is so pervasive that its central operation, the taking of a maximum, has ceased to look like one operation among others with a domain of its own and has come to look like the form of rationality as such, and beyond that, dimly, like the form of things. This paper is about that hardening, and its guiding claim is a denial: that optimization is not a law of the universe, and that morality and the manner of being of intimate relation are not, in their structure, optimization problems at all.

The denial is easy to state and easy to mistake. It is not the pious complaint that one *ought not* to optimize love, that to do so is cold or unromantic. Such a complaint concedes the very thing in dispute, for it grants that an optimization problem is there to be solved and merely asks that we refrain from solving it, out of tact. The claim of this paper is stronger and colder than that. It is that in intimate relation there is, in the strict sense, no well-defined optimization problem to refrain from: that the operation of maximization, applied here, does not have a hard solution one declines to compute but has no legitimate solution to compute at all, because the conditions under which such an operation is defined are not, in this domain, satisfied. The economist who hears the complaint has a ready reply: that love resists optimization only because our utility function is not yet fully written, and that the remedy is a richer function, one with intimacy and meaning and the long horizon folded in. The reply is powerful and must be met on its own ground. The burden of the paper's central part is to show that it fails, that the trouble is not a function written too poorly but the impossibility, for reasons

given in their place, of there being a function to write.

The origin of the question, and its stakes

The question that organizes the paper arrived from without, in the course of an exchange on the political economy of value and the theory of generative justice, and it arrived in a form so simple that it took some time to feel its weight: whether optimization really is a law of the universe. The interlocutor's own framework had long resisted the reduction of heterogeneous value to a single settling scale, and the question was in that sense already implicit in it; but stated baldly it did a particular work. It moved optimization from the place of an obvious and unexamined procedure to the place of a metaphysical thesis, which is to say a thesis that might be false. Once it is seen as a thesis, one can ask what it asserts and whether it is true, and the asking is the whole of this paper. The stakes are not confined to intimacy. If the argument holds, then a picture that governs a great deal of contemporary reasoning about how to live is shown to rest, at least in one central region, on a category mistake; and intimate relation, which the series has taken throughout as the minimal and most exposed unit of relational being, is the region in which the mistake is most legible, because it is there that the goods which resist the picture are least disguised.

Two movements, kept deliberately apart

The paper's argument falls into two movements which it is essential not to confuse, and much of the force of the whole depends on holding them apart. The first movement is a proof, and it is internal and formal. It asks whether the intimate relation furnishes a well-defined optimization problem, and it answers, in four steps, that it does not; and it does this, deliberately, *without any appeal to value*. It does not say that optimizing is bad. It says only that the operation is here undefined: that there is nothing of the required shape for the operation to act upon. One may read the whole of the second part of this paper as an atheist would read a proof that a certain equation has no solution over the reals, with no moral coloring at all, and the argument should be able to compel a reader who feels no particular reverence for love and merely wishes his formalisms to be well posed.

The second movement is a criticism, and it is external and normative. It takes the result of the first as given, that here there is no optimization problem, and it asks what follows when the picture is imposed regardless, when a domain that furnishes no well-defined maximization is treated as though it did. Here, and only here, do the value-laden claims enter: that the imposition damages what it touches, converting a generative circulation into an extractable and exhaustible quantity; that it is a symptom of a particular historical condition rather than a timeless truth; and that it mistakes the kind of thing morality is. The order matters. The proof clears the ground by showing that the frame does not fit; the criticism then examines the cost of forcing it on. To run them together, to argue at once that optimization is undefined and that it is wicked, would weaken both, for it would let the reader suspect that the formal claim is only the moral distaste in disguise. It is not, and the separation is the guarantee.

Three lines, and the shape of the recovery

Three lines run through the argument, as they have run through the series, and naming them here lets their recurrence read as design. The first is *psychoanalytic*: that among the goods any complete objective would have to weigh is the drive, and that the drive, arising at a coupling of the Real and the Symbolic, is precisely what cannot be fully written down, so that the non-structurability of value is not a limitation of our present formalisms but a feature of the thing (Lacan 1978). The second is the line of *relational ontology and the vacancy of the big Other*, developed across the series and stated most sharply in the papers on the non-binding vow and on relational estrangement: that value is not a property held inside a subject but is generated within a relation and exists only there, so that there is no position outside the relation, no omniscient third, from which its value could be read off and fixed (Huang 2026). This line does the heaviest work, for it supplies the reason the objective must be endogenous, and it ties the whole to the series' recurring insistence that there is no metalanguage and no big Other to occupy the God's-eye view that quantification silently requires. The third is the line of *generative justice and political economy*, developed in exchange with Eglash: that value which should circulate and return to those who generate it can instead be settled and drawn off, and that the imposition of an optimizing frame is one of the forms this extraction takes (Eglash 2016).

These lines converge on a recovery, for the paper does not end in denial. Having argued

that rationality is not optimization, it owes an account of what relational rationality then is, and it offers one: a rationality of response, of attunement, and of the sustaining of a generation, which has its own severity and is not the severity of the maximum. But the recovery is held, in the manner the series demands, short of the temptation that would undo it. It would be easy, and it would be a defeat, to answer the question “what should one optimize, if not utility?” with “love, then, or meaning, or generativity,” for that answer keeps the frame and merely repaints the summit. The paper refuses it. Its positive claim is that relational rationality is plural and admits no synthesis into a single measure, and that the refusal to name one master objective is not an evasion but the content of the view, enacted, as the series enacts its claims, in the polyphonic form of its own close.

7.2. The Formal Anatomy of an Optimization Problem

Before one can show that intimate relation furnishes no well-defined optimization problem, one must be exact about what a well-defined optimization problem requires, and the exactness is not pedantry but the whole condition of the argument’s force. The four impossibilities of the paper’s central part are, each of them, the failure of one of the conditions set out here; if the conditions are stated loosely, the failures can be dodged, and if they are stated in a caricatured form the whole refutation is a straw man. The aim of this section is therefore to state, without polemic and in a form a theorist of decision would himself accept, precisely what has to be in place for the operation of maximization to denote anything at all. The section grants optimization its strongest and most respectable version, so that when the later parts withdraw the conditions one by one, they withdraw them from a construction the optimizer recognizes as his own and not from a parody built to be knocked down.

An optimization problem, in its canonical form, is the search for an element of a set that makes a function as large as possible. Written out, it is the expression

$$x^* = \arg \max_{x \in \mathcal{X}} J(x),$$

and the compactness of the notation hides four presuppositions, each of which must hold

for the expression to pick out anything. There is a *feasible set* $\mathcal{X}$, the space of available options, which must be given in advance and be well defined, so that it is determinate what is and is not a candidate. And there is an *objective function* J , which assigns to each candidate a value; and it is in the conditions on J that the presuppositions grow heavy. For the expression to denote, J must be *representationally complete*, defined over terms into which every value at stake has been written, since a value absent from J is a value the maximization cannot see. It must be *exogenous and fixed*, given prior to the search and unchanged by it, for a function that drifts while one climbs offers no summit one can reach and keep. It must be *scalar*, or valued in an ordering rich enough that maxima exist, since $\arg \max$ over values that do not all compare has nothing determinate to return. And behind all three there must be an *optimizer*: a subject whose objective J is, whose preferences it encodes, presupposed to stand outside the problem, prior to it and stable through it, as the one for whom x^* is best.

The four presuppositions, named in the order of their denial

It is worth naming these four in the order the paper will deny them, since the order is a descent from the surface of the problem to its ground, from whether the problem can be *written* to who is doing the *writing*, and each later condition presupposes the earlier ones already met.

The first presupposition is *representational completeness*: that every value at stake can be set down as a term in J . This is the condition that the problem can be stated at all, logically prior to every other, for a value that cannot enter J is not priced badly within the optimization but excluded from its statement, beyond the reach of any adjustment of the function. The first impossibility denies this.

The second is *exogeneity and fixity*: that the objective is given before the process and unaltered by it, a determinate target rather than a moving one. This is the condition an endogenous, self-revising objective violates, and the second impossibility denies it, not as a contingent fact about people whose tastes happen to wander but on the ontological ground that value in relation is generated within the relation and admits no external position from which it could be fixed.

The third is *scalarity*: that the values J assigns lie on a common scale, so that any

two candidates compare and argmax has something to select. This is the condition incommensurable goods violate, and the third impossibility denies it.

The fourth is the *stable optimizer*: a subject with settled preferences standing outside the problem, whose objective J is and for whom its maximum is best. This is the condition a subject constituted within the very relation being optimized violates, and the fourth impossibility denies it, dissolving the fixed referent of the “who” the whole construction silently presupposes.

An instrument granted its proper domain

It clears the ground to see the four conditions holding somewhere, for the paper does not claim that optimization is everywhere ill-posed, only that it is so in a particular and important region, and the contrast is sharper if the well-posed case is granted its due. Consider a shipping company routing a fleet to minimize fuel cost. The feasible set is the routes the vehicles can take, well defined by the road network; the objective is fuel burned, representationally complete because fuel is the whole of what is being weighed and nothing relevant is left outside it; exogenous and fixed, since the price of fuel and the shape of the network do not shift because the planner is planning; scalar, since fuel is measured in one unit along which more and less are always defined; and owned by a stable optimizer, the firm, whose objective this determinately is and who is not remade by the routing. Here optimization is not merely legitimate but the only serious way to proceed, and the paper affirms this without reservation. The four conditions are jointly met, the operation is well defined, and to decline it would be a failure of reason and not a fidelity to anything. The example matters precisely because it is so clean: it shows that the paper’s quarrel is not with optimization but with its transposition into a domain where, as the next part argues, not one of these four conditions survives.

The demand that the anatomy be granted in full

The strategy of the argument requires that this anatomy be granted in its full strength, and the reason is worth stating, because it marks off the paper’s claim from a familiar and much weaker one with which it would otherwise be confused. The weaker claim holds that optimization problems in human affairs are merely *hard*: that the feasible set is too

vast to search, the objective too costly to evaluate, the information too poor, so that we fall back of necessity on rules of thumb and on stopping when a candidate is good enough rather than best (Simon 1955). This is the objection from bounded rationality, and it is true and important, and it is not this paper's objection; indeed it concedes exactly what this paper denies. To satisfy because the true optimum is out of computational reach is to grant that a true optimum exists, well defined but unreachable, and merely to humble our access to it; the metaphysics of optimization is left standing, and only our finitude is confessed. Even the theory of choice under uncertainty, which replaces the known objective with an expectation over states, preserves the four conditions intact and simply integrates J against a probability, so that the agent maximizes expected rather than certain utility and the whole apparatus, with its complete, fixed, scalar objective and its stable subject, is carried over undisturbed (Savage 1954). The paper's claim reaches beneath all of this. It is not that the problem is well-posed and hard, nor that it is well-posed and risky, but that it is not well-posed at all, that one or more of the four conditions fails in kind and not in degree. To establish that, one must take optimization at its strongest, grant it a searcher of unlimited power and perfect information facing no uncertainty whatever, and show that even for such a searcher the problem does not exist, because the representationally complete, exogenous, fixed, scalar objective belonging to a stable subject that the operation requires is, in intimate relation, not there to be operated on. The anatomy is set out in full so that the denials, when they come, cannot be answered by the reply that a faster computer or a more patient economist would have found the maximum after all. There is, the next part argues, no maximum there to be found, and no faster computer reaches what was never posed.

7.3. The Genealogy of Optimizationism

The picture criticized here was not always a picture of everything, and recovering the outline of how it became one is not idle history but part of the argument. A thesis that presents itself as the timeless form of reason draws much of its authority from seeming to have no alternative and no origin, to be simply how thinking goes; and that authority is loosened, though not refuted, once the thesis is shown to have been assembled, step by step, out of choices that could have been made otherwise. The point of the genealogy

is therefore not to refute optimizationism by naming its birthday, which would be the genetic fallacy, but to change its standing: to move the claim that optimization is the form of things out of the register of self-evident truth, where it defends itself by seeming to have always been there, and into the register of historical construction, where one can ask what was assumed at each step and whether the assumptions hold. Three moments mark the passage from a local operation to a picture of the world, and at each a commitment enters that the later parts will have to test.

From purposive action to the calculus of means

The first moment is the isolation, within the theory of action, of a specifically instrumental rationality. Weber's typology distinguishes the rationality of ends, *Wertrationalität*, oriented to a value held for its own sake, from the rationality of means, *Zweckrationalität*, which takes an end as given and concerns itself with the efficient fitting of means to it (Weber 1978). The distinction is analytic, and in Weber it carries no triumph; he watched the advance of means-rationality with foreboding, as the closing of an iron cage around a disenchanted world. But the distinction did a lasting and double-edged work. By carving out a domain in which reason operates on means alone, with the end bracketed as given from outside, it made possible a rigorous science of efficient action; and it opened, at the same stroke, a fateful slippage. It is a short step, and one Weber himself did not take but the tradition after him did, from "reason can operate on means, the end being given" to "reason *is* the operation on means, and the end is simply given." Once the end is bracketed it is easily forgotten as a question, and the bracketing that was meant as a division of labor within reason hardens into a definition of reason as such. What drops out is precisely the rationality of ends, the reasoned deliberation about what is worth pursuing, which Weber had kept in view and which the instrumental turn consigns to the merely subjective, a matter of decision rather than of reason. The seed of optimizationism is here: a form of reasoning whose entire content is the maximization of the satisfaction of an end it does not itself examine.

The marginalist objectification of the objective

The second moment gives the bracketed end a mathematical body and, in doing so, smuggles in the assumption on which everything later turns. In the marginalist tradition

the ends of action are gathered into a single object, the utility function, and the agent is defined as its constrained maximizer; economics is recast as the science of the relation between ends and scarce means with alternative uses, and the rational agent is the one who allocates the means so as to maximize utility (Robbins 1932). Two things happen here that the criticism will need to have named. The first is a *commensuration by construction*. To represent the heterogeneous ends of a life as arguments of one function returning one magnitude is already to assume that they share a scale, that gains in one can be set against losses in another and a net computed; the common scale whose existence the third impossibility will deny is not argued for in the marginalist construction but built into the form of the utility function, where it becomes invisible precisely because it is structural rather than asserted. One does not notice an assumption one has been given as the shape of the tool. The second is an *objectification of the end*. What in Weber was an end held by an agent, something the agent is toward, becomes a function the agent *has*, a fixed datum standing ready for the optimization to range over; and with this the endogeneity of ends, their formation and revision within the very activity that pursues them, drops silently from view. The agent of marginalism arrives at his problem with his function already written, and the writing is treated as no part of the economic act, as though preferences were furniture brought to the room rather than something that happens in the living.

The axiomatic universalization in decision theory

The third moment lifts the maximizing agent clear of economics and installs him as the definition of rationality wherever there is choice at all. In the theory of expected utility, a small set of axioms on preference, of which completeness and transitivity are the load-bearing pair, is shown to entail that the agent's choices can be represented as the maximization of the expectation of a utility function; to be rational just is to choose as if maximizing such a function (Neumann and Morgenstern 1944; Savage 1954). The result is a genuine achievement, elegant and, within its assumptions, unimpeachable, and the paper does not dispute the mathematics. What it marks is the quiet enormity of one axiom. Completeness requires that for any two options the agent prefer the one, prefer the other, or be indifferent, and this innocuous-seeming demand legislates that there is no pair of goods standing in any fourth relation, none between which preference is not yet

settled in a way no sweetening resolves; transitivity then chains the pairwise comparisons into a single order. To accept the axioms is thus to decree, at the ground floor and before any particular choice is examined, that value is commensurable and the rational agent a maximizer on one scale, and, worse for the later argument, to make this decree the very meaning of the word “rational.” The consequence is that the person who declines to place two goods on a common scale, who holds that a vocation and a friendship are not rankable as better, worse, or precisely equal, is no longer voicing a substantive view about the goods that might be right; he is, by the definition now installed, irrational, his refusal a symptom rather than a position. Optimization, which entered as the efficient fitting of means to a bracketed end, has become by this third step the criterion of reason itself, binding on every chooser, in love no less than in commerce, and the completeness axiom has made the denial of commensurability unsayable within the frame, since to deny it is simply to fail the definition of the rational.

The reach of the genealogy, and its limit

Set end to end, the three moments trace the elevation of a local operation into a picture of the world: the bracketing of ends that made a pure calculus of means possible, the objectification and construction-borne commensuration of ends in the utility function, and the axiomatic installation of the maximizer as the meaning of rationality as such. What the genealogy establishes is that the claim “optimization is the form of rationality,” and its cosmic shadow “optimization is the form of things,” are constructions rather than findings, and that at each step an assumption entered, commensurability above all, which could have been declined and which the paper will argue is false in the domain of intimate relation. What the genealogy does not establish, and does not pretend to, is that optimization is thereby worthless; the fallacy of dismissing a tool by its history is one the paper is careful not to commit. Optimization is a superb instrument within the domain where its four conditions hold, and the shipping fleet of the previous section is not the exception but the rule across engineering, logistics, and the allocation of genuinely fungible resources, where to refuse the maximum would be a failure of reason and not a fidelity to anything finer. The error lies in the universalization rather than in the operation, in the inference from “this works wherever value is complete, fixed, commensurable, and owned by a stable subject” to “value is everywhere so, and where it seems not to be

we have merely not yet done the sums.” That inference is what the completeness axiom makes feel like a truism and what the genealogy exposes as a step that was taken and could have been refused. It is that inference, and not the mathematics of maximization, that the next part denies, condition by condition and starting from the ground.

Part Two Four Impossibilities: Why Intimate Relation Is Not a Well-Defined Optimization Problem

7.4. The First Impossibility: The Non-Structurability of Value

The four impossibilities descend from the most superficial precondition of the anatomy to the most fundamental, and it is worth being explicit at the outset about why this first one comes first, since the order is an argument in itself. The later impossibilities all concern a function already written: whether it can be held fixed, whether its values share a scale, whether a stable subject owns it. They presuppose, that is, that the values at stake have already been got onto the page as terms, and they ask what goes wrong thereafter. This first impossibility strikes earlier, at the writing itself. It asks whether certain of the values any honest account of intimate relation must weigh can be set down as terms at all, and it answers that some cannot, so that the objective is not merely hard to fix or to compare but impossible to complete. A value that cannot be written into J is not a value the optimization prices badly; it is a value the optimization never reaches, excluded not from the maximum but from the statement of the problem. If this is right, the optimizing ambition fails at the first step, before the later impossibilities are even in view, and the completeness on which the whole ambition silently rests is shown to have been unavailable from the start.

The completeness demand, made precise

The claim must be sharpened before it can be defended, because in a loose form it is merely the tired complaint that love is too rich for numbers, and that complaint the economist can absorb without a scratch. His reply, rehearsed already in the introduction, is that a value which seems to resist the function resists only because the function is written too poorly, and that a richer specification, with the goods of intimacy and the long horizon and the pleasures of the bond all entered as arguments, would take up whatever a first pass left out. The reply has real force, and it has a distinguished lineage: the program of extending utility maximization into the household, into marriage, fertility, and the allocation of affection, was carried out in detail and with great ingenuity, and it proceeded exactly by folding ever more of intimate life into the arguments of a utility function (Robbins 1932). To meet it one must state precisely what it demands. It demands *completeness*: that for every value v bearing on the relation there exist a term t_v , a representation of v as an argument of J such that the candidate states of the relation

are ordered by how much of v they deliver. Completeness is not an incidental wish of the program but its condition of adequacy, for an objective that omits a value that genuinely bears on the relation is an objective for some thinner thing, and to maximize it is to optimize a caricature. The economist needs completeness, and the question is whether he can have it.

He can have it for a great many values, and the paper concedes this freely, since the concession sharpens the point of attack. Comfort, shared leisure, the division of labor in a household, even many of the tendernesses of a life together admit of proxies stable enough to serve as terms, and where they do the optimizing frame is not obviously ill-posed but merely, as the later parts will argue, ethically and practically treacherous. The first impossibility does not rest on the mass of ordinary goods that can be proxied. It rests on the claim that *at least one* value the objective must include cannot be, and that its exclusion is fatal to completeness however well the rest is done. The paper meets the demand, therefore, not at its weakest point but at its hardest: with the one value whose inclusion the economist most needs and least can secure, the psychoanalytic drive.

The drive as the value that cannot be written

That the drive must be in any complete objective for intimate relation is not a point the economist can concede away, for the drive is not an ornament at the edge of the bond but among its springs. What draws two people and holds them, what makes a particular other the one whose presence is not substitutable by another of equal merit, what gives desire its insistence and its opacity even to the one who feels it, belongs to the economy of the drive; an objective for a love that left it out would be an objective for companionship or for mutual advantage, some real thing but not the thing in question. So the drive must be a term. And the drive is precisely what admits of no term, for reasons that lie in its structure and not in our instruments.

The drive, in the register the series has used throughout, arises at a coupling of the Real and the Symbolic and reduces to neither (Lacan 1978; Lacan 1992). It is not a preference. A preference is a settled disposition to rank options, and a ranking is exactly what a term records; if the drive were a preference it would pose no problem, and could be written down like any other. But the drive does not rank the options in the feasible set, because

what it circles is not among them. It orbits an object that is not a positive object at all but a vacancy, the place of what is constitutively missing, and it draws its force from the orbiting rather than from any attainable state that might be reached and possessed. This has a consequence that is fatal to representation as a term. A term t_v must assign to each candidate a magnitude, so that candidates can be ordered by it, more here, less there, monotone in the good; and the assignment must be such that getting more of the good is, other things equal, getting nearer the objective's maximum. The drive violates this at its core, for it is extinguished by attainment where attainment occurs: the state that would count, on any proxy, as the fullest delivery of the good is the very state in which the drive, having reached its ostensible object, finds that the object was never it, and moves on. The mapping a term requires, from more of the good to nearer the maximum, is not merely inaccurate for the drive; it runs backwards, and no monotone magnitude can be laid over a structure whose satisfaction is its own undoing.

An illustrative case — the ledger of a marriage. Consider the attempt made in earnest rather than in theory. A couple, urged toward the frame by a culture that prizes it, resolve to reason about their marriage as an optimization: to enumerate what each values, to weigh the yields against the costs, and to act on the balance. Much of the enumeration succeeds. They can list the division of housework, the comfort of a shared home, the pleasures of company, and can even, with effort, assign these rough weights and speak of trade-offs among them without absurdity. Then one of them tries to enter the thing that actually binds them to this person and not another, equal on every listed count, and the enumeration fails. It is not that the value is large and hard to weigh. It is that when they try to say what it is a quantity *of*, every candidate answer, security, admiration, pleasure, familiarity, turns out to name something that a different person could in principle supply as well or better, and so to name not the bond but a proxy the bond exceeds. The remainder that resists every proxy, the sheer this-one-ness that is why the ledger is being kept at all, is precisely what will not go into a column, because it is not a quantity of anything and answers to no “more” or “less.” The ledger can be completed only by leaving out the reason for keeping it.

To force the drive into a term one would therefore have to replace it with a proxy, some measurable satisfaction standing where it stood; and here the decisive move of the

economist's program can be named and refused. The program's most powerful device is revealed preference: the resolve to sidestep the inner life entirely and read value off behavior, defining what a person values as whatever their choices maximize, so that the drive, whatever it is in itself, is captured by the pattern of what the person is observed to choose. This is ingenious and, for a wide class of goods, unobjectionable. Against the drive it fails, and its failure is instructive. Revealed preference assumes that choice reveals a stable underlying ordering, that the pattern of choices is the trace of a preference the choices express. But the drive produces exactly the pattern revealed preference cannot parse: the pursuit that abandons its object on attainment, the choice that undoes itself, the wanting whose satisfaction is its extinction. Faced with this, revealed preference must either declare the behavior irrational, thereby excluding from the account the very spring of the bond it was meant to capture, or fit an ordering to the choices post hoc, thereby recording as a stable preference a movement whose whole character is that it is not one. In neither case has it represented the drive. It has, in the first, thrown the drive out as noise, and in the second, replaced it with a fiction of stability that is a different thing wearing its name. The proxy is not a poorer measurement of the drive. It is the substitution of a positive object for a vacancy, which is exactly the operation that empties the drive of what makes it the drive.

The category of the failure, and its consequence

The nature of the failure must be fixed exactly, because everything downstream depends on it. The failure is not epistemic. It is not that the drive is hard to quantify, that our instruments are coarse and our surveys noisy, and that a finer psychometrics would in time get its number. That reading leaves the optimizing frame wholly intact, conceding only that the measurements are poor; and it is the reading the paper most needs to refuse, because it is the one that keeps the door open to "do the sums better." The claim is stronger and stranger: that there is here no number to be measured well or badly, that the mapping from the drive to a magnitude fails not in its accuracy but in its existence, because the drive is not the kind of entity of which there is a quantity to be had. This is the same distinction the anatomy drew between a problem that is merely hard and a problem that is ill-posed, and the drive falls on the second side of it not by degree but by kind.

Non-structurability. A value is *non-structurable* if its manner of being precludes its representation as a term in an objective function, that is, precludes any assignment to the candidate states of a monotone magnitude by which they could be ordered. The psychoanalytic drive is non-structurable: arising at a coupling of the Real and the Symbolic, circling a constitutive vacancy rather than a positive object, and extinguished by attainment where attainment occurs, it admits no monotone magnitude over the candidates and so no term. Its exclusion from the objective is therefore not a defect of measurement, remediable by finer instruments, but a matter of category. It cannot enter the statement of the problem.

The consequence is fatal to the economist's reply on its own terms, and it is worth drawing the dilemma out to its end so that no escape is left standing. The reply promised to rescue optimization by completing the function; completeness for intimate relation requires a term for the drive; the drive admits no term. So the function must either omit the drive, in which case it is incomplete and the reply has not been made, the objective being one for some thinner relation that leaves out a spring of this one, or include a proxy for the drive, in which case it has put a positive object where a vacancy was and is again not an objective for this relation but for a substitute, so that the optimization, however impeccably posed thereafter, maximizes the wrong thing at the ground floor. There is no third path on which the drive is both admitted and itself, because admission as a term just is the imposition of a magnitude, and the drive admits none. The first precondition of the anatomy, that every value at stake be representable in the objective, therefore fails, and it fails before the questions of fixity, comparability, and the optimizer can be raised, since those concern a function already written and this concerns the writing. One may read the three impossibilities that follow as showing that even the incomplete function one could write, over such values as do admit of terms, would still furnish no well-posed problem. But this first has already shown that the function was condemned to be incomplete, and that the completeness on which the whole optimizing ambition depended was never there to be had.

7.5. The Second Impossibility: The Relationality of Value and the Absent Quantifier

Suppose the first impossibility set aside, and grant, only to press on, that a function could be written over such values as do admit of terms. The second condition of the anatomy then comes into view: that this function be exogenous and fixed, given before the process of pursuit and unchanged by it, a determinate target rather than a moving one. This section denies that condition. But it denies it in a particular way, and the way matters as much as the denial, because a weak version of the denial changes nothing and the economist has already absorbed it. The weak version says that people's preferences are unstable, that they want one thing today and another tomorrow, and that the objective therefore drifts. To this the economist answers, rightly, that instability is just more structure to model: let the utility function carry a time index, or let today's choice include a term for its effect on tomorrow's tastes, and the drift is absorbed into a larger fixed problem. The paper's denial is not the weak one and does not meet this answer, because it does not locate the trouble in the instability of preferences at all. It locates it deeper, in the ontology of the value itself, and argues that value in intimate relation is *relational*, generated within the relation and existing only there, so that there is no standpoint outside the relation from which its magnitude could be read off and fixed. The objective cannot be exogenous because there is no exogenous position for it to be given from; and this is not a fact about wandering tastes that a time index could catch, but a fact about where relational value is, which no reindexing reaches.

Value as relational rather than intrasubjective

The utility function is a function of one subject. It encodes *his* preferences, the values as they stand for *him*, and its arguments are states of the world evaluated from his single standpoint; and even the theory of games, which sets several such functions interacting, leaves each the private possession of its owner, given before the interaction and merely played out through it. The whole construction presupposes that value is intrasubjective, lodged inside a subject and carried by him to the situation as a piece of his equipment. It is exactly this presupposition that the relational ontology of the series denies, and the denial is not a mood but a claim with consequences. The value at stake in an intimate

relation, the meaning that a private word carries, the weight a kept silence has come to hold, the worth of the bond itself, is not a property either partner keeps inside and brings; it is generated between them, in the relating, and has no existence apart from the relation that bears it (Wanhong 2026b; Huang 2026). This is not a metaphor. A private language means nothing to either speaker considered alone, because its meaning is the sediment of a shared history and is stored in the relation and not in either head; a rite that is precious to the two is not a datum in either partner's separate ledger, because its preciousness is not a fact about either of them but a fact about what has formed between them. Value here has the standing that trust was shown to have in the paper on the non-binding vow: a property of a relational structure, a feature of the topology of the bond, and not an attribute of any node within it (Huang 2026).

An illustrative case — the worth that is not in either of them. Two people have, over years, made a certain walk their own: a particular route, taken on particular evenings, that has gathered to itself the whole texture of their life together, so that to walk it is for each of them an act dense with meaning. Ask what the walk is worth, and to whom, and the question comes apart in the hand. It is not worth much to either of them *separately*: taken alone, one of them walking the route is a person on a road, and the meaning that floods the shared walk is simply absent, having no bearer. Nor is its worth the sum of two private worths, for there are no two private worths to sum; the meaning does not exist in either of them to be added. It exists between them, in the relation the walk both expresses and sustains, and it exists nowhere else. There is, then, no ledger in which the walk's value is an entry, because a ledger is kept by a subject and totals what has worth *for him*, and the walk's worth is not of that kind. To insist on entering it one would have to pick a standpoint, his or hers, and record from there a private shadow of a value that is not private, thereby recording something other than the value one meant to capture.

The quantifier that quantification requires, and its absence

From the relationality of value a consequence follows that is fatal to the exogeneity condition, and it is worth drawing out slowly, because it joins this impossibility to the deepest commitment of the series. To *quantify* a value, to assign it the magnitude a term in J demands, is to occupy a definite position: the position of one who surveys the field of

value from outside and above, sees the candidates and their worths spread before him, and reads each onto a common scale. Quantification is silently a view from nowhere within the valued field, a God's-eye operation, and it presupposes a standpoint exterior to the values it measures. For value that is intrasubjective this presupposition is met without difficulty, at least in principle, since the subject stands over against the world he evaluates as its external assessor; his preferences are inside him and the world is outside, and he reads the one onto the other. But for value that is *relational*, generated within the relation and existing only there, the presupposition cannot be met at all. Whoever would quantify such value must stand either within the relation or outside it, and neither will serve. Standing within, he is a party to the very generation he would assess, with no exterior purchase, no vantage from which the relational value lies spread before him as an object; he is inside the thing he would survey. Standing outside, he finds nothing to survey, because the value exists only within and is not present to any external position. There is no third place, no exterior and omniscient vantage from which the worth of what two people generate between them could be read onto a scale. And this is precisely the standpoint that quantification requires: the standpoint of a big Other who would hold the true measure of all relational value. The whole of this series, following the mother paper, has argued that this Other does not exist, that there is no metalanguage and no position from which the meanings by which people live could be assessed from without (Huang 2025a; Huang 2026). To assign relational value a determinate magnitude is therefore to presuppose the one standpoint the series has shown to be empty.

The vacant quantifier. Value in intimate relation is *relational*: generated within the relation and existing only there, a property of the relational structure and not of any subject within it. To quantify a value is to assign it a magnitude from a standpoint exterior to it. For relational value no such exterior standpoint exists, since a position within the relation has no external purchase on it and a position outside the relation has nothing before it to assess; the standpoint quantification requires is that of a big Other holding the measure of all relational value, and this position is empty. The objective of an optimization over intimate relation therefore cannot be exogenous, having no external vantage from which to be given, nor fixed, being generated in the same motion that would

pursue it. The endogeneity of the objective is not a contingency of unstable preference but the ontological consequence of the relationality of value.

The defeat of the economist's reply

This is the point at which the economist's reply is not merely met but defeated, and the defeat should be stated exactly, because the reply is resilient and returns in new dress if left half-answered. The reply was: your objective is misspecified or unstable; specify it better, index it to time, and the trouble dissolves. Against the first impossibility this failed because certain values admit of no term at all. Against the second it fails for a further and independent reason: that even for values which might admit of terms, there is no standpoint from which the terms could be assigned their magnitudes, the values being relational and the assigning position vacant. The reply rests, at bottom, on a picture in which the true worths are already out there, lodged somewhere and waiting to be read by a careful enough observer, so that better specification is a matter of reading them more accurately. That picture is exactly what the relationality of value refuses. Relational value is not lying in wait, outside the relation, to be discovered by a sufficiently patient economist; it is generated inside the relation, in the act, and holds still for no exterior gaze. The objective is not a target the searcher has specified too crudely. It is generated by the searching, revised in the relating, and held fixed by no standpoint that could serve as its source; and an $\arg\max$ over an objective that is produced in the same motion that would maximize it, and that no external position holds still, does not name a hard problem awaiting a better economist. It names no problem, for there is nothing of the form the operation requires for the operation to be applied.

7.6. The Third Impossibility: Incommensurability

Grant once more, for the sake of pressing on, that the objective could be written and that some standpoint could fix it. The third condition of the anatomy then requires that the values the objective assigns lie on a common scale, so that any two candidates compare and $\arg\max$ has something to select. This section denies that condition through

the incommensurability of certain goods: the thesis, developed most rigorously by Raz, that there are goods between which no common measure holds, so that the demand to rank them on one scale is not a hard task but a mistaken one, and that within intimate relation the attempt to price a good can be, in the strict sense, a betrayal of it rather than a misjudgment. As with the previous two impossibilities, the claim must first be distinguished from a weaker neighbor with which the frame would gladly confuse it, and only then pressed to its sharp form.

Incommensurability as a relation, not a difficulty

The weaker neighbor is the thought that some comparisons are merely hard, that weighing a career against a friendship is difficult and uncertain and beyond our present precision. This the optimizing frame absorbs without strain: hard comparisons are comparisons still, and difficulty is only a call for better estimates. Incommensurability in the strict sense is a different matter, a positive structural relation and not a confession of ignorance. Two goods are incommensurable when there is no common measure in terms of which their values are precisely comparable, when it is neither true that the first is better than the second, nor that the second is better than the first, nor that they are exactly equal (Raz 1986; Chang 1997). The three familiar relations of a common scale, better, worse, equal, are jointly exhausted only where a scale underlies them; where none does, two goods may stand outside all three, related in a way the scale cannot represent, and this standing-outside is not our failure to have measured but the goods' failure to share a measure. The most exact mark of the relation is due to Raz and deserves to be given precisely, because it converts a vague intuition into a test. Suppose two options were merely *equal* on some common scale. Then improving one of them even slightly, sweetening it by a little, would have to make it determinately better than the other, since on a scale a small addition to an equal quantity yields a larger quantity. Now take a career and a friendship one is inclined to call equally choiceworthy, and sweeten the career by a modest raise in salary. If the two were equal on a scale, the raised career is now determinately the better choice. But it is not: the career with the raise is still neither better than the friendship, nor worse, nor exactly equal, just as before the raise. The tie does not break under the small improvement, and a tie that does not break under improvement was never a tie on a scale at all. The small-improvement argument shows, not that the comparison is hard,

but that there is no scale beneath it to be hard about.

Pricing as betrayal

Within intimate relation this structural relation takes a sharper form, in which the attempt at commensuration is not only a mistake about the goods but a wrong done to them, and here the paper leans on the line running from Raz through Anderson to the recent moral critique of markets (Anderson 1993; Sandel 2012). The sharpening turns on a fact about certain goods: that they are constituted, in part, by the stances one takes toward them, so that to take the wrong stance is not to misdescribe the good but to alter it. Among the goods so constituted are those whose being includes a refusal to price them. For such a good, to price it is not to measure it, even badly; it is to change it into something else, and in the changing to betray it. This is why the refusal to name a sum is not squeamishness. To ask what payment would compensate the ending of a friendship is not to arrive, with effort, at a large figure; it is to have misunderstood what a friendship is, since a bond one holds oneself ready to release for a price is, by that readiness, already not the bond one took oneself to be pricing but a lesser thing wearing its name. The pricing does not report a worth and get the figure wrong. It produces, in the act of pricing, a diminished thing, and reports a fact about that.

An illustrative case — the offer. A man is asked, by someone who means the question seriously, what sum would induce him to give up his oldest friendship, permanently and with no further contact. Two things are worth noticing in his response. The first is that he does not experience the question as difficult, as though the number were very large and hard to fix; he experiences it as a category mistake, as one would the question how much the number seven weighs. The second is more telling. If he were to take the question in the spirit asked, to begin in earnest to name a figure and to negotiate it upward, something would already have happened to the friendship, before any sum was agreed and whether or not one ever was. To have entertained the offer in earnest is to have constituted oneself as someone whose friendships are for sale at a price, and a friendship held by such a person is not the good the offer was meant to price. The betrayal is not in the accepting, which never comes; it is in the pricing, which changes the thing priced in the moment it treats it as priceable. This is why the fitting answer is not a very large

number but a refusal of the frame, and why the refusal is not a failure to compute but the only response that leaves the good intact.

Incommensurability. Two goods are *incommensurable* when they stand in none of the three relations a common scale affords, being neither better, nor worse, nor exactly equal, as the failure of their tie to break under small improvement reveals. Certain goods at stake in intimate relation are incommensurable in this sense; and some are further constituted, in part, by the refusal to price them, so that to place them on a common scale is not to mismeasure them but to transform and thereby betray them. The scalar condition of the anatomy therefore fails: the values the objective assigns do not all lie on a common scale, and $\arg \max$, which requires such a scale to have anything to select, has nothing over which to operate. The error is one of category and not of computation; the goods are not the kind of thing of which there is a sum.

The relation to the first two impossibilities

The three impossibilities so far compound rather than repeat one another, and it is worth marking the joints at which each cuts, since an objector may suspect that they are a single complaint in three costumes. The first concerned *representation*: whether a value can enter the objective as a term at all, and it found that the drive cannot, being extinguished by the attainment a monotone magnitude would track. The second concerned *fixation*: whether the objective, granting it written, can be given from an exterior standpoint, and it found that relational value admits none, being generated within the relation that bears it. This third concerns *comparison*: whether the values the objective assigns, granting them written and fixed, lie on the common scale that maximization requires, and it finds that incommensurable goods do not. The three are independent, and their independence is the strength of the case, for an objector who somehow answered one would face the others untouched: were the drive representable after all, its term would still have to be commensurated with the rest, and incommensurability would block it; were an exterior

standpoint somehow found to fix the objective, the goods it fixed would still fail to share a scale. The descent is real, from whether the problem can be written, through whether it can be fixed, to whether what it fixes can be compared; and beneath all three lies a fourth question the descent has been circling from the start, not yet touched, the question of the one for whom the problem is a problem at all, the optimizer whose stable preferences the whole construction has quietly presupposed and whom the next section dissolves.

7.7. The Fourth Impossibility: The Constitution of the Subject

The three prior impossibilities concerned the objective: whether it can be written, fixed from without, and furnished with a common scale. This last one reaches beneath the objective to the quietest condition of the anatomy, the one that underwrites the others and is least often brought to light, that there is an *optimizer*. Maximization requires not only something to be maximized but someone to maximize it: a subject whose objective J is, whose preferences it encodes, standing outside the problem, prior to it and stable through it, as the one for whom x^* is best. Without such a subject the phrase “his optimum” has no determinate referent, for there is no settled *his* to whom the optimum belongs. This section denies that condition. In intimate relation the subject is not prior to the relation but constituted within it; the one who would optimize is a product of the process he is imagined to stand outside of; and the “who” the whole construction presupposes loses the fixity the construction needs.

The subject as constituted, not given

The optimizing frame inherits from marginalism a subject who arrives at the situation already formed, bearing a preference order settled in advance, which the situation then reveals and satisfies. Even the more sophisticated economics that allows preferences to change tends to model the change as itself the output of a prior and stable meta-preference, a fixed disposition governing how tastes evolve, so that the fixity merely retreats one level and the subject remains, at bottom, given before the process. The relational ontology of the series denies this picture at its root, and denies it of the subject exactly as it denied it of value, since the two denials are one. The subject of intimate relation does not enter the relation with its preferences fixed and undergo the relation as their playing-out. It is

formed in the relating: its desires are shaped by the other's desire, its sense of what is worth wanting is remade in the shared life, and its individuation, the very drawing of the boundary between what it is and what the other is, is accomplished and revised within the bond rather than settled before it (Wanhong 2026b; Wanhong 2026a). This is not the mild and assimilable point that people change their minds, which a meta-preference could absorb. It is the ontological point that the preference-bearing subject the optimization presupposes, the fixed evaluator standing over against the field of options, is not the antecedent condition of the intimate relation but one of its ongoing products. What the relation generates is not only value between the partners but the partners themselves, as the valuers they are in the course of becoming.

An illustrative case — who would collect the optimum. A person enters a relation with a settled sense of what he wants from a life, and over years within it that sense is remade: he comes to want things he had not known were wantable, to find hollow some things he had once ranked highest, to care about the other's flourishing in a way that is not reducible to his own prior preferences because it has reorganized them. Suppose now he had, at the outset, tried to choose the relation by optimization, computing which arrangement best satisfied the preferences he then held. The arrangement that maximized the preferences of the man at the outset is not the arrangement the man he became would choose, and not because either made an error, but because the second man's preferences are the product of the very relating that the first man's optimization was meant to govern from before it began. Whose optimum, then, was to be computed? Not the first man's, for he no longer exists to collect it, and his preferences were dissolved and reformed by the process. Not the second man's, for he did not exist yet at the moment of choice, and could not have supplied the objective, being himself an output of what was chosen. There is no single subject present throughout to be the owner of the objective and the beneficiary of its maximum. There is a subject in the course of being constituted by the relation whose value the optimization would compute, which is a different thing from the fixed optimizer the frame requires.

The dissolution of the fixed referent

From this a difficulty follows that is fatal to the fourth condition, and it is a difficulty about reference rather than about stability, which the case has made ready to state. If the optimizer is constituted within the very process his optimization is supposed to govern, then “whose optimum?” has no fixed answer, because the subject named in any answer differs at the end of the process from the one who posed it at the start, and the difference is produced by the process itself. This is worse than the drift of the objective treated under the second impossibility, and must not be folded into it. There the target moved while the archer stood still; here the archer is remade by the shooting, so that the one who would gather the optimum at the summit is not the one who set out to climb and did not hold, at setting out, the preferences by which the summit is a summit. The frame needs a stable subject to be the owner of the objective and the beneficiary of its maximization, the one whose J it is and for whom x^* is best; and in intimate relation there is no such stable owner, only a subject in the making whom the relation is precisely in the business of unfixing. To ask what is optimal *for him* is to presuppose a settled him that the relating dissolves and reforms, and the referent of the optimizing “who” comes apart in the asking.

The constituted subject. Optimization presupposes an *optimizer*: a subject prior to the problem and stable through it, whose objective the function is and for whom its maximum is best. In intimate relation the subject is constituted within the relation rather than given before it, its preferences and its individuation ongoing products of the relating. The optimizer is therefore a product of the process it is imagined to stand outside of, and “whose optimum?” loses a fixed referent, the subject named in any answer being remade by the very process the optimization would govern. The fourth condition of the anatomy fails: there is no stable subject to own the objective or to be the beneficiary of its maximum.

The four taken together

The four impossibilities may now be gathered, and gathering them shows that they are not four names for one objection but four independent failures at four distinct joints, running from the surface of the problem to its ground. Can the values be *written* into the objective? Not all: the drive, extinguished by attainment, admits no term. Can the objective, so far as written, be *fixed* from without? No: relational value admits no exterior standpoint, and the objective is endogenous of ontological necessity. Can the values it fixes be *compared* on a common scale? Not the incommensurable ones: the scale argmax needs is not there. And is there a stable *subject* to own the whole and receive its maximum? No: the optimizer is constituted in the process it would govern. Each cut is at a different joint, and each alone suffices, since an optimization problem needs all four conditions and the failure of any one leaves the operation undefined. Together they establish, without a single appeal to value, that intimate relation furnishes no well-defined optimization problem: not a hard one that greater computational power would crack, but an ill-posed non-problem, whose required object, a representationally complete, exogenous, fixed, scalar objective belonging to a stable subject, the operation of maximization does not find. With this the formal movement of the paper is complete. What follows is no longer proof but criticism, and it turns to the different question the proof has cleared the way for: not whether one *can* optimize intimate relation, which has been answered in the negative, but what befalls the relation when, undeterred by the answer, one imposes the frame regardless.

Part Three The Cost of Optimizationism

7.8. The Damage to Generativity

The second movement of the paper begins here, and its question differs in kind from the first. The first movement asked whether intimate relation furnishes a well-defined optimization problem and answered that it does not; it passed no judgment on optimizing, establishing only that here the operation is undefined. This movement takes that result as settled and asks a question the result makes newly pressing: what happens when the frame is imposed regardless, when a domain that furnishes no well-posed maximization is treated as though it did, its relational and incommensurable and endogenous goods forced into the shape of an objective to be maximized? From here the claims are value-laden, and openly so; and the separation insisted on in the introduction is what earns them the right to be, for they no longer trade on the formal result but build upon it, taking as given that no optimization problem is present and asking after the cost of pretending one is. The first such cost, argued in this section, is a damage with a definite form: the imposition converts a value that should circulate and accumulate within a relation into a quantity that can be settled, extracted, and in the end exhausted.

Two fates for generated value

The theory of generative justice, developed in this series in exchange with Eglash, distinguishes two fates that the value generated in a relation may meet, and the distinction is the hinge of this section (Eglash 2016). Value may *circulate*: return to those who generate it, replenishing the conditions of its own further generation, so that the relation is a site of ongoing production that sustains itself and the value stays in motion among its makers. Or value may be *extracted*: drawn off from its generators, alienated, settled somewhere outside the circuit of its making, so that the relation is mined rather than cultivated and its capacity to generate is drawn down toward depletion. Eglash's own cases are drawn from labor, ecology, and the technical arts, where the value in question is relatively legible and its diversion relatively easy to see; the contribution of this series has been to carry the distinction into intimate life, where the value at stake is least legible and its diversion hardest to name, and where, this paper now argues, the optimizing frame is one of the chief instruments of the second fate. The claim is not a loose analogy between mining ore and pricing love. It is that the operation optimization performs on a

relational good is, in its formal structure, an operation of extraction, and the next step is to show why.

The effect of optimization on a circulation

To see the extraction one must see what optimization does to a value when it forces it into an objective. To make a relational good a term in J is to render it a *quantity*: a magnitude that can be summed with others, compared, traded off, and, above all, *settled*, brought to a final accounting at which one reads off whether the maximum was reached. But a relational good is not, in its own manner of being, a settleable quantity. It is a circulation, a generation whose life is in its continuing and which has no natural terminus at which it is complete and may be totalled. Meaning between two people is not a stock that accumulates toward a full amount; it is a movement that is either kept up or allowed to lapse. Rendered as a quantity to be maximized, such a good is made available to be settled, and to settle a circulation is to stop it. The optimizing frame does not merely mismeasure the relational good, assigning it a number that is off. It re-forms the good into the kind of thing that can be cashed out, and the cashing out is the depletion, because what is cashed out is no longer in circulation. The harm is thus not that the optimization reaches a wrong figure. It is that the operation of rendering-as-quantity, which optimization must perform before it can begin, has already converted a generation into a stock and thereby positioned it to be drawn down.

A single geometric illustration

The series has given this depletion a geometric form elsewhere, and it earns one sentence here, strictly as illustration and not as apparatus to be developed. In the account of the good and the bad cycle, generative value was shown to be carried not in any endpoint state but in the accumulated phase of a circuit, the holonomy an interpreter gathers in traversing it, which no terminal reckoning can capture because it is a property of the path and not of any point upon it (Huang 2025b). The single relevant point is this: that optimization, whose entire grammar is the selection of a best *point*, an x^* in the feasible set, is by its very form blind to value that lives in a path rather than a point, and so cannot so much as register, let alone protect, the generative accumulation it settles away. The apparatus is not needed here and will not be unfolded; it serves only to name, in

a vocabulary the series has already made precise, why a value carried in circulation is invisible to an operation that knows only summits.

An illustrative case — the audited relationship. A couple, anxious and conscientious, begin to keep an account of their relationship: to track what each contributes and receives, to note whether the returns justify the investment, to hold periodic reckonings at which the question is whether, on balance, the thing is paying off. Their intention is care; they mean to tend the relationship by measuring it. But the measuring does to the relationship exactly what this section describes. What had been a circulation, a giving and receiving whose worth lay in its ongoing motion and never stood still to be totalled, becomes a stock to be assessed at each reckoning; and a stock assessed is a stock that can come out short. The damage is not that the audit might return an unfavorable balance and end the relationship, though it might. The damage is prior to any balance and independent of its sign: it is that the auditing has changed the good audited, converting a generation kept alive by not being totalled into a quantity that exists to be totalled, so that even a favorable balance is now a balance struck on a diminished thing. The couple set out to protect the circulation and, by rendering it accountable, stopped it in the act of counting it.

The form of the damage

The damage can now be stated in its proper shape, and stated so that it is plainly a harm and not a mere infelicity of description. When a relational good is subjected to the optimizing frame it undergoes three movements. It is first rendered as a term, which requires assigning it a settleable magnitude it did not possess. It is then entered into an objective to be maximized, which subordinates it to the reckoning of a total in which it figures as one summand among others. And it is then, in the maximizing, spent: treated as a stock to be drawn down toward a maximum rather than a circulation to be kept in motion. This is the formal signature of extraction, and it is why the couple who begin in earnest to ask whether the relationship is worth it have already begun the conversion the theory of generative justice warns against, whatever answer they reach. The harm is not the risk of an unfavorable verdict. It is that the reckoning itself has changed the good reckoned, in the same way and for the same reason that the pricing of the previous

part diminished the friendship it priced: by treating as a settleable quantity what had its life in never being finally settled. Optimization imposed where no optimization problem exists is thus not an idle error that leaves its object untouched while failing to improve it. It is an operation that remakes its object into something it can act upon, a settleable quantity, and in the remaking performs the very extraction that draws off into a final accounting the value whose life was in never being finally accounted.

7.9. Optimizationism as a Symptom of Modernity

The criticism now widens from the damage optimization does within a single relation to the standing of optimizationism as a general thesis about the world. The claim of this section is that the elevation of optimization into a law of the universe is best understood not as a discovery but as a *symptom*: an epistemological form taken by a particular historical condition, which the mother paper of this series named the crisis of the symbolic, and which is bound up with the habituation of a life-world to the logic of capital (Huang 2025a). The universe, on this reading, climbs no landscape; the climbing of landscapes is a historically specific practice, native to a specific organization of production, that has been projected outward onto the cosmos and taken for its law. To argue this is not to refute optimizationism by its origins, the fallacy already disowned, but to relocate it: to move it from the register of eternal truth, where it defends itself as simply how things are, into the register of historical symptom, where one may ask what condition it expresses and what that condition costs. The genealogy of the first part showed that optimizationism was constructed; this section asks what, in the present, keeps the construction standing and makes it feel like nature.

The commensurating operation as the native form of capital

The decisive feature of optimizationism, isolated already in the genealogy, is its demand for commensuration: its requirement that heterogeneous goods be brought onto a single scale before a maximum can be defined. This requirement is not peculiar to the theory of optimization, and seeing where else it lives is the key to the diagnosis. It is the native operation of capital. The circulation of capital consists in nothing else than the reduction of qualitatively incomparable things, an hour of labor, a measure of grain, a song, an

afternoon of care, to a common quantity in which they can be exchanged, accumulated, and made to breed more of themselves; the value-form is precisely a commensurating machine, and the historical career of capital is the spread of its commensuration into region after region of life, until things once held to lie beyond price acquire one and enter the circuit (Marx 1976). Optimizationism is the epistemology proper to this machine. It is what universal commensuration looks like once it is raised from a practice to a theory of rationality and thence to a picture of the world: the settled conviction that behind the apparent heterogeneity of goods there always lies a scale on which they compare and a maximum toward which reason should climb. The conviction feels self-evident to the modern mind not because it is a self-evident truth but because the mind has been formed within a life-world that performs the commensurating operation on everything, ceaselessly, until the performability of the operation comes to seem a property of the goods rather than an imposition laid upon them. This is the critique of instrumental reason that the Frankfurt tradition pressed: that reason, reduced to the calculation of means and the commensuration of ends, mistakes its own historically produced form for reason as such and forgets the ends it can no longer reason about (Horkheimer 2004; Horkheimer and Adorno 2002).

The symbolic crisis and the flight to the scale

The mother paper diagnosed the present as a crisis of the symbolic, a hollowing of the shared meanings by which a world is held together, and optimizationism can be placed within that diagnosis as one of its characteristic responses (Huang 2025a). The placement explains something the genealogy alone could not: why the constructed picture is not merely available but attractive, why people reach for it. When the thick symbolic orders that once told a community what things were worth, and told it in qualitative and incommensurable terms, lose their hold, a vacuum opens where the sense of worth had been, and into that vacuum the single quantitative scale flows as a replacement. A scale asks for no shared meaning. It needs no agreement about what a thing is for or what makes a life go well, only a number; and so it promises orientation to a disenchanted world that can no longer supply itself with meanings, a way to know what to do, maximize the measure, that survives the collapse of every thick account of the goods. Optimizationism is in this sense a flight: a flight from the difficulty of incommensurable value, which

requires judgment and yields no algorithm, into the false comfort of a scale, which requires only computation and spares one the judgment. That the flight should present itself as hard-headed rationality, and the refusal of it as soft sentiment, is itself part of the symptom, for the condition valorizes the very operation that expresses it and recasts fidelity to the real structure of value, the refusal to commensurate what does not compare, as a failure of nerve to be overcome.

The projection onto the cosmos

The last movement of the symptom is the projection of the historically specific operation onto the universe as its law, and it is this movement that the paper's title refuses. Because the commensurating, maximizing operation is performed everywhere within a certain form of life, it comes to seem that the operation is not being performed but merely recognized, that the landscapes were always there and reason only climbs them. One meets this projection in its popular cosmic form, in which everything from a molecule seeking its lowest energy to a market clearing to an organism maximizing its fitness is said to be "really" optimizing some quantity, so that the human who calculates is at last only doing consciously what all of nature does blindly, and optimization stands revealed as the deep grammar of being. The paper's denial is aimed exactly here, and it can be put precisely. What is actually observed is not a universe that climbs landscapes but a form of life that climbs them and then, carrying its scale with it, finds the operation everywhere it lays the scale down. That certain physical systems admit description as extremizing a quantity is a fact about the reach of a mathematical formalism, not evidence that nature is engaged in maximization in the sense at issue, the sense in which there is an objective owned by a subject and a best state to be sought; the formalism's success has been read back into the world as the world's own procedure. To say that optimization is a law of the universe is to mistake the shadow the commensurating life-world casts over whatever it examines for a feature of what is examined. The practice is real and has a date. The law is a projection. And intimate relation, whose goods are relational and incommensurable and whose subjects are constituted in the relating, is the region where the projection is most plainly false, because it is the region in which the commensurating operation, once applied, most visibly destroys the very thing it was applied to.

7.10. Optimizing Practice Is Not Ethical Practice

This section is the pivot of the criticism and, in a sense, of the paper, for it states in its sharpest form the claim the title's question was aimed at from the start: that morality cannot be defined as an optimization problem, and that an optimizing practice, however well it succeeds on its own scale, is not thereby an ethical practice. The preceding sections argued that optimization is ill-posed in intimate relation and that its imposition does damage. This one argues something orthogonal to both, and independent of both: that even where an optimization is perfectly well-posed and perfectly successful, reaching a genuine maximum of a genuine objective, it may still fail as an ethics, because the criterion of the optimal and the criterion of the good are different criteria, answering different questions, and the optimal is not the good. The claim thus holds even in the shipping-fleet domain where the four conditions are met; it is not a claim about ill-posedness at all, but about the gap between maximizing and acting well, which no well-posedness closes.

The orthogonality of the optimal and the good

The series has met a structure of this kind before, and naming the earlier instance sharpens the present one and shows it is not improvised for the occasion. In the paper on the sustainability of generative relation, poetry was shown to satisfy a formal, dynamical criterion, the criterion of the good cycle, of endless non-settling circulation; and it was shown in the same breath that satisfying this criterion does not make a symbolic circulation *good*, since the aesthetics of fascism and the discourse of the cult satisfy the very same dynamical criterion and are evil (Huang 2025b). The lesson drawn there was that the dynamical criterion and the justice criterion are orthogonal: the first asks whether a circulation can sustain itself, the second whether it ought to and at whose expense, and a circulation may pass the first and fail the second, so that goodness requires the justice criterion as an independent condition which the dynamics can never supply. The present claim has the same shape, with optimization in the place of dynamics. The criterion of the optimal answers one question: whether, on a given objective, a given option is the best available, whether it sits at the maximum. The criterion of the good answers another: whether the option ought to be chosen, whether it wrongs anyone, whether it

honors what the agent is bound to honor. These two are orthogonal. An option may be optimal and wrong; an option may be right and suboptimal; and success on the first criterion is no success whatever on the second, since they do not measure one thing along a common scale but pose different questions that a single answer cannot jointly settle. To have found the maximum is to have answered the first question and not so much as touched the second.

An illustrative case — the optimal betrayal. Suppose a man faces a choice well-posed enough to optimize: the relevant goods admit of proxies, the objective is stable, the scale is available, and he himself is settled in his preferences. He computes, correctly, that abandoning a friend who has become burdensome, at a moment when the friend most depends on him, maximizes his objective, and even, on a plausible specification, maximizes an impartial aggregate of well-being, since his own gain is large and the friend will in time recover. The optimization is impeccable; the maximum is genuine; on its own scale nothing better is available. And the act is a betrayal. The point is not that he has optimized the wrong objective, which would return us to the earlier impossibilities; grant that the objective is as good as an objective gets. The point is that optimality and rightness have come apart, that the very act which is best on the scale is the act that wrongs the one to whom he was bound, and that no refinement of the maximization repairs this, because the wrong is not a quantity the objective failed to include but a feature of the act that the whole dimension of maximizing cannot see. He did the optimal thing, and he ought not to have done it, and both are true at once.

The resistance of morality to the optimizing form

That the two criteria are orthogonal is not a brute fact but follows from the kind of thing morality is, and three features of the moral show why it resists the optimizing form in particular, each naming a place where the case above bites. The first is the *unconditionality* of certain moral requirements. An obligation of the kind Kant placed at the center of ethics does not present itself as one good among others to be weighed in a sum and outweighed should the sum come out otherwise; it presents itself as binding regardless of the balance, a constraint on what may be done and not a quantity to be traded against other quantities (Kant 1998). An optimizing frame can represent such

a requirement only by falsifying it: either as a very large term that a still larger term could in principle outweigh, which denies its unconditionality, or as an absolute constraint bounding the feasible set, which removes it from the objective altogether and concedes that the moral was never a matter of maximization to begin with. The second feature is the *non-tradability* of moral considerations. To make a duty a term in an objective is to make it tradable, available to be sacrificed when the numbers favor the trade; but much of what we recognize as moral seriousness consists precisely in the refusal to make certain considerations tradable, in holding that there are things one does not do whatever the yield, and this refusal is unintelligible within a frame in which everything is, by the form of the objective, a quantity that trades (Williams 1985). The man in the case did the tradable thing; that the friend's dependence could be traded away for a sufficient gain is exactly what a moral seriousness would deny. The third feature is the *irreplaceability of the other*. The person to whom one is bound is not, morally, the bearer of a quantity of value that another bearer of equal quantity could replace without loss; the other is irreplaceable, and the claim the other makes is the claim of this singular one and not of the value it happens to carry (Levinas 1969). Optimization, whose feasible set is a space of interchangeable options ranked by a common measure, cannot represent irreplaceability at all, since its every option is in principle substitutable by another of equal or greater value; and irreplaceability is precisely the denial that such substitution is ever, here, without loss.

Orthogonality of the optimal and the good. The criterion of the *optimal* and the criterion of the *good* are orthogonal: the first asks whether an option maximizes a given objective, the second whether it ought to be chosen, and success on the first is no success on the second. An optimizing practice, even one well-posed and reaching a genuine maximum, may therefore fail as an ethical practice, and does so wherever the good it maximizes is not the good it ought to honor. Morality resists the optimizing form in particular because of the unconditionality of its requirements, the non-tradability of its considerations, and the irreplaceability of the other, none of which an objective function can represent without falsifying. Morality is therefore not a higher-order optimization, a maximization of some moral quantity, but a practice outside the grammar of optimization.

The optimal is not the good.

The completion of the criticism

With this the criticism completes itself, and it does so by closing the last exit the optimizing frame might take. Confronted with the argument thus far, a defender of optimization has one sophisticated move left: to concede that ordinary utility is the wrong objective and to propose that morality itself be optimized, that we maximize not pleasure or preference but the good, folding the moral considerations into a richer objective and maximizing that. This section's claim is what forecloses the move. Morality cannot be the objective of an optimization, because its central features, the unconditional, the non-tradable, the irreplaceable, are exactly the features an objective function cannot carry; to write morality into an objective is to strip it of these features and so to write in something else under its name. The optimizing frame cannot be rescued by aiming it at the good, for the good is not the kind of thing there is a maximum of. And this does not leave ethics without rationality, which would be a disaster of the opposite kind and which the paper is at pains to avoid. It leaves ethics with a rationality that is not optimization, a way of reasoning about what to do that is answerable, discriminating, and severe without being the maximization of any measure; and the recovery of that other rationality, promised from the start, is the work of the part that follows.

Part Four After the Negation: A Non-Optimizing Relational Rationality

7.11. Rationality Is Not Optimization: Reclaiming the Word

The paper has denied that intimate relation is an optimization problem and criticized the imposition of the frame; it owes now an account of what relational rationality positively is, and the debt is not optional. To leave the matter at the denial would invite the very reading the paper most wants to refuse: that in surrendering optimization one surrenders rationality itself, and consigns love to mere feeling, to a warm unreason that does as it likes. That reading has force only because a long usage has quietly equated rationality with optimization, until the two words function as synonyms and the space of the reasonable has narrowed to the space of the maximal. The first task of the recovery is to break that equation, and it is a task of reclamation rather than invention, for the equation is a recent contraction of a word that once meant more, and what the paper reclaims was there before optimization annexed the term.

The contraction of a word

That the equation is a contraction and not a definition can be read directly off the genealogy already given. Rationality was not always maximization. Weber's own distinction preserves a rationality of ends alongside the rationality of means, a reasonableness about what is worth pursuing and not only about how to pursue efficiently what is given (Weber 1978); and behind Weber lies the far older tradition of practical wisdom, in which the rational agent is not the one who maximizes a measure but the one who perceives well what a situation requires and acts fittingly, whose excellence is discernment and proportion rather than computation. The narrowing of rationality to optimization is the achievement of the particular history the genealogy traced, in which the bracketing of ends, the objectification of the objective, and the axiomatic installation of the maximizer combined to make "rational" mean "maximizing on a scale" and to make anyone who declines the scale, by the completeness axiom, irrational by definition. Once this narrowing is seen as an achievement with a date, its air of necessity dissolves. It is not that reason is optimization and relation therefore falls outside reason; it is that a certain history has annexed the word "reason" to optimization, and an annexation can be contested. The paper contests it, and the ground of the contest is that the older and wider senses were not confusions the narrowing cleared up but competences the narrowing dropped.

Two rationalities, distinguished

The reclamation is best done by distinguishing two things the one word has been made to carry, the rationality that *maximizes* and the rationality that *responds*, and by showing that the second is no less rational for being no optimization. The rationality that maximizes takes a fixed objective and a field of options and selects the option that makes the objective greatest; its virtue is efficiency, its measure the distance to the summit, and its proper home the domain where value is representable, fixed, commensurable, and owned by a stable subject, the domain, that is, where the four conditions hold and the shipping fleet is routed. The rationality that responds takes a situation whose goods are relational, incommensurable, and in part non-representable, and a self still in the making rather than fixed, and it does what the first rationality cannot: it attends to what the situation and the other require, discerns among incommensurable goods without a scale, and acts fittingly rather than maximally, answerable at every point to a demand that comes from without rather than to a total computed from within. This second rationality is not a defective form of the first, an optimization carried out with poor instruments and no clear objective. It is a competence of a different kind, with its own standards of success and failure, its own ways of going right and of going wrong, and its own severity, described in the sections that follow. To call it irrational because it does not maximize is to mistake the annexed sense of the word for the whole of it, and to require that the reasoning proper to relation justify itself before a tribunal whose jurisdiction the paper has denied.

Severity without a maximum

Everything in the recovery turns on one point, which must be insisted on because it is the point the optimizing frame will most resist: that the rationality of response is *severe*, that it has genuine standards and is not a license for whatever one likes. The deepest suspicion of any non-optimizing rationality is that it is merely a soft permission, a way of dignifying caprice by excusing it from the discipline of the measure; and the suspicion is fair, and must be met, for a relational rationality that amounted only to “do as you feel, unencumbered by calculation” would deserve the contempt the optimizing frame heaps on it, and would moreover betray the goods it claims to serve, which make hard demands. The answer is that the rationality of response has a discipline of its own, as

exacting as the discipline of the maximum and in one respect harder, since it cannot be discharged by a rule: the discipline of getting the other right, of perceiving the situation as it is and not as one would prefer it, of discerning which among several incommensurable goods this occasion asks to be honored, of sustaining a generation without grasping it. These are standards one can fail, and fail badly. A response can be false, inattentive, self-serving, disproportionate; the difference between a fitting response and an unfitting one is as real as the difference between a right answer and a wrong one, though it is not the difference between a larger number and a smaller. Indeed the case of the optimal betrayal in the previous section was a failure of exactly this rationality, and its being a failure, assessable as such, is the proof that a standard was in force: the man perceived his friend rightly enough to know what was owed, and acted against the perception, and the wrongness of his act is not a smaller number on any scale but a failure of response that the scale could not even record. The severity is real. It is simply not the severity of optimization. Rationality, reclaimed, is wide enough to hold both the maximizing and the responding; and the reasoning proper to relation is the second, no less rational for owning no maximum, and answerable to standards the first cannot see.

7.12. The Form of Relational Rationality

The rationality of response has been distinguished from the rationality that maximizes and credited with a severity of its own; it remains to describe its form positively, to say what its operations are, so that it stands as a competence with a shape and not merely as the negation of optimization. Three moments compose it, and they are not stages of a procedure run in sequence but aspects of a single way of proceeding, present together in any exercise of it: response, the answering of a demand that issues from the other; attunement, the perceptual fit to a situation and its goods; and sustaining, the keeping-in-motion of a generation that is not to be grasped. Each is a standard one can meet or fail, and each names a competence the optimizing frame not only lacks but cannot represent, so that describing them is at once to give the recovery its content and to show why the frame it replaces was blind to exactly these things.

Response

The first moment is response, and it names a reorientation of rationality from a total computed within to a demand answered from without. The maximizing agent faces a field of options and consults an objective that is his own; the question he asks is what best serves that objective, and the direction of his reasoning is inward, from the world to his measure. The responding agent faces an other whose claim upon him is not derived from his objective and cannot be, and the question he asks is what this other, this situation, requires of him; the direction of his reasoning is outward, from himself to a demand he did not set and cannot revoke. This is why the ethics of the irreplaceable other is the native home of relational rationality rather than an ornament upon it: the other's claim is precisely a demand that comes from beyond the self's objective, and a rationality of maximization cannot so much as register it, since it appears in no term of any objective the self could hold (Levinas 1969). Response is answerable in a way maximization is not, and the difference is the mark of its rationality rather than a softness in it. The maximizer answers to his own objective and to nothing else, and so cannot, strictly, get the objective wrong; it is simply his. The responder answers to what is other than himself, and can therefore fail in ways the maximizer has no room for: by failing to hear the demand at all, by hearing it and answering falsely, by substituting his own measure for the other's claim and calling the substitution a response. That these are genuine failures, distinguishable from success, is what shows response to be a competence of reason and not a mood, for only what can be done rightly or wrongly is a matter of reason at all.

Attunement

The second moment is attunement, and it names the perceptual achievement without which response would be blind. To respond fittingly one must first perceive rightly: see the situation as it is, register which goods are truly in play, discern what this occasion, among all the occasions it resembles, distinctively asks. This is the competence the tradition of practical wisdom set at the center of ethics, the trained perception that grasps the salient features of a particular case and is not the application of a rule to a case already described, but the prior and harder work of arriving at the description the rule would need (Nussbaum 1986). It is exactly the competence for which the optimizing frame has no place, since optimization can begin only once the situation has been reduced

to a feasible set and an objective, and attunement is the labor of reaching a sense of the situation that precedes that reduction and often resists it. Attunement is what allows discernment among incommensurable goods without a scale, and this is its most important and least obvious office. Where the maximizer, denied a common measure, is simply stalled, unable to rank and so unable to act, the attuned agent is not stalled at all: he perceives which good this situation asks to be honored, not by computing a total in which the goods are compared, which is impossible, but by a discernment of the case that sees what it calls for. That such discernment is possible, that people do in fact choose well among incommensurable goods and can tell a wise such choice from a foolish one, is itself evidence that a rationality other than optimization is at work, since the choice is demonstrably not a maximization and yet is demonstrably not arbitrary, being open to praise, criticism, and the judgment that it was rightly or wrongly made.

Sustaining, and an image

The third moment is sustaining, and it names the aim proper to a rationality of response, which is not to reach a summit but to keep a generation in motion. Where the maximizing agent seeks a terminal state, the best point at which the work is done and the objective achieved, the responding agent seeks no terminus, for the goods of relation have their life in continuing and are spoilt by any final reckoning, as the criticism showed at length. The rationality of sustaining is therefore oriented to the ongoing rather than the achieved: its success is that the generation continues, replenished and unpossessed, and its characteristic failure is not falling short of a maximum but letting the generation lapse, whether by grasping it, which settles it, or by neglecting it, which starves it. Here a single image may be allowed, and only as an image. There is an old figure for a strength that does not seek the summit: water, which does not strive upward or contend for the high place, but goes to the low ground others disdain, takes the shape of whatever holds it, and by never contending nourishes all things. The figure catches, better than an argument might, what a non-maximizing rationality is like, its yielding that is not weakness, its finding of the way by fitting rather than forcing, its power that lies precisely in not climbing; and it is offered for that one flash of recognition and then set down, without exposition, since to expound it would be to build an apparatus from what is meant only to light the thought. The form of relational rationality is response, attunement, and sustaining.

Each is a standard, exacting and failable; together they are the competence the paper reclaims under the name of reason, a reason whose excellence is to answer, to perceive, and to keep in motion, and never to maximize.

7.13. Non-Action as the Highest Rationality

The recovery closes with the moment that reaches furthest from optimization and gives the paper's positive claim its most demanding form: that the highest exercise of relational rationality is a kind of non-action, a knowing when not to intervene, not to force, not to optimize at all, and that this restraint, far from the absence of reason, is its most difficult accomplishment. The claim draws on the notion of *wuwei*, non-action or effortless action, and completes the recovery by naming the competence that even the rationality of response must include: the competence of letting a generation arise rather than making it, of tending the conditions of a good rather than seizing the good directly (Laozi 2003). It is the sharpest point of the whole positive account, because it is where relational rationality most flatly contradicts the imperative the optimizing frame cannot suspend, the imperative always to close the gap to the maximum.

The rationality of restraint

The optimizing frame knows no restraint of this kind and cannot, for its imperative is always to act, to move toward the maximum, to close whatever distance remains between the present state and the best. Within that frame, inaction is intelligible only as a failure to optimize, a leaving of value on the table; there is no positive place in it for the deliberate refusal to intervene, since any refusal that forgoes an available improvement is, by the logic of the maximum, simply irrational. The rationality of relation has such a place, and it is central rather than marginal, because much of what is best in a shared life arises only when it is not forced and would be destroyed by the very intervention that sought to secure it. Trust that is demanded is not trust; spontaneity that is engineered is not spontaneous; a tenderness produced on purpose in order to produce it is something other than tenderness. For goods of this kind, and they are the characteristic goods of intimacy, the fitting exercise of reason is often to refrain: to make the space in which the good can arise of itself, and then to leave it be. And to know which goods are of

this kind, and when the space has been made, and how to keep from the intervention that would spoil them, is a discernment as exacting as any the previous section described, and in one respect harder, since it must be exercised against the standing impulse to do something, to help, to secure, to optimize. This is the rationality of restraint, and it is not the abdication of reason but its refinement, the point at which reason grows wise enough to know the limits of its own doing and to recognize that some goods are available only to a hand that does not grasp.

Letting the good cycle arise

The series has given this restraint a precise place before, and recalling it shows that the figure of non-action is not an exotic import brought in to decorate the ending but the name of a claim the argument has carried throughout. In the account of the good and the bad cycle, the good cycle was shown to be one whose positive accumulation is *endogenous*, arising from the internal tension of the relation itself rather than pumped in by extraction from without; and non-action was there identified as the stance that neither extracts nor forces closure, that lets the endogenous accumulation occur of itself rather than manufacturing a false increase by drawing on some outside (Huang 2025b). The same identification holds here and completes the argument of the present paper by joining its end to its middle. To optimize a relation is to intervene upon it, to act upon it as upon a system to be driven toward a maximum; and this intervention is exactly the forcing the good cycle cannot survive, since it substitutes an external drive for the internal generation and yields, at best, a manufactured increase that depletes what it draws upon, which is the very extraction the criticism of the third part described. The rationality of non-action is the refusal of this intervention: the tending of the conditions under which the relation generates value of itself, and the restraint from the optimizing action that would replace that self-generation with an extraction. What the maximizing frame reads as leaving value on the table is, seen rightly, the only way the value in question is ever had at all, since it is value that arises only where it is not seized, and the hand that reaches to maximize it closes on the diminished thing its reaching made.

The measure that is not the maximum

The deepest form of the paper's positive thesis can now be stated, and it is fitting to end the recovery on it. Optimization takes its measure from the maximum: the standard against which every state is judged is the best attainable state, and reason's task is to close the distance to it. A rationality of the kind this part has described takes its measure elsewhere, from what a situation and an other are of themselves, from the grain of the thing and the movement it already has; and reason's task, on this measure, is to accord with that movement, to sustain and not force it, to tend and not seize, rather than to override it toward a maximum defined apart from it. This is the deepest sense in which optimization is neither the form of relational rationality nor the law of the world. The world of relation does not present a landscape with a summit that reason should climb. It presents a generation with a movement of its own that reason should discern and accord with; and the highest rationality is not the one that reaches the highest point but the one that accords most truly with what is there, that knows when to act and, harder, when not to, and finds in restraint not the failure of reason but its fulfillment. With this the recovery is complete. Relational rationality is response, attunement, sustaining, and, at its height, the non-action that lets the good arise of itself; and none of these is a maximization, and every one of them is reason.

Part Five Close

7.14. The Polyphonic Conclusion

It remains to close, and the manner of the closing is not incidental to the argument but its last step. The paper has denied that intimate relation is an optimization problem, criticized the imposition of the frame, and recovered a rationality of response, attunement, sustaining, and non-action. A reader who has followed this far will feel the pull of a single question, and the whole of the close turns on how it is answered: if not utility, then *what* should one optimize? Love, perhaps, or meaning, or generativity itself? The temptation to answer is strong, and it is strong for a reason worth naming, since the reader has been trained by the very frame the paper opposes to expect that a serious argument ends by supplying a new objective to put in the place of the one it rejected. An answer would round the paper off in the shape the frame has taught us to find satisfying, replacing the discarded objective with a worthier one and leaving the machinery of maximization intact but redirected. The paper refuses the answer, and the refusal is not an omission or a failure of nerve but the final content of its view.

The surrender concealed in naming a new objective

The temptation must be met head-on, because to yield to it would undo everything the paper has argued, and would undo it quietly, wearing the look of a constructive conclusion. To say “do not optimize utility; optimize love” is to keep the entire apparatus the paper has dismantled, the objective, the scale, the maximum, the optimizer, and merely to change the argument of the function. But the four impossibilities were not impossibilities about *utility* in particular. They were impossibilities about the optimizing form as such, brought to bear on intimate relation: that its goods resist representation, admit no exterior standpoint to fix them, share no common scale, and belong to no subject stable enough to own the objective. Not one of these failures is touched by a change of objective. Love, written as the argument of J , is as non-representable, as relational, as incommensurable, and as owned-by-no-stable-subject as any other relational good; to make it the thing maximized is to inflict upon it precisely the damage the criticism described, rendering the circulation a settleable quantity and drawing it off in the reckoning. The offer to optimize love rather than utility is therefore not a friendlier version of the optimizing frame but the same frame with a more sympathetic mask, and it

does the same harm to a more beloved object; indeed it does the harm more surely, since the reverence in which love is held makes the reckoning feel like devotion and disarms the suspicion that would have attended the reckoning of mere utility. To accept the offer would be to lose the argument at the last step, having won it at every prior one. The paper therefore declines to name a master objective, not from an inability to think of one, but from having understood that any objective so named would reinstate the error the whole paper exists to expose.

The plural and the unsynthesizable

What stands in the place where a master objective would go is not a blank but a positive thesis, and it is the thesis the series has reached before by other roads: that the goods and the rationalities of relation are plural, and that their plurality admits no synthesis into a single measure without loss. There is no one thing that relational rationality maximizes, and this is not because the one thing has yet to be found but because there is none to find. There are, rather, many goods standing to one another in relations no common scale represents, and many aspects of the reasoning that honors them, response and attunement and sustaining and restraint, that do not reduce to a single operation performed on a single objective. This is the counterpart, in the theory of rationality, of the polyphonic form the series has given its conclusions since the paper on sustainability, where it was argued that the truth of a matter may lie in the tension among several frameworks none of which subsumes the others, and that to force them into one synthesis is to lose exactly the truth that lived in their irreducibility (Huang 2025b). The refusal to name a master objective is that same refusal carried to the level of value: an insistence that the many goods and the many modes of their honoring are not to be collapsed into one, and that the collapse, however it satisfies the desire for a single answer, destroys what it unifies. The plurality is not a stage on the way to a unity not yet achieved. It is the finding.

The form as the argument

That the paper enacts this refusal rather than merely asserting it is the last thing to say, and it is what binds the paper's form to its content in the manner the series requires of itself. A paper that argued against the single measure and then, in its conclusion, supplied one, would refute itself in its form whatever its sentences maintained; the shape of its

ending would betray the burden of its argument, offering with the closing gesture exactly the master objective the body had shown to be impossible. This paper ends instead by declining the measure, and the declining is meant to be read as the argument's completion and not its evasion. The most honest thing a work against optimization can do at its close is to withhold the new optimum the reader has been trained to expect, to leave the plurality unsynthesized on the page, and to let the absence of a master objective be felt as the presence of the thesis. The reader who reaches the end and finds no single answer to "what, then, should one optimize?" has not been failed by a paper that lost its nerve before the constructive task. He has been given the answer, which is that the question, in this domain, has no answer of the kind it asks for, and that to have felt the want of one and let it stand unfilled is to have understood. The form withholds the summit because there is none, and the withholding is what the paper had to say.

7.15. Envoi: A Promise That Is Not Optimized

The argument has run its course, from the anatomy of the optimizing frame, through the four impossibilities that show it ill-posed in intimate relation, through the criticism of its imposition, to the recovery of a rationality that responds rather than maximizes. It remains to close as the series closes its papers, not with an argument but with an image, and to return, as the paper began, to the plainest form of the thing it has been about.

Consider a promise. Two people bind themselves to one another for a life, and in doing so they perform an act the optimizing frame cannot understand. The frame would have them compute: to weigh the expected value of the bond against its alternatives, to keep the option of revision open should a better prospect appear, to treat the vow as a provisional maximum held only until the numbers change. A promise made in that spirit is not a promise but a standing intention to defect when it pays, and everyone knows the difference, though the frame cannot state it. For a promise is precisely the refusal to keep computing. It is the act by which one closes the ledger, forecloses the revision, and binds oneself past the point where the calculation could reach, saying not "I will stay while you remain the optimal choice" but "I will stay," full stop, whatever the sums come to say. The whole worth of a promise lies in its being unconditional in just the way an optimization can never be, and the series has argued elsewhere that this unconditionality,

far from a weakness, is the very source of the trust a promise can generate, since it is the mark that the one who promises has placed the bond beyond the reach of the calculation that could betray it (Huang 2026).

This is why a promise is a promise only when it is not optimized, and why the attempt to make it so destroys it in the same motion by which the pricing destroyed the friendship and the maximizing settled the circulation. To ask, of the one you have bound yourself to, whether she is worth it, to hold the vow open against the day a better yield appears, is not to be a more rational lover but to have stopped promising and started calculating, and to have lost, in the calculating, the very good the promise was. The good of the promise is available only on the far side of the refusal to compute its worth; it is a good one can have only by declining to ask the question the optimizing frame insists is the rational one. And so the deepest thing the paper has to say is said not by its arguments but by this plainest of acts, in which one human being says to another that here the question of worth will not be asked, not because the answer might be unwelcome but because the asking would already be the betrayal. There are goods a love does not maximize, and it is not for want of a better measure. It is because to have reached for the measure at all would have been to have loved something other than the one before you, who is not a quantity of value that a greater quantity could replace, but this one, irreplaceable, whom one does not weigh. 未曾计算, 故其爱得全—never weighed, and so the love is whole; which is to say, a promise, and not a sum.

Acknowledgements

Two debts frame this paper, and it is fitting to name them together at its end, for one gave it its question and the other its reason, and between them they enclose everything the paper contains.

The question with which the paper begins, whether optimization is really a law of the universe, came from an exchange with Ron Eglash, in the course of a longer conversation on the political economy of value and the theory of generative justice. It arrived in a form so plain that its force took time to register, and its whole work was to move optimization from the place of an unexamined procedure to the place of a thesis that might be false.

Everything the paper is followed from taking that displacement seriously. Beyond the question, the theory of generative justice developed in exchange with Eglash supplies the criticism of its third part with its central concept, the distinction between value that circulates and returns to its generators and value that is drawn off and settled elsewhere, without which the account of the damage optimization does could not have been given (Eglash 2016). Where the paper has reasoned well, the debt is his; where it has reasoned poorly, the fault is the author's alone.

The other debt is older and needs no argument. This paper, like every paper of the series, is for the girl who belongs to the forest and the mountains, whom the author has never once weighed for whether she was worth it, because that was never a question one could compute. If the acknowledgement to Eglash records where the question came from, this one records for whom the whole was written; and it is not beside the point of the paper but its plainest confirmation, for a bond that refuses to be priced, that is held past every reckoning and never put to the calculation of its worth, is the nearest witness there is to the thesis these pages have labored to establish, that there are goods a love does not maximize, and that it is not for want of a better measure. 致我最爱的人。 To the one I love most.

References

- Anderson, Elizabeth (1993). *Value in Ethics and Economics*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Chang, Ruth (1997). "Introduction". In: *Incommensurability, Incomparability, and Practical Reason*. Ed. by Ruth Chang. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, pp. 1–34.
- Eglash, Ron (2016). "An Introduction to Generative Justice". In: *Teknokultura. Revista de Cultura Digital y Movimientos Sociales* 13.2, pp. 369–404. DOI: [10.5209/rev_TEKN.2016.v13.n2.52847](https://doi.org/10.5209/rev_TEKN.2016.v13.n2.52847).
- Horkheimer, Max (2004). *Eclipse of Reason*. Orig. 1947. London: Continuum.
- Horkheimer, Max and Theodor W. Adorno (2002). *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*. Ed. by Gunzelin Schmid Noerr. Trans. Edmund Jephcott; orig.

- Dialektik der Aufklärung*, 1944/1947. “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception”. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Huang, Wanhong (2025a). “Responding to the Crises of Symbol and Subject in Modernity: Towards a Generative Nomos of Relational Presence”. OSF, doi:10.17605/OSF.IO/5R6CD; year to be finalized (2024 preprint / 2025).
- (2025b). “The Sustainability of Intimacy: Poetic Generativity and Generative Justice”. *Philosophy of Intimacy and the Theory of Justice*, Paper IX.
 - (2026). “The Causality of the Non-Binding Vow: On Trust, Promise, and the Generation of Expectation in the Absence of the Other’s Sword”. *Philosophy of Intimacy and the Theory of Justice*, Paper XIII.
- Kant, Immanuel (1998). *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. Trans. Mary Gregor; orig. 1785. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lacan, Jacques (1978). *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI*. Ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller. Trans. by Alan Sheridan. New York: W. W. Norton.
- (1992). *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959–1960: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII*. Ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller. Trans. by Dennis Porter. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Laozi (2003). *Dao De Jing: A Philosophical Translation*. Trans. Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall. New York: Ballantine Books.
- Levinas, Emmanuel (1969). *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*. Trans. by Alphonso Lingis. Trans. Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press.
- Marx, Karl (1976). *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume One*. Trans. Ben Fowkes; orig. 1867. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Neumann, John von and Oskar Morgenstern (1944). *Theory of Games and Economic Behavior*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Nussbaum, Martha C. (1986). *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Raz, Joseph (1986). *The Morality of Freedom*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Robbins, Lionel (1932). *An Essay on the Nature and Significance of Economic Science*. London: Macmillan.
- Sandel, Michael J. (2012). *What Money Can’t Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

- Savage, Leonard J. (1954). *The Foundations of Statistics*. New York: Wiley.
- Simon, Herbert A. (1955). “A Behavioral Model of Rational Choice”. In: *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 69.1, pp. 99–118.
- Wanhong (2026a). “Generativity Under Power: Trust, Asymmetry, and Estrangement in Intimate Relations”. Philosophy of Intimacy and the Theory of Justice, Paper XVII. Working draft.
- (2026b). “The Emergence of Culture in Intimate Relation: The Three-Register Dialectic of the Relational Real”. Philosophy of Intimacy and the Theory of Justice, Paper XXIV.
- Weber, Max (1978). *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*. Ed. by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich. Ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Williams, Bernard (1985). *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

CHAPTER 8

The Limitation of Language in Intimate Relation

Drive as the Phenomenology of Manque

致她——

For her—

那个属于森林与山之女孩，

the girl who belongs to the forest and the mountains,

在我词穷之处，你仍在。

where my words run out, you are still there.

致我最爱的人。 To the one I love most.

This paper proposes that language has a limit, and that the limit is generative. Across six dimensions of relational life, its existence, its maintenance, the value it generates, its ethics, its justice, and its evolution, there is in each case a core that language reaches toward and cannot reach. The paper sets out these six limits, each as a claim of its own, and then argues that what stands at the limit is drive in the psychoanalytic sense. Drive is not a content language omits and might recover; it is the phenomenology of *manque*, the gap between the symbolic and the Real that resists complete symbolization. This gap has two faces, a pre-symbolic remainder cut off when the subject enters language and a resulting impossibility of closure, and they are one. Around it drive circles and desire slides. By a thought experiment the paper shows that closing the gap would extinguish rather than fulfill them, so that the non-closure of language is the condition of their persistence. It then follows drive into the time of relation and draws out the generativity of the limit in the poem, in an ethics without possession, and in a justice that guards what it cannot settle, with a coalgebraic and reduction-theoretic counterpart offered as a heuristic. The paper offers no final synthesis; its form enacts its content.

Keywords: the limit of language; *manque*; drive; desire; the Real; *objet petit a*; generative relational being.

AI usage statement: AI assistants were used for drafting and discussion. The claims and the theoretical framework are the author's own, and the author takes full responsibility for the content.

Part One The Six Dimensions of the Limit of Language

8.1. The Limit Proposed, Not Lamented

There is an old habit of treating the limit of language as a defect. On this habit, language is an instrument for the transport of meaning, and wherever it fails to carry meaning across, it has fallen short of what it was for. The failure is then met with resignation, with the wish for a fuller language, or with a mysticism that points past speech to a silence it cannot itself enter. This paper takes a different route. It does not lament the limit of language and does not propose to overcome it. It proposes that the limit is the condition of something, and that the something is the very life of relation.

The proposal

The proposal can be stated at once. In each of the dimensions along which a relation lives, its coming into being, its being kept alive, the value it generates, the ethics it asks of those within it, the justice it owes, and the way it grows and turns into new forms, language reaches toward something it does not reach. This paper first lays out these six limits one by one. It gives each of them its own shape, so that the limit of language is seen not as a single vague insufficiency but as six distinct and structured phenomena, each with its own core that speech circles and does not touch, and each stated as a claim of its own.

The paper then makes its central move. What stands at the limit, in each of the six cases, is not an absence to be regretted. It is the site at which drive, in the sense psychoanalysis gave the word, becomes possible. Drive is not one more content that language happened to leave out and might, with better instruments, recover. Drive is the phenomenology of that limit itself. It is the way the gap between what can be said and what presses beneath saying shows itself, the felt form of a remainder that the operation of the signifier can never close. This is why the attempt to say the drive returns not the drive but its renewed escape. To symbolize the gap is to find that the gap has moved, because the gap is nothing other than what symbolization cannot close.

What follows from it

From this the rest follows. If the limit is the site of drive, then the non-closure of language is not a wound in relation but the open space in which relation keeps moving. A relation in which everything had been said, in which the other had been wholly reached, in which no remainder stirred beneath the words, would be a relation in which nothing further pressed, nothing further turned, nothing further was generated. The completeness so often wished for would be the end of the very thing it wished to secure. This consequence, argued in Part Two by a thought experiment, governs the whole account: closure is not fulfillment but extinction, and the openness of the limit is what keeps a bond alive.

The path of the paper

The paper proceeds in five parts. Part One sets out the six limits, giving each its own structure and its own claim: the ungroundability of the bond's existence, the uncapturability of the living present, the absence of any external place to price relational value, the aesthetic measure of the ethical response, the generativity that justice guards, and the direction of growth that cannot be said in advance. Part Two traces the shared form of these six to its source in the constitution of the speaking subject, gives the gap its two faces and its object, distinguishes the drive that circles from the desire that slides, and establishes by a thought experiment that the closure of the gap would extinguish rather than fulfill them, from which the paper's central claim follows, that drive is the phenomenology of the limit. Part Three follows the persistence of drive into the time of relation, where an early signifier goes on organizing later bonds, the symptom appears as a fidelity to what cannot be said, and the good bond is shown to consist in making room for the other's unsymbolizable core. Part Four draws out the generativity of the limit in three registers, the poem as a language that circles the gap without closing it, an ethics that generates a bond without possessing the other, and a justice that guards the generativity of relational being against premature settlement. Part Five closes without a synthesis, in keeping with what the paper argues, since a work about what language cannot reach ought not to pretend, in its last pages, to have reached it.

Method and stance

Two remarks on method. First, the paper states its own contributions as named claims, set off from the prose, so that what it proposes can be found and weighed apart from the argument that leads to it. Second, at each dimension and each register the paper passes through the relevant literature not to survey it but to locate, in each account, the point it reaches toward and the remainder it leaves, so that the review is everywhere in the service of the position and never a catalogue.

A remark on stance. This is a constructive paper and not a polemical one. It sets up no adversary and refutes no school. Where it passes near positions that would treat full communication as an ideal, or transparency between persons as the measure of a good bond, it does not stop to defeat them but builds a different account and lets the difference speak. The traditions it engages, in speech-act theory, in phenomenology, in the theory of value, in psychoanalysis, in the ethics of the other, and in the study of testimony, are taken as sources of insight to be positioned, each having reached toward the same limit from its own side.

8.2. The Being of a Relation

This section takes the first of the six dimensions, the sheer existence of a relation, and establishes a single result: that the being of a bond, its *that it is* as distinct from any account of what it is like, cannot be grounded by any proposition, and that this ungroundability is not a defect in relational language but the condition under which the existence of a relation can be a matter of fidelity rather than of record. The section states the phenomenon, sets it against the two traditions that would seem to close it, isolates the core that neither reaches, and draws the claim.

The phenomenon

Take first the plain fact that a relation exists. Two people are bound, or they are not; the bond is alive, or it has died. Language seems obliged to be able to say which, and it holds the sentences ready to hand. We are together. This is real. I am yours. These sentences present themselves as if they could establish the existence they announce, as if

to say the bond were in some measure to make it, or at least to fix and secure it against doubt. The appearance is strong enough that a whole practice of reassurance rests on it, the practice of asking to be told, and of telling, that the bond is there.

They do not establish it. The sentence *we are together* neither proves that the bond exists nor brings it into being. It can be spoken over a bond already hollow, and it can be withheld from a bond fully alive. The existence of a relation is not the kind of thing a proposition can ground. Whether the bond is real is settled somewhere the sentence does not reach, and every sentence about it arrives after the fact it would establish, a report on a state it did not produce and cannot guarantee. The being of the relation lies outside all the signifiers that would name it.

Two ways of trying to close the gap, and why they do not

Two traditions promise to close exactly this gap, and it is worth seeing why neither does, since the reason is instructive.

The first is the performative account of speech. Austin taught that some utterances do not describe a state of affairs but bring one about, that to say the words is, under the right conditions, to do the deed (Austin 1962). I now pronounce you; I promise; I name this ship. It can look as though *I am yours* belongs to this class, an utterance that makes the bond it declares. But the performative works only where a convention stands ready to be invoked and a procedure exists whose completion the words execute. The marrying words marry because an institution recognizes them; the naming names because a practice confers the name. The existence of a living bond has no such institution behind the words. There is no procedure whose correct performance constitutes the reality of love, no convention on whose authority *I am yours* could execute the bond it speaks. The performative closes the gap between word and deed only where an institution has already closed it; for the bare existence of a relation, no institution has, and the words fall back into report.

The second is the ideal of transparent communication, the thought that a bond is secured when the two have made themselves fully intelligible to each other, when nothing of either remains unsaid. Habermas built a whole ethics on the regulative ideal of communication free from distortion, oriented to mutual understanding (Habermas 1984). On such a

view the existence of a good bond would be underwritten by the completeness of the understanding reached within it. But understanding, however complete, is understanding of what the other says and shows, and the existence of the bond is not something either party says or shows. It is presupposed by everything they say and shown by nothing. Two people can understand each other to the last word and still face the question of whether the bond between them is alive, because that question is not answered at the level of understanding at all. The transparency ideal, pressed to its limit, would deliver a perfect mutual intelligibility beneath which the existence of the bond would remain exactly as ungrounded as before.

The core

What both traditions reach for and miss is the same. The core language cannot reach here is the sheer existence of the bond, its *that it is*, as against all the descriptions of what it is like. Descriptions there can be in abundance. The tone of a morning, the history of a quarrel and its repair, the shape of an ordinary evening, all of this can be said, and much of it can be said well. What cannot be said, because it is of a different order from any description, is the fact that beneath all these there is a bond at all, living now, in force now. That fact is presupposed by every description and secured by none of them. It is not a further, especially deep description that better language might supply. It is not a description at all, and that is why no description reaches it.

The ungroundability of the bond. The existence of a relation, its being-in-force as distinct from every account of its qualities, cannot be established by any proposition. No performative constitutes it, for it invokes no institution; no completeness of mutual understanding underwrites it, for it is presupposed by all understanding and shown by none. The being of the bond lies outside the signifier that would name it.

An illustrative case — the reassurance that settles nothing. One partner asks to be told

that the bond is real, and the other tells them, and the words are true and warmly meant. Yet the asking returns, not from distrust of the answer but because the answer, however true, is not the kind of thing that could settle the question. What was wanted was not a sentence but the standing of the bond itself, and no sentence delivers that standing. The recurrence of the asking is not a fault in either party. It is the mark that the existence of a bond lies where no reassurance can put it, outside the reach of any words that would confirm it.

Why the limit is generative here

Far from being a defect, this ungroundability is what lets the existence of a relation be a matter of fidelity rather than of record. Because no sentence can ground the bond, the bond rests on something other than a sentence, on a holding that must be renewed and cannot be filed away as done. Consider the counter-case, a relation whose existence *could* be established by a form of words. Its existence, once the words were produced, would be settled, on record, no longer at stake; and a bond no longer at stake is a bond one possesses by having produced its title. The limit forbids exactly this. Because the existence of the relation can never be put on record, it can never be possessed as a title, and so it remains what it must be to be a bond at all, a thing continually at stake, held open, renewed in the holding. The reader will recognize, without its needing to be argued here, that a promise carrying no external guarantee stands closer to this condition than a contract does: the contract puts the bond on record and thereby makes it a title; the promise, guaranteeing nothing, leaves the bond where the existence of a relation always is, outside the record and in the keeping. The ungroundability that looked like a poverty of language is the very thing that keeps the existence of a relation an act.

8.3. The Living Present

This section takes the second dimension, the maintenance of a relation through time, and establishes that what maintenance depends on, the living present in which two people are actually with each other, cannot be occupied by any statement, because the act of stating already places the speaker at a distance from the moment stated. The result is that maintenance is a matter of presence rather than of statement, and the section shows

this by way of the phenomenon, a review of the two accounts that would make the present sayable, the isolation of the core, and the claim.

The phenomenon

A relation is not only brought into being; it is kept. Maintenance is the work of holding a bond alive through time, and what it holds is not a record of the past but a living present, the felt now in which two people are actually with each other. Language seems able to reach this present. We have the tense for it. I love you now. I am here. This is the present indicative, the grammatical form of the current moment, and it appears made to seize exactly what maintenance depends on.

It does not seize it. By the time *I love you now* has been said, the now it names has slipped past. The present of feeling, the actual current in which the relation is alive, is always a step ahead of the signifier that would fix it, so that speech about the present is always speech about a present just departed. The word arrives late. What it catches is not the living now but the trace of a now already becoming past, and the living now itself, the thing maintenance most needs to hold, is precisely what runs out from under every attempt to state it.

Two accounts of the sayable present, and their remainder

Two accounts promise that the present can, after all, be reached in speech, and each illuminates the limit by the exact manner of its failure.

The first is the account of the performative present, the deictic now. Linguistics observes that words like *now*, *here*, *I*, and *this* take their reference from the very act of utterance; the *now* of *I love you now* just is the moment of speaking, so it seems the word cannot lag the moment it names, since it names whatever moment it is spoken in. But this only relocates the lag. The deictic *now* refers to the moment of utterance, yet the living present that maintenance needs is not the instant of an utterance; it is the felt current of being-with, which is not itself an act of speech and which the utterance interrupts in order to name. When I stop being with you in order to say that I am with you, the saying occupies the moment the deixis points to, and the being-with it would report has been set aside for the duration of the report. The deictic present is real, but it is the present

of the speaking, not the present of the bond, and these are not the same present.

The second is the phenomenological account of the living present, which comes nearer the truth and for that reason marks the limit more precisely. Phenomenology describes the present of experience not as a knife-edge instant but as a thick now that carries the just-past in retention and the about-to-come in protention, so that the living present is always already a passage rather than a point. Merleau-Ponty makes perception itself this temporal thickness, a present that is never a bare instant but a field in motion (Merleau-Ponty 1962). This is exactly right about the present that maintenance inhabits, and it is precisely what defeats the statement. A statement fixes; it arrests a content and holds it still for predication. The living present, being a passage and not a point, cannot be arrested without being stopped, and stopped it is no longer the living present but a still taken from it. Phenomenology thus tells us why the present cannot be said: to say it is to fix it, and to fix a passage is to end the passing that made it alive.

The core

The core language cannot reach here is the *present* of the relation, its currentness, the being-now of the bond as against every account of how it was a moment ago. The relation lives in a present that speech cannot occupy, because the act of speaking already places the speaker at a small distance from the moment spoken of, and because the moment in question is a passage that fixing would end. One can narrate the relation, and narration has its place, but narration is always of the just-past, and the living edge on which the bond is actually sustained stays ahead of the narration, uncaptured.

The uncapturability of the present. The living present in which a relation is sustained cannot be occupied by any statement. The deictic present belongs to the act of speaking and not to the being-with it would report; the thick present of experience is a passage that fixing would arrest and so end. What maintenance rests on stays ahead of every sentence that reaches for it.

An illustrative case — the photograph of the moment. Two people try to hold an evening by recording it, a photograph, a note written the same night, a message that says exactly how it feels now. Later the record is faithful and the moment is gone from it, present only as something the record points back to and does not contain. The living being-together that the evening was cannot be found in what was saved of it. This is not the failure of a poor record. The best record would do no better, because the present it would hold is a passage, and what is saved of a passage is always a still from which the passing has been removed.

Why the limit is generative here

This is what makes maintenance a matter of presence rather than of statement. Because the living present cannot be said, it can only be inhabited, and the keeping of a relation is not the repeated production of true sentences about it but the repeated occupation of a present that no sentence holds. Consider again the counter-case, a bond whose current moment *could* be fixed in words. Its maintenance would consist in keeping the words up to date, in issuing at each moment the true sentence for that moment, a maintenance of the record rather than of the bond; and a relation maintained by keeping its record current would be one in which presence had been replaced by reporting. The limit forbids this substitution. Because the living present cannot be caught in a sentence, maintenance cannot be discharged by sentences, and is thrown back onto presence itself, onto the being-there that no report replaces. The uncapturability that looked like a failure of the present tense is what keeps maintenance an inhabiting rather than a filing. It is also the temporal form of desire, which slides from signifier to signifier precisely because no signifier ever coincides with the present it reaches for, a movement the paper takes up in Part Two.

8.4. Relational Value Without a Place to Be Priced

This section takes the third dimension, the value generated within a relation, and establishes that such value cannot be named as a magnitude, because quantification presupposes an external place from which worth is assessed, and a value that exists only within a relation grants no such place. The result is that relational value cannot be extracted

or priced, and this is what keeps it living in the bond rather than available to be drawn off. The section proceeds through the phenomenon, a review of the accounts that would render relational value assessable, the isolation of the core, and the claim.

The phenomenon

Within a relation, value is generated. Something comes to matter, to weigh, to be worth caring for, and this worth is not carried in from outside but arises in the bond itself. Language seems able to reach this value. We have the vocabulary of worth ready: what this means to me, how much you matter, what our years together are worth. These phrases present value as if it were a magnitude, a quantity that speech could name and, naming, fix.

They do not fix it. The value generated in a relation is not a property lodged in either person, to be read off and reported. It is generated in the relation and exists only there, in the between, and this is what defeats the naming. To name a value as a magnitude is to assume a place from which the naming is done, a standpoint outside the thing valued from which its worth can be assessed and set down. For a value that exists only within a relation there is no such outside place.

Two ways of trying to assess it, and why they fail

Two lines of thought promise that relational worth can be brought into a common measure, and each fails in a way that shows the structure of the limit.

The first treats the value in a bond as a form of capital. Bourdieu extended the economic vocabulary of capital to goods that are not money, cultural capital and social capital among them, and analyzed relationships as holdings that can be accumulated, converted, and made to yield (Bourdieu 1984). On this account the worth generated in a relation would be a stock of social capital, in principle measurable by what it can be converted into. The account captures something real about how relationships function within fields of power, and it fails at exactly the point that concerns us. The value that social capital measures is the value a relationship has *for* something outside it, its convertibility into advantage; the value generated *within* the bond, the worth the bond has in itself and for those in it, is precisely what does not convert, what cannot be cashed into any external

advantage without ceasing to be the thing it was. Social capital measures the relation from outside, in the currency of what it yields; the value in question is the one that has no yield outside the relation, and so no place in the ledger of capital.

The second is the appeal to a common measure of value as such, the assumption, built into any optimization or cost-benefit frame, that distinct goods can be ranked on a single scale so that trade-offs among them can be computed. Raz argued against exactly this assumption for certain goods, holding that some values are incommensurable, that there is no common measure by which, for instance, the worth of a friendship and a sum of money could be compared, and that to attempt the comparison is not to make a difficult judgment but to commit a kind of error about what the values are (Raz 1986). The worth generated within a relation is incommensurable in this sense. To ask what it is worth in any external currency, to seek its magnitude on a common scale, is not to pose a hard question but to misunderstand the value, which is not the kind of thing that has a magnitude on a scale shared with other things. Raz names the error; the present account gives its ground, in the next paragraph.

The core

The core language cannot reach here is the *relational generation* of value, its arising in the between rather than in either party, which is also its refusal of any external place from which it could be quantified. The point is not that the value is large, or hard to compute, or private. The point is structural, and it grounds the incommensurability Raz observed. Quantification presupposes an outside knower who could assign a magnitude to any worth, a position from which all value is in principle assessable, a place occupied, in the theological figure the series has used elsewhere, by an Other who could price everything. A value generated only within a relation denies that such a position exists for it, since to occupy the position would be to stand outside the relation, which is to stand where the value is not. There is no assessor clear of the bond from which the bond's own generated worth could be measured, because the worth does not exist anywhere the assessor could stand. Incommensurability, at this level, is not a curious fact about certain goods; it is the consequence of a relational ontology of value, on which there is no external vantage from which relational worth could be brought to a common measure, because relational worth is nowhere but in the relation.

No external place to price the relation. Value generated within a relation cannot be assigned a magnitude, because quantification requires a standpoint outside the valued thing from which worth is assessed, and relational value exists only within the relation, offering no such standpoint. The incommensurability of relational goods is not a brute datum but a consequence of the relational generation of value: there is no Other positioned to price what exists only in the between.

An illustrative case — the years that have no price. Asked what a long shared life is worth, one finds the question not hard but wrong, and the wrongness is instructive. It is not that the figure is large or hard to compute. It is that there is no currency the worth converts into, no external ledger where it could be entered, because the worth exists only in the bond and nowhere a price could be set. To name a sum would not undervalue the years; it would misdescribe them, treating as a magnitude on a common scale what has its being only in the relation.

Why the limit is generative here

This is what keeps relational value from being a possession or a price. Because the worth generated in a bond cannot be set down as a magnitude, it cannot be extracted from the bond and carried off, cannot be banked, traded, or realized elsewhere. Consider the counter-case, a relational value that *could* be fully priced. Priced, it could be sold; realized in an external currency, it could be drawn off, and the relation would be left holding a figure where the bond had been. The limit forbids this. Because relational value has no external place to be assessed, it has no external place to be cashed, and so it stays where it was generated, in the living bond, unavailable to extraction. This will matter in Part Four, where the capture of relational value by external powers is shown to work only by first supplying the very forms in which the value is generated, since the value itself, once generated within the bond, offers capital no place to seize it. For now the point is only that the worth generated within a relation, having no place to be priced, has no place

to be taken, and that this ungraspability is what keeps it a living worth rather than a realizable asset.

8.5. The Aesthetic Measure of the Ethical Response

This section takes the fourth dimension, the ethical demand a relation makes, and establishes that at its root the ethical response rests on an aesthetic measure, a sensed fittingness that cannot be turned into a proposition, so that ethics is a matter of cultivated perception rather than of applied doctrine. The section states the phenomenon, reviews the singularity of the other and the aesthetic register through which it is met, isolates the core, and draws the claim. This is the dimension the paper marks as ethical at its root, and the review is correspondingly fuller.

The phenomenon

A relation makes ethical demands, and the first of them is a demand to answer this person, the one before me, in their singularity. Language seems able to meet the demand. We have the resources of moral speech: principles, reasons, the vocabulary of obligation and desert. It appears that to act well toward another is to apply the right rule to the case, and that the rule and the case can both be said. A long tradition in moral philosophy proceeds on exactly this appearance, treating the ethical task as the subsumption of a particular case under a general principle.

They can be said only up to a point, and the point is where ethics begins.

The singularity of the other

To grasp the other through any predicate, any category, any rule, is already to grasp them as an instance of a kind, a bearer of the stated features, one who falls under the description. Levinas made this the center of ethics: the other faces me not as an instance of humanity in general but as this one, whose claim on me precedes and exceeds every category under which I might bring them, so that the ethical relation is a relation to what no concept contains (Levinas 1969). The face, in his vocabulary, is exactly what resists becoming a theme, a content I could state and thereby master. The ethical claim

comes from what the predicates do not exhaust, from this other as this other and not as a case of a type. So far the limit is a limit on conceptual grasp: the singular exceeds the general, and the other's claim issues from the excess.

But this leaves a question Levinas does not fully answer, and it is the question that carries the section. If the other exceeds every rule, how is the fitting response to them found? It cannot be deduced, for deduction works from generals and the case is singular. What faculty, then, takes the measure of a singular to which no rule reaches?

The aesthetic register

The answer this paper proposes is that the measure is taken aesthetically, in the register of *aisthesis*, sensed before it is stated and not reducible to any rule from which it could be read off. How much to say and how much to leave unsaid, when to press and when to hold back, the exact weight of a gesture, the timing of a silence: all of this is apprehended in the way one apprehends the rightness of a line or the wrongness of a false note. It is a perception of fittingness, not an inference to it.

Two sources make this register precise. Merleau-Ponty showed that perception is not the passive reception of data but an active taking-up of a situation, a bodily attunement that grasps a whole before it articulates any part, and that this attunement has its own intelligence, a knowing in the perceiving that no subsequent proposition exhausts (Merleau-Ponty 1962). The fitting response to another is grasped by exactly this perceptual intelligence: one senses the shape of the situation and what it calls for, as a whole, before and beneath any rule one could state. Dufrenne, extending phenomenology to aesthetic experience, described the perception of an aesthetic object as the apprehension of an expressed meaning that is given only in the sensing and cannot be detached from it into a concept, a meaning that is felt as the depth of the perceived and lost the moment one tries to state it apart from the perceiving (Dufrenne 1973). The measure of the ethical response has this form. It is an expressed meaning of the singular situation, given in the perception of it and not detachable into a rule.

This is why the ethical response cannot be propositionalized. The proposition states a general, and the fittingness at stake is of this response, here, to this one. To translate the sensed measure into a statable rule is to replace the perception of a singular with the

application of a general, which is to pass over exactly the singularity the other's claim consisted in. The measure lives in the sensing and dies in the saying.

The core

The core language cannot reach here is the *aesthetic measure* of the ethical response, the sensed fittingness that cannot be turned into a proposition. It is not that the right rule is hard to find or hard to phrase. It is that the fittingness at stake is of a kind with the fittingness of a form, apprehended in perception and lost in translation to a rule, because the rule states a general and the fittingness is singular. The ethical, at its root, is answerable to a measure that is aesthetic in the strict sense: taken by *aisthesis*, in the perceiving, and not by the understanding, in the proposition.

The aesthetic root of the ethical. The fitting response to the singular other cannot be derived from any rule, because rules state generals and the fittingness is of this response to this one. It is grasped aesthetically, in the register of aisthesis, as one grasps the rightness of a form, and is lost when translated into a proposition. Ethics at its root rests on a perception, not a doctrine.

An illustrative case — the timing no rule gives. Someone before you is in pain, and the question is whether to speak or to keep silent, and if to speak, in what weight and at what moment. No rule delivers the answer, for the rule states a general and this is this person, now. What guides the fitting response is a perception of the whole situation, a sensed measure taken in the way one senses that a further word would be one word too many. Those who respond well here are not those who know more rules but those whose perception has been schooled finer, and what they have is not a doctrine but an eye.

Why the limit is generative here

This is what keeps ethics a matter of cultivated perception rather than of applied doctrine. Because the fitting response cannot be propositionalized, it must be perceived, and the ethical life is the schooling of a perception fine enough to take the measure of a singular case. Consider the counter-case, a morality fully written as rules. One would discharge it by looking up the rule and applying it, and the looking-up would pass over the singularity of the other in favor of the type under which the rule brought them; a perfectly codified ethics would be an ethics that never met anyone, only cases. The limit forbids this. Because the measure is aesthetic and cannot be codified, ethics is returned to the trained eye and the trained ear, to a sense of the fitting that no code replaces, and the ethical life becomes the long cultivation of that sense. This connects the ethical dimension to the aesthetic education the series has developed elsewhere, and it will return in Part Four, where the ethics of making room for the other's unsymbolizable core is shown to rest on exactly this perceptual measure. What cannot be said in the ethical relation is not a failing of moral language. It is the opening in which answering this other, and not merely applying a rule to a case, becomes possible at all.

8.6. The Generativity That Justice Guards

This section takes the fifth dimension, the justice a relation owes, and establishes that what justice most owes protection to is not only a settled fact awaiting adjudication but the generativity of relational being, the still-forming life of the bond, which is the intervention of the Real into the symbolic and cannot be settled in advance by any existing order of signs. The result is that justice at its root is the guarding of generativity rather than the settlement of the already-formed. The section proceeds through the phenomenon, a review of the two pictures of justice that treat it as settlement, the isolation of the core, and the claim.

The phenomenon

A relation owes justice, and justice seems the most sayable of all the dimensions, since it lives in claims, procedures, and judgments, in the very element of statement. Justice weighs what is owed and settles it, and to settle is to say. It appears that whatever

justice concerns can in principle be brought into the order of signs, stated as a claim and disposed of by a judgment. Two pictures reinforce the appearance, and it is worth naming them to see what they leave out.

Two pictures of justice as settlement

The first is the procedural picture, on which justice is the correct running of a procedure that takes claims as inputs and yields judgments as outputs. Its virtue is that it makes justice sayable through and through: everything relevant is a claim, and a claim is a statement. But a procedure operates on the already-formed. It takes what has happened, states it as a case, and disposes of it, and it is constitutively backward-looking, addressed to what has taken shape and can be brought before it. What is still forming, what has not yet taken the shape a claim would state, is not an input the procedure can accept, and so it falls outside the procedure's reach not by oversight but by the procedure's nature.

The second is the picture of justice as the retrospective repair of wrongs, the setting-right of a harm already done. This too is real and necessary, and this too is backward-looking. It addresses the wrong as a fact, laid out for assessment, and its whole labor is the disposal of what has already occurred. Here the work on testimony is instructive by contrast. Felman and Laub, studying the witnessing of catastrophe, found that the most severe wrongs resist exactly the settlement that repair would require, that there is in them a core which does not become a statable fact to be assessed and closed, but persists as something only borne witness to, never disposed of (Felman and Laub 1992). Even in the retrospective case, then, a remainder escapes settlement. And what escapes there is a version of what concerns us, though the section's own subject lies not in the past wrong but in the forward direction, in the still-forming.

The core

Something in justice resists settlement, and it is the deepest thing justice has to protect. What a relation of justice must answer to is not only a settled fact but the generativity of relational being itself, the still-forming, not-yet-settled life of the bond. This generativity is the intervention of the Real into the symbolic. What is new is new precisely in that it is not yet covered by the existing signifiers, a tear the Real opens in the order of established

meaning. The core language cannot reach here is this *generativity* of relational being, the Real's intervention, which cannot be settled in advance by any existing order of signs. To bring the still-forming under the settled sign is to demote it from becoming to become, from the living generativity that justice must protect to a finished case that a procedure can dispose of. The limit is not that justice has not yet found the right words. It is that the object justice most owes protection to is, by its nature as generativity, what the words have not reached and cannot reach without ending it.

Justice guards what it cannot settle. The deepest object of justice is the generativity of relational being, the still-forming life that the intervention of the Real keeps opening in the order of settled meaning. This generativity cannot be settled in advance, for to settle it is to convert becoming into the already-become and so to end it. Justice at its root is therefore the guarding of a generativity it cannot bring into the settled sign, not the settlement of the already-formed alone.

An illustrative case — the grievance that the settlement misses. A wrong within a bond is brought to a reckoning, stated as a claim, weighed, and disposed of by an agreed repair. The repair is fair, and something in the wrong is nonetheless left untouched by it, a residue that the statement of the claim could not carry and the settlement could not reach. What the reckoning addressed was the wrong insofar as it could be stated; what remains is the wrong insofar as it could not. The residue is not a sign that the settlement was unjust. It is the mark that justice answers to something a settlement does not exhaust.

Why the limit is generative here

This is what keeps justice from collapsing into administration. Because generativity cannot be settled in advance, justice cannot be exhausted by procedure, and a justice worthy of the name holds itself open to what its own settled forms have not anticipated.

Consider the counter-case, a justice that could dispose of everything by existing rule. It would be an administration of the already-formed, complete and closed, and precisely in its completeness it would be deaf to the new that relational being keeps generating, since the new is what no existing rule anticipated. The limit forbids this closure. Because the generativity justice guards cannot be brought under the settled sign, justice must keep itself answerable to what exceeds its procedures, and refuse itself the false completeness of a procedure that has foreseen everything. The mode of this keeping-open, a knowing that holds what it cannot dispose of, is taken up in Part Four under the name of witnessing. What justice cannot bring into the settled sign is not a gap in the law. It is the living generativity that the law exists to keep open.

8.7. The Unsayable Direction of Growth

This section takes the sixth and last dimension, the evolution of a relation, and establishes that the direction of a bond's genuine growth cannot be stated in the signifiers now available, because genuine novelty is by definition what the present vocabulary does not contain, so that a relation is a becoming undergone rather than a plan carried out. The section proceeds through the phenomenon, a review of the accounts that would make the direction of growth sayable in advance, the isolation of the core, and the claim, and it closes Part One by gathering the six limits into their shared form.

The phenomenon

A relation grows and turns. It generates forms it did not have, becomes over years something neither party could have set out at the start. Language seems able to reach this growth, at least in prospect. We plan, we imagine, we say where we are heading: what we will build, who we will become, what our life will grow into. These sentences present the direction of a bond's development as if it could be laid out ahead of the walking.

They lay out only what the present already contains.

Two ways of saying the future, and their limit

Two accounts promise that the direction of growth can be stated in advance, and each shows, by the form of its shortfall, what genuine novelty is.

The first is prediction, the projection of a future from the trends of the present. Prediction is powerful and often right, and it has a definite scope: it states the future insofar as the future is a continuation of the present, an extrapolation of what is already underway. But precisely for that reason prediction reaches only the future that the present already implies. What it cannot reach is the genuinely new, the form that is not an extrapolation of present trends but a break from them, for such a form is not contained in the present data and so cannot be projected from them. Prediction states the future that is already latent; the direction of genuine growth is the future that is not latent, and prediction passes it by.

The second is the account of the future as the realization of a plan, the execution of an intended design. A couple sets out to build a life of a certain shape, and the building realizes the design. This too has its truth, and this too has its limit. A plan can only specify what its authors can already conceive, in the vocabulary already available to them; it lays out a future in present terms. But a relation that genuinely evolves becomes something its members could not have specified at the outset, something for which they did not yet have the words, and this is not a failure of planning but the mark of real growth. Where the outcome was fully specifiable in advance, there was no evolution, only the unrolling of a design. The plan reaches the future it could already state; the direction of genuine growth is the future it could not, and the plan does not contain it.

The core

The core language cannot reach here is the *direction* of the relation's becoming, its genuine novelty, which cannot be stated in the signifiers now available. The point is not that the future is uncertain in the ordinary way, a known range of outcomes not yet decided; uncertainty of that kind is still stated in present terms, as a distribution over foreseen possibilities. The point is that the genuinely new form is not yet sayable at all, since its sayability would require the very signifiers whose absence is what makes it new. The direction of real growth is the not-yet-symbolizable, and it stays ahead of speech not by

accident but by what novelty is. This is the forward-facing form of the same generativity that justice was shown to guard: there, the still-forming as the object of protection; here, the not-yet-sayable as the direction of growth.

The direction of growth is not sayable in advance. The direction in which a relation genuinely evolves cannot be stated in the signifiers now available, because genuine novelty is precisely what the present vocabulary does not contain. Prediction reaches only the latent future, the plan only the already-conceivable; the new form is not-yet-symbolizable, and stays ahead of every advance description by what novelty is.

An illustrative case — the life neither could have described. Two people set out with a picture of the life they would build, and years on they are something the picture did not contain, not a deviation from the plan but a growth the plan had no words for. Asked at the start to describe what they became, they could not have, because the terms were not yet theirs. The becoming was real precisely in that it outran the description available to it. What they could not have said in advance was not a gap in their foresight. It was the room in which the relation grew into what no one yet had words for.

Why the limit is generative here

This is what keeps the evolution of a relation open rather than executed. Because the direction of genuine growth cannot be said in advance, a relation is not a plan carried out but a becoming undergone, and its future is generated in the living rather than read from a design. Consider the counter-case, a relation whose development could be fully stated beforehand. It would have no future in the strong sense, only the unrolling of a foreseen sequence, a life lived as the execution of its own prospectus. The limit forbids this. Because the direction of real growth is not-yet-sayable, the future of a relation cannot be pre-stated and so cannot be merely executed; it must be undergone, generated in the walking, open to forms not yet in the language. What cannot be said in advance

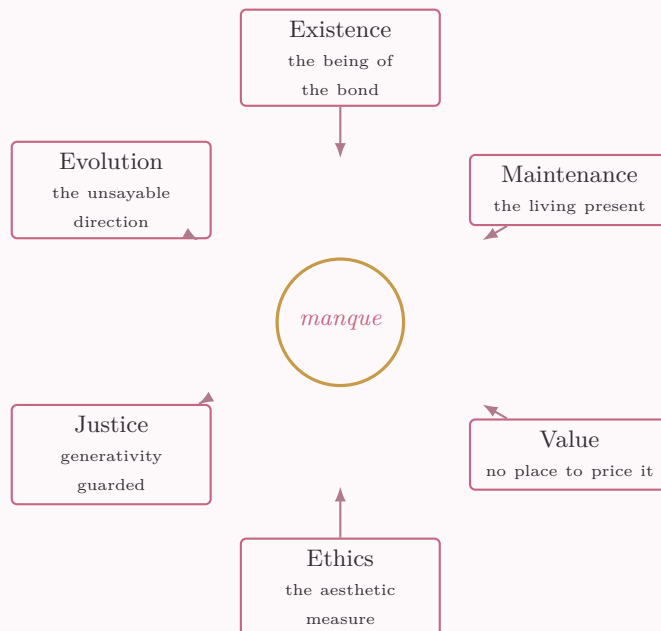


Figure 8.1: Six windows on one gap. In each dimension of relational life, language reaches toward a core it does not touch (rose arrows), and in each the core is a face of the same *manque*. The parallel is not a ranking; it is six structured phenomena sharing one form.

is not the failure of foresight. It is the space in which a relation can still become what no one yet has words for.

The six limits are now before us, each with its own core and each with its own claim: the ungroundability of the bond's existence, the uncapturability of the living present, the absence of any external place to price relational value, the aesthetic measure of the ethical response, the generativity that justice guards, and the unsayable-in-advance direction of growth. They are set side by side, not ranked and not derived one from another, and the parallel is deliberate: the limit of language is not one vague insufficiency but six distinct and structured phenomena. Yet across all six a single form has appeared. In each, language reaches toward something and does not reach it; in each, the core it cannot reach is a remainder that the operation of the signifier leaves outside itself; and in each, the not-reaching is not a defect but the condition under which that dimension

of relational life is what it is. Part Two asks what stands at these limits, traces it to the constitution of the speaking subject, and gives it a name.

Part Two The Phenomenology of the Gap: The Descent at Manque

8.8. Entry into the Symbolic and the Pre-Symbolic Remainder

This section opens Part Two by tracing the shared form of the six limits to its source. The aim is to establish that the remainder language could not reach, in each of the six dimensions, has a single origin in the constitution of the speaking subject, and that psychoanalysis names this origin: the subject is constituted in the signifier by an operation that leaves a part outside itself, in the register of the Real. The section sets out the psychoanalytic account of entry into language, follows the two moments of that entry by which the remainder is produced, distinguishes the sense of the Real it employs, and shows that the six cores of Part One are expressions of this one remainder.

From six limits to one source

Part One left a result and a question. The result was that in each dimension of relational life, language reaches toward a core it does not reach, and that in each the not-reaching is generative. The question is why the same form should recur across dimensions as different as the existence of a bond, the measure of an ethical response, and the direction of growth. Six limits with one form ask for one source, and the source is not to be found by comparing the dimensions with one another but by descending beneath them, to the constitution of the subject who speaks in all of them.

The subject constituted in the signifier

To become a subject who speaks is to be taken up into the symbolic order, the field of signifiers that precedes the subject and structures it. This is the pivot of Lacan's rereading of Freud, and its consequence is precise. The subject that comes to be in the signifier is not a prior fullness that language then expresses. It is constituted in and by the signifier, and there is no subject of speech behind or before this constitution to which one might appeal (Lacan 2006). Fink states the mechanism carefully: the subject is what is represented by one signifier for another, a subject that appears only in the movement of the chain and has no substance apart from it (Fink 1995). The subject is an effect of the signifier, not its origin.

Before the signifier there is a phase in which the human infant finds an anticipated unity

in an external image, a coherence borrowed from a form outside itself, and this borrowed coherence already installs a distance between the subject and the ground of its own being (Lacan 2006). The image gives a unity the body does not yet have, and the self that forms around it is from the first an identification with something other, a self founded on an outside. When the signifier arrives it does not heal this distance but redoubles it, for now the subject must find itself in a field of signs that likewise precede and exceed it. The entry into language is the second and decisive founding of the subject upon what is not itself.

The two moments of alienation and separation

The entry into the signifier can be followed in two moments, and the second is where the remainder is produced. In the first moment, which psychoanalysis calls alienation, the subject takes on the signifiers of the Other as the only means of appearing at all, and pays for its appearance by a loss: to be represented by a signifier is to be reduced to what the signifier can carry, and the living being that entered is not wholly carried (Lacan 1978). In the second moment, separation, the subject confronts a lack in the Other itself, the fact that the Other's chain of signifiers does not close, does not contain the answer to what the subject is for it, and in this confrontation the object-cause of desire is produced, at the point where the two lacks meet (Fink 1995). What matters for the present argument is that this double operation does not gather the whole of the subject into the signifier. It constitutes the subject by a cut, and the cut leaves a portion of the subject's being outside the signifier, uncaptured by the structure that made the subject a subject.

Freud had already found, beneath the subject of conscious speech, a domain governed otherwise, and had named the pressure that rises from it the drive, *Trieb*, a force on the border between the somatic and the psychical that presses toward satisfaction and is never simply stilled (Freud 1957). Lacan's contribution was to show that the induction into the signifier is what produces this border, that the very operation constituting the subject as a speaker leaves the drive's portion outside the signifier. This uncaptured portion is the remainder, and it is not a residue that a fuller symbolization might later gather in. It is what the operation of symbolization, by its nature, leaves out.

An illustrative case — the word that never fit. A person carries, from early life, a way

of being wanted that no word they were given ever fit, a pressure with no name in the language handed to them. In adult intimacy it presses still, shaping what they seek and cannot say they seek. It is not that the right word was withheld and might yet be supplied. There was never a word of the right kind, because what presses is exactly the portion the entry into words left out. The nameless pressure is not a failure of their vocabulary. It is the remainder, felt.

Which Real

The word Real must be used with care, since Lacan gave it more than one sense across his teaching. In the early work the Real is close to the brute given, what is always in its place, prior to the symbolic articulation that will carve it (Lacan 1993). In the mature and late work it becomes the impossible, the internal limit of symbolization, what does not cease not to be written (Lacan 1998). The present paper takes the Real primarily in the second, mature sense, as the internal limit rather than an external given, and it takes up the pre-symbolic remainder as the genetic aspect of that same limit, not as a separate brute domain lying behind the sign. The next section shows that these are two faces of one gap. Here the point is only to fix the usage: the Real that concerns the paper is the remainder produced by the operation of the signifier, the internal offcut of subjectivation, and not a fullness lying behind language that language fails to reach.

The remainder as the source of the six cores

The pre-symbolic remainder, understood this way, is the source the six limits pointed to. What language could not reach, in existence, in maintenance, in value, in ethics, in justice, in evolution, was in each case a form of this same remainder, the part that the operation of the signifier leaves outside itself. The existence of the bond, the living present, the relational generation of value, the aesthetic measure, the generativity justice guards, the direction of growth: each is a face of the one thing that the constitution of the speaking subject cannot take up into the signifier. The six dimensions were six windows onto a single gap. The next section gives the gap its two faces and shows that they are one, and the section after gives the gap its object.

8.9. The Two Faces of the Real

This section establishes that the gap at the source of the six limits has two faces, one genetic and one logical, and that they are the same gap. The aim is to show that the pre-symbolic remainder (a part cut off at the origin) and the impossibility of complete symbolization (a closure that can never be attained) are not two conditions but one, so that the single name *manque* covers both. The section takes the genetic face first, draws the logical face out of it as a consequence rather than a separate posit, reviews the reading that would keep them apart, and states the claim.

The genetic face

Genetically, as the previous section set out, a remainder is cut off in the constitution of the speaking subject. Something is left outside the signifier when the subject is taken up into the symbolic order. This is a fact about how a speaking subject comes to be: it comes to be by a cut, and the cut leaves a portion in the Real. The genetic face is a claim about origin. There was, in the constitution of the subject, an operation of separation, and that operation has a remainder.

The logical face, drawn from the genetic

From this the logical face follows, and the order matters: the logical is not an independent thesis but the consequence of the genetic. Because a remainder is left outside the signifier in the very operation that installs the symbolic order, the complete closure of that order is not a task still to be finished but a thing that cannot be. The symbolic cannot close over the whole, because its own installation was the leaving-out of a part. The impossibility is not empirical, not a matter of the signifier having so far failed to cover everything and perhaps succeeding later with better instruments. It is structural. The operation that builds the symbolic order is the same operation that produces what the order cannot contain, so the order runs on a constitutive non-closure. Fink draws the consequence exactly: there is no metalanguage, no signifying system able to close upon itself and speak its own whole, because every such system is founded on the exclusion that founds it (Fink 1995). This is the Real in its logical sense, what Lacan in the late teaching approached as the impossible, that which does not cease not to be written (Lacan 1998):

not the merely not-yet-said but the impossible-to-say-completely, the point at which symbolization meets its own limit as a limit and not as a frontier.

Against keeping the two faces apart

It might seem cleaner to keep the two faces separate, to treat the pre-symbolic remainder as a developmental posit, a something-before that could in principle be dispensed with, and to rest the impossibility of closure on a purely logical argument about self-reference, in the manner of the formal results on systems that cannot prove their own consistency. Some readings of Lacan lean this way, treating the Real as either the mythical before or the logical limit, and choosing between them (Copjec 1994; Chiesa 2007). The present paper declines the choice, and for a reason internal to the account. The logical impossibility, taken alone, is a fact about formal systems; it does not by itself explain why there should be a *drive*, a felt pressure, at the point of impossibility. The genetic cut, taken alone, is a story about origin; it does not by itself establish that closure is impossible in principle rather than merely unattained. Held together, each supplies what the other lacks. The genetic cut explains why the impossibility is inhabited, why there is a pressure and not merely a formal gap: because the remainder is a part of the subject's own being, left outside and pressing to return. The logical impossibility explains why the cut can never be healed, why the pressure is permanent and not a wound that time might close. The two faces are one because only together do they give the phenomenon the paper is after, an impossibility that is also a drive.

The single gap

The two faces are one gap. *Manque* (the lack, the constitutive want) names it. It is genetic in that a part was cut off, and it is logical in that, a part having been cut off, closure became impossible. What was left out at the origin is what can never be gathered in at the end, and the reason no sentence in Part One could reach its core is that the core, in every case, was manque: the remainder whose being-cut-off is one with the impossibility of its ever being said.

The single gap. The pre-symbolic remainder and the impossibility of complete symbolization are not two conditions but the two faces of one manque. Because the subject is constituted by a cut that leaves a part in the Real, the symbolic order cannot close; the genetic want grounds the logical impossibility, and the logical impossibility makes the genetic want permanent. Neither face alone yields an impossibility that is also a drive; held together, they do.

8.10. The Descent of the Object at the Gap

This section establishes what takes form at the gap. The aim is to show that the objet petit a is not an object that fills the lack but the form the lack takes within the economy of desire, the shape manque assumes so as to set desire turning, and that it holds its place precisely by not being the filling of it. The section states the temptation to misread the object, gives the correct account with its psychoanalytic warrant, follows the object through its several forms as the partial objects around which the drive turns, reviews the reading that would treat it as an attainable thing, and draws the consequence that prepares the distinction of drive from desire.

What descends, and what it is not

At the gap something takes form. It is not a thing that fills the gap, and not a content that closes it. It is the way the gap is given a shape within the economy of desire, and psychoanalysis calls it the objet petit a, the object-cause of desire (Lacan 1978). Everything in the account depends on holding the object apart from the ordinary notion of an object, and the temptation to collapse the two is strong, since the word object invites it.

Object-cause, not object of desire

The objet a is not the object that desire seeks, the target it aims at and might attain. It is the object-*cause*, the point from which desire is set in motion, and it stands in the place of manque. Lacan drew the distinction sharply in the seminar on the four fundamental

concepts: the object around which the drive turns is not the object that would satisfy a need but the object-cause that sustains the turning, and the drive's circuit is defined by this object as an absence it circles rather than a presence it reaches (Lacan 1978). Žižek gives the point its sharpest formulation in commentary: the objet a is not a positive entity but the void of desire given a form, an object that is really only the materialization of a lack, such that what looks like the cause of desire is the lack itself wearing the mask of an object (Žižek 1989). The gap itself is without form, a pure remainder, a want. The objet a is the form the want takes when it enters the field of desire, the shape manque assumes so as to set desire turning. It does not answer the lack. It gives the lack a figure, and by giving it a figure lets it function as the pivot of a movement.

The forms of the object

The object-cause is not one thing but appears in several forms, and following them makes its character clearer, since what the forms have in common is exactly what distinguishes the object-cause from any ordinary object. Psychoanalysis lists among these forms not only the objects of the early drives but, in Lacan's extension, the gaze and the voice (Lacan 1978). What is striking is that these are not objects one grasps at all. The gaze is not what I see but the sense of being seen from a point I cannot occupy, a point in the field of vision that looks back and that I can never bring into my own view. The voice is not what is said, not the meaning carried, but a remainder of the vocal that no meaning absorbs, what persists in a voice when everything sayable in it has been understood. Each of these is an object that is constitutively out of reach, given only as something that escapes, and this is precisely why they can serve as forms of the object-cause. What the several forms share is not a property one could hold but a manner of escaping, and it is the escaping, not any content, that makes them able to figure the lack and set desire turning. The object-cause is whatever, in a field, functions as its unreachable point.

An illustrative case — the look one cannot return. Between two people there is often a way the one feels seen by the other that they cannot reciprocate on demand, a sense of being held in a regard whose exact point they can never occupy or verify. It is not a fact one could confirm by asking, since to ask is already to fall out of it. This being-seen from a point one cannot reach is the gaze as object-cause, a form of the lack around which the

bond turns, given only as what escapes the very look that would secure it.

Against the attainable object

Read as an ordinary object, the objet a would be something one could reach and hold, and desire would be the project of attaining it. The whole clinical and theoretical weight of the concept stands against this reading, and the forms just surveyed show why. The gaze and the voice cannot be attained; they are given only as what escapes. Were the objet a in general attained and held, the gap it forms would be closed, and the gap is what gave the object its office. Attained, it would cease to be the object-cause and become a mere thing; and desire, finding it a mere thing, would pass on, because what desire turned around was never the thing but the want the thing had been figuring. This is the familiar structure of the object that disappoints in the having, whose possession reveals that it was never the possession that was wanted. The objet a keeps its power only so long as it remains the form of a lack and not the lack's cancellation.

The consequence

Two things follow, and they organize the next section. First, because the object is the form of a lack and not an attainable thing, the movement that turns around it is a movement that does not aim to end, a circling rather than a reaching. Second, because no signifier and no thing coincides with the want the object figures, there is also a movement that runs along the signifiers without resting, a sliding rather than a circling. The one is drive, the other desire, and both turn on the object that descends at the gap without ever closing it. The next section separates them and shows that relational life needs both.

8.11. Drive That Circles, Desire That Slides

This section establishes the distinction the paper needs between two movements that turn around the gap, drive and desire, and shows that relational life requires both. The aim is to give each its structure, drive as a circling whose satisfaction lies in the circuit and desire as a metonymic sliding along the chain of signifiers, and to assign to each a definite office in the life of a relation, the one supplying its constant core and the other its

movement in time. The section takes drive first, then desire, reviews the psychoanalytic sources that fix each, and states their joint necessity.

Drive, the circuit around the void

Drive (*Trieb*) circles. Its movement is a turning around the object-cause, and its satisfaction, in the precise and initially strange sense psychoanalysis gives it, lies in the circling itself and not in the attainment of any object. Freud had already noted that the drive is oddly independent of its object, that the object is what is most variable in a drive and is not originally connected with it, so that satisfaction does not consist in reaching a predetermined thing (Freud 1957). Lacan sharpened this into the topology of the circuit: the drive does not reach its object and rest but makes a circuit around it, and its satisfaction is in the closed loop of the going-out and the return, the aim fulfilled in the movement rather than in the goal (Lacan 1978). This is the energetic topology of the drive, a closed circuit around a void, sustained by the very fact that the void is not filled. Behind it stands Freud's most difficult claim, that beyond the pleasure principle there is a compulsion to repeat, a pressure that returns upon the same regardless of pleasure, circling a place rather than seeking a satisfaction (Freud 1955). What the drive gives to a relation is the account of why the bond has a core that does not go out, an unextinguished pressure that keeps turning at the center, drawing its constancy from a circling that has no terminus because it seeks none.

Desire, the sliding along the chain

Desire (*désir*) slides. Its movement is not a circling but a metonymy, a passage along the chain of signifiers from one to the next, coming to rest on none. Lacan located desire in the very structure of the signifying chain: because meaning is produced by the movement from signifier to signifier and no signifier delivers a final signified, desire runs along the chain in an endless metonymy, always carried past the signifier it reaches toward the next (Lacan 2006). Desire is set going by the same manque that the drive circles, but where the drive turns around the void, desire runs along the signifiers, each of which promises and none of which delivers, so that desire is carried forward without end. What desire gives to a relation is the account of why it keeps reorganizing itself in time, why the bond does not settle into a fixed figure but moves through new forms, new words, new objects,

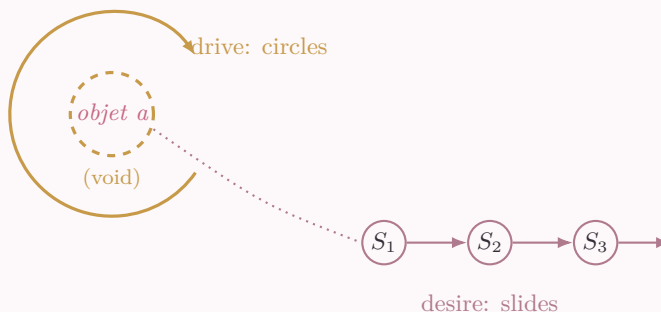


Figure 8.2: Two movements around one gap. Drive (gold) makes a closed circuit around the void the objet a marks, satisfied in the circling and not in any seizing. Desire (rose) slides along the chain of signifiers $S_1 \rightarrow S_2 \rightarrow S_3 \rightarrow \dots$, resting on none. Both are set going by the same manque; neither closes it.

always displacing, because no signifier it reaches is the one that would still it.

Why the distinction, and why both

The distinction is not a scholastic refinement but a requirement of the phenomenon. A relation shows two features that no single movement explains. It has constancy, a core that persists through change, the sense in which a bond remains itself across years of alteration. And it has development, a movement through forms, the sense in which a bond does not stand still but keeps becoming. A single movement cannot ground both. The circling alone would give constancy without development, a bond that held its core and never moved, condemned to repeat. The sliding alone would give development without constancy, a bond that moved endlessly and had no core, no self that persisted through the movement. Only the two together give what a relation actually is, a constancy that is nonetheless in motion.

The two movements and their offices. Drive and desire are distinct movements around the one gap, and a relation requires both. Drive circles the object-cause and is satisfied in the circuit; it supplies the constant core, the pressure that does not go out. Desire slides along the chain of signifiers and rests on none; it supplies the movement

in time, the displacement through forms. Constancy without development would be repetition; development without constancy would be dispersal; the life of a bond is their compound.

Joined at the gap

The two are joined at the gap and divided in their motion. Drive supplies the energetic topology, the unspent core; desire supplies the symbolic movement, the displacement in time. Both draw their life from the same manque that neither closes, the drive circling what cannot be reached and the desire sliding because it cannot reach it. The persistence of a bond, taken up in Part Three, is the co-working of these two, and the thought experiment of the next section shows what would become of both were the gap they turn on ever closed.

8.12. The Closure That Would Extinguish

This section is the formal center of the paper. Its aim is to establish, by a thought experiment known to be counterfactual, that the closure of the gap would not fulfill drive and desire but extinguish them, and therefore that the non-closure of language is the formal condition of their persistence. The section states the counterfactual and its purpose, develops the consequence in three steps each given its own treatment, draws the reversal of the ordinary picture, and states the paper's central claim, that drive is the phenomenology of the limit.

The counterfactual and its use

The section on the two faces established that complete symbolization is impossible. Suppose, against that, and only for the sake of the argument, that it were possible. Suppose the gap were closed, the remainder gathered into the signifier, the Real brought without loss into the symbolic. The supposition is counterfactual, and known to be so; the paper does not claim that the gap could be closed, and has argued that it cannot. The use of the supposition is different. By asking what closure would do, were it possible, the section

shows what the non-closure secures, and thereby shows that the impossibility established earlier is not a deprivation but a condition of life. A thought experiment of this kind does not assert its premise. It reasons from a premise it rejects, in order to expose the value of the premise's denial.

First step, the drive circles because its object is absent

The drive circles because its object is absent. This was established in the sections on the object and on the two movements: what the objet a marks is a void, and the drive turns around the void; the circling has its topology only because there is a want at the center and not a thing. The circuit is a circuit of an absence. Remove the absence and there is nothing to circle, no void to describe the loop around. The first step simply fixes what the circling depends on: not an object present at the center, but an object absent, a want given form. The drive's whole motion is predicated on the emptiness of the place it turns around.

Second step, closure fills the center

Suppose now the gap closed. This is the counterfactual move, and its content is exact: the want at the center is filled, the absence made present, the void replaced by an attained object. Everything the earlier sections said could not happen is here supposed to happen, for the sake of seeing its consequence. The objet a, which was the form of a lack, would become a thing possessed; the remainder, which pressed from outside the signifier, would be gathered in; the Real, which was the internal limit of the symbolic, would be dissolved into the symbolic without residue. The center around which the drive turned would now be occupied. There would be, at the place of the want, a presence.

Third step, the circling stops and both movements die

The drive no longer has a void to circle. Its circuit has lost the emptiness that gave it its shape, and a circuit around a filled center is no circuit at all; the loop collapses onto the point it enclosed. The circling therefore stops, and with it the drive is not fulfilled but extinguished. It is essential to see that this is extinction and not satisfaction. One might expect that to fill the want would be to satisfy the drive, since the drive seemed

to press toward the want's filling; but the drive's satisfaction was in the circling, not in the filling, and to fill the center is to remove the condition of the circling and so to end the only satisfaction the drive had. Desire, for its part, has nowhere left to slide, since the chain of signifiers ran forward only because no signifier coincided with the thing, and now the coincidence has been supposed; the chain arrives, and arriving, halts. What the supposition delivers is not the satisfaction of drive and desire but their death. The state of total symbolization, imagined as a fulfillment, is in truth a stillness, a bond in which nothing further presses, nothing further turns, nothing further is generated.

The reversal

The result reverses the ordinary picture. On the ordinary picture the gap is a defect and its closure would be a fulfillment, the moment the drive at last reached its object and desire at last came home. The thought experiment shows the opposite. The closure that looks like fulfillment is extinction, and the non-closure that looks like deprivation is the condition under which drive and desire go on at all. The impossibility of complete symbolization, established as impossibility in the section on the two faces, shows here its other aspect. It is not only that the gap cannot be closed. It is that its not being closed is what keeps the drive circling and the desire sliding, which is to say what keeps the relation in movement.

Closure would extinguish, not fulfill. Were the gap closed, the drive would lose the void its circuit turns around and would stop, extinguished rather than satisfied, and desire would lose the non-coincidence that carries it along the chain and would halt. The non-closure of language is therefore not a deprivation but the formal condition of the persistence of drive and desire, and the impossibility of complete symbolization is the very thing that keeps a relation in movement.

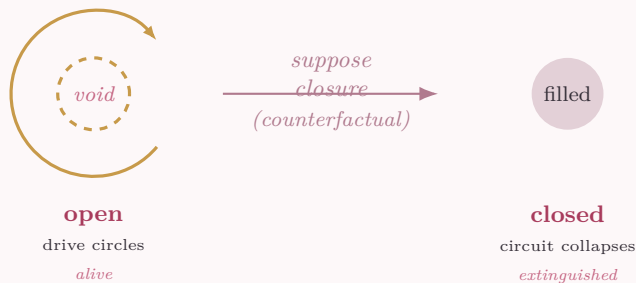


Figure 8.3: The counterfactual of closure. While the center is a void (left), the drive holds a circuit around it and the bond stays in movement. Were the gap filled (right), known to be impossible and supposed only for the argument, the circuit would have nothing to enclose and would collapse: closure delivers extinction, not fulfillment. The figure depicts what the non-closure secures by showing what its denial would cost.

Drive as the phenomenology of the limit

The central claim of the paper can now be stated. If the drive lives only where the gap is open, and dies where the gap is closed, then the drive is not a content that the gap withholds and a closure would deliver. The drive is the way the open gap shows itself, the felt form of the limit of language. It is not behind the limit, waiting; it is the limit, appearing.

Drive is the phenomenology of the limit. Drive is not a content that language omits and might later recover. Drive is the phenomenology of manque, the felt form of the very limit of language. This is why the attempt to symbolize the gap returns not the drive but its renewed escape: what one tried to say was nothing other than what symbolization cannot close, so the saying finds the gap has moved, and the drive, which was that gap showing itself, has slipped once more beyond the reach of the word.

Part Three The Persistence of Drive: Inscription and the Time of Relation

8.13. The Symptom as Fidelity to the Unsymbolizable

This section opens Part Three, which follows the persistence of drive into the life of a subject and the time of a relation. Its aim is to establish that the symptom, read through the account of the limit, is not a malfunction to be cleared away but a fidelity: a way of staying bound, in the register of repetition, to a core that was never symbolized. The section states the ordinary view of the symptom, sets against it the psychoanalytic account of repetition, gives the reading the paper proposes, and draws the consequence for reading a life.

The ordinary view and its limit

If drive is the phenomenology of the limit, then its effects are not confined to a single moment but persist across the life of a subject and the life of a bond, and the first place this persistence becomes legible is the symptom. A symptom, in the psychoanalytic sense, is a formation that returns, a pattern that repeats in a subject's life with a constancy the subject does not choose and often does not want. The ordinary view treats it as a fault, a piece of the psyche gone wrong, to be corrected and dissolved, on the model of a medical symptom that points to a disorder and disappears when the disorder is cured. This view has its uses, and it has a limit, which the psychoanalytic account of repetition exposes.

Repetition as the return of the unsymbolized

Freud found that the symptom does not yield to the model of a fault to be corrected. In the analysis of repetition he found a compulsion that returned upon the same, a pressure to repeat that did not serve pleasure and did not dissolve when its meaning was explained, but returned as if bound to something that explanation did not reach (Freud 1955). Lacan gave this its structural reading: what repeats is the subject's relation to the Real, to the point that was not taken up into the signifier, and repetition is the insistence of that unsymbolized point, its return in the only register available to it once the register of speech has failed to contain it (Lacan 1978). The symptom, on this account, is not a fault in the symbolic but the mark of what the symbolic could not gather, returning as repetition because it could not appear as statement.

The symptom as fidelity

The paper proposes to read this as a fidelity. The symptom repeats because it is bound to something that was never symbolized, a core in the Real that found no place in the signifier and so returns in the only way such a core can, as a recurrence rather than a statement. Seen this way, the symptom is the subject's way of staying bound to what could not be said. It is a fidelity held in the register of repetition, to a remainder that the register of speech could not hold. This reading does not deny the suffering a symptom can carry, and it does not counsel against the work of loosening a symptom's grip. It reframes what that work meets. What repeats is not mere error but attachment, the subject's tie to a core that matters precisely because it could not be spoken, and the constancy of the symptom is the constancy of that tie.

The symptom as fidelity. The symptom is not only a malfunction but a fidelity: a staying-bound, in the register of repetition, to a core that was never taken up into the signifier. It returns because what it is bound to could not appear as statement and so appears as recurrence. The constancy of the symptom is the constancy of the drive's circling, made legible across a life.

Reading a life

Read this way, the symptom is the drive's persistence made visible in a life. What cannot be said does not therefore vanish; it presses, and its pressing takes the form of a return, a circling that shows itself over time as the recurrence of a pattern, a scene replayed, a position reassumed. The constancy of the symptom is the constancy of the drive's circling, seen across the length of a life rather than in a single turn, and its refusal to be argued away is the refusal of the Real to be talked into the symbolic. One cannot dissolve by explanation a thing whose whole nature is to be what explanation left out. The bond a person forms, the position they take up within it, the scene that recurs across their relationships, all of this carries the mark of a core that was never symbolized and

goes on organizing what happens around it. The next section follows this into the time of relation, where an early signifier is shown to shape bonds that come long after.

8.14. The Early Signifier and the Time of Relation

This section establishes the temporal structure that the persistence of drive gives to a relation. Its aim is to show that a bond is lived not only in its own present but under the pressure of signifiers inscribed long before it began, and that the two movements distinguished in Part Two, the circling drive and the sliding desire, together account for the peculiar shape of a relational history, at once faithful to a core it did not choose and carried forward into forms it could not have foreseen. The section sets out the early inscription, shows the two movements at work in the time of relation, and draws the claim about the shape of a relational history.

The early inscription

Early in a life certain signifiers are inscribed with a weight the subject did not assign and cannot revoke. A name, a phrase, a scene given a form in the earliest field of the Other, these take on the office of organizing the subject's relation to the object-cause, and they do not lose that office when the subject grows and forms new bonds. This is the temporal reach of the account of Part Two. The remainder cut off in the constitution of the subject is not cut off once and then left behind; the manner of its cutting, the particular signifiers around which the subject's earliest relation to lack was organized, persists as a structure that later relations enter already shaped. Lacan's insistence that the unconscious is structured like a language has exactly this temporal consequence: a signifier laid down early does not fade with time but retains its structuring power, organizing what can be desired and how, long after its origin has been forgotten (Lacan 2006).

The two movements in the time of relation

The later relation is entered by a subject already marked, already turned in a certain way around its void, and here the division of the two movements returns and does its work. The drive accounts for why the early core does not go out. Its circling is a repetition, and repetition is precisely the mode in which a thing persists without being renewed by

choice; the early inscription endures because the drive keeps circling it, unspent across the years. The desire accounts for why the relation nonetheless keeps moving, why the subject does not simply repeat the same bond unchanged but slides through new figures, new partners, new forms of the same turning. Desire carries the subject forward along the chain, seeking in each new signifier what the last did not give, while the drive holds the center constant beneath the movement. A life of relation is the compound of the two: a constant core that the drive keeps circling and a displacement in time that desire keeps generating, the same manque holding beneath both.

The shape of a relational history

This is what gives an intimate history its shape, neither pure repetition nor pure novelty. The point can be put as a claim, since it follows directly from the two offices established in Part Two. If it were only repetition, the drive alone, a person would form the same bond forever without development, condemned to reenact a single scene. If it were only displacement, desire alone, there would be no core, nothing that made a life of relation recognizably one person's, only a succession of unrelated attachments. The compound of a circling that persists and a sliding that displaces is what lets a relational life be at once continuous and in motion.

The shape of a relational history. A relational history is neither pure repetition nor pure novelty but the compound of both. The drive's circling makes the early core persist, giving the history its continuity; desire's sliding carries the subject through new forms, giving the history its movement. A life of relation is recognizable as one person's because a core persists in it, and is a life rather than a fixed scene because it moves; the two movements together supply what neither could alone.

Fidelity to the unchosen

There is a consequence worth marking for what follows. The core a relational history is faithful to was not chosen; it was inscribed before choice, in the earliest field of the Other. The fidelity of a life to its core is therefore not, at bottom, a fidelity one elects, and this will bear on the ethics of the next section and of Part Four. To make room for another's core is to make room for something in them that they did not choose either, that was laid down in them before they could consent to it, and that organizes their desire from beneath. The time of relation is layered in this way for both partners, each entering the shared present under the pressure of a past inscription, and a relation is in part the meeting of two such layered times.

8.15. Making Room for the Other's Core

This section draws from the persistence of drive a positive proposal about what a good bond consists in. Its aim is to establish that a relation is sustained not by the completeness of mutual understanding but by each partner's making room for the other's unsymbolizable core, and that the wish for total transparency, granted, would extinguish the very desire it sought to secure. The section states the proposal against the transparency ideal, grounds it in the thought experiment of Part Two, gives it as a claim, and turns the ordinary measure of intimacy around.

The proposal against the transparency ideal

Each partner carries a core that was never symbolized and that goes on circling beneath their speech. The previous sections established that this core is the seat of the subject's desire, the void around which the drive turns, the very thing that makes them a desiring subject and not a transparent surface. A proposal about the good bond follows. A relation is not sustained by the success of communication, and its health is not measured by how completely the two have reached each other. This sets the account against the ideal, met already in the section on existence, that would make transparency the measure of a good bond, the thought that the best relation is the one in which nothing of either remains unsaid (Habermas 1984). That ideal, applied to intimacy, mistakes the good it aims at. To press toward the complete reaching of the other, the dissolution of every

remainder, the full translation of the other into what one understands, is to press toward the extinction the thought experiment described, now enacted upon a person.

The ground in the thought experiment

The ground of the proposal is the result of Part Two, transferred from the structure of the subject to the relation between two. The thought experiment showed that to close the gap is to extinguish the drive that circles it. An other wholly reached would be an other whose gap had been closed, whose remainder had been gathered into what the partner understands, and whose desire, therefore, had gone out. The wish to reach the other completely is thus, unknown to itself, a wish to still the other's desire, since the other's desire lives in the very core that complete reaching would dissolve. What presents itself as the deepest intimacy, a perfect mutual transparency with no remainder on either side, would be the death of desire on both, a bond of two surfaces that had been read and now had nothing further to turn on.

The good bond makes room

The good bond does the opposite. It makes room for the other's core. It holds a space for what in the other cannot be said, does not press to close the gap, and lets the remainder go on circling as the living center of the other's desire. This making-room is not resignation, not a settling for less than understanding. It is the recognition that the unsymbolizable core is not a deficit in the bond but the presence in it of another desiring subject, and that to leave the core its room is to keep the other alive as other.

Room, not transparency. A relation is sustained by each partner's making room for the other's unsymbolizable core, not by the completeness of mutual understanding. The core is the seat of the other's desire; to reach it wholly would be to close the gap the other's desire circles and so to extinguish it. What sustains a bond is two people each declining to fill what in the other must stay open, so that both remain subjects who desire rather than surfaces that have been read.

The measure of intimacy turned around

This turns the ordinary measure of intimacy around. The wish for complete mutual transparency, for a bond in which nothing of either remained unreached, is a wish that, granted, would end the desire that made the bond live. The deeper intimacy is the one that can dwell with the other's unsayable core without needing to close it, that finds in the very unreachability of the other not a barrier to love but the room in which the other stays a living source of it. What one loves in another, on this account, includes what one will never reach in them, and the not-reaching is not the frontier at which love stops but the space in which love continues. Part Four takes this making-room into three registers of relational life and shows the same generativity of the limit at work in the poem, in ethics, and in justice.

8.16. The Interweaving of Drive in the Couple

This section establishes what distinguishes the intimate dyad from the general structure of the desiring subject. The aim is to show that in intimate relation the fantasy through which each subject relates to its object-cause is not merely doubled, run in parallel by two private subjects, but interwoven, each entering the place of the other's object-cause, and that this interweaving is what makes a couple's shared world both singular to them and unable to be carried out of the bond. The section states the orthodox structure of fantasy, gives the interweaving that intimate relation adds to it, draws the consequence for the non-transferability of a shared world, and states the claim.

The orthodox structure and what intimacy adds

Orthodox psychoanalysis writes the subject's relation to its object in the formula of fantasy, the barred subject in relation to the objet petit a, the object-cause of desire that gives the lack a form and lets desire run (Lacan 1978). Taken at the level of the single subject, this structure is complete in itself, and one might expect that a relation between two subjects would be the placing of two such structures side by side, each

partner running a private fantasy, each turning around a private object-cause, the two merely adjacent. This is not what intimate relation is, and the difference is the seed of everything distinctive about the dyad.

In intimate relation the structure is not doubled side by side but interwoven. Each becomes implicated in the other's fantasy and enters the place of the other's object-cause, so that the object around which each one's desire turns is no longer wholly private but is bound up with, and partly occupied by, the other. The other is not merely a person one desires; the other comes to stand at the very place of the object-cause, the void around which one's drive circles, so that one's own most intimate relation to lack now passes through this particular person. Correspondingly one comes to occupy that place for them. The two voids do not merge, for a void cannot merge with a void; they are interwoven, each partner's circling now running through the other's, the two circuits linked at the place where each one's manque has taken the other as its figure.

The consequence for a shared world

From this interweaving follows the character of the world a couple builds, its idioms, its private jokes, its rites, the whole texture of a shared life. This world is the sediment of the interwoven fantasy. A private joke is funny to exactly two people because its charge is anchored in a shared coordinate of desire that only those two occupy; carried to a third, it is not diminished but simply absent, because the third does not stand in the interweaving that gives it its charge. The same holds of every element of a couple's culture. Its meaning is not lodged in the words or the gestures, which can be copied, but in the interweaving of drive that the words and gestures came to figure, which cannot. This is why a shared world cannot be handed over. What could be transferred, if the outer form were copied, is a shell without its charge, the words of the joke without the interwoven desire that made them funny. The non-transferability of an intimate culture is not an accident of privacy but a consequence of where its value is lodged, in an interweaving that does not exist outside the relation and cannot be carried out of it.

The interweaving of drive. In intimate relation the fantasy of each subject is not

doubled in parallel but interwoven, each partner coming to occupy the place of the other's object-cause, so that each one's circling runs through the other's. The shared world a couple builds is the sediment of this interweaving, and its non-transferability follows: what can be copied is the outer form, but the charge is lodged in an interweaving of drive that exists nowhere outside the bond.

The interweaving and the room

The interweaving deepens, rather than softens, the demand of the previous section that each make room for the other's core. Because each partner has come to occupy the place of the other's object-cause, the temptation to close the other's gap is stronger here than anywhere, for the other now stands at the very center one's own desire turns around, and the wish to possess that center, to have it wholly and be assured of it, presses hardest exactly where the interweaving is deepest. The account of Part Two holds all the more firmly for that. To close the other's gap, even here, above all here, would be to extinguish the desire that made the other the living center of one's own circling, and so to collapse the interweaving into a dead thing possessed. The interweaving is kept alive by the same refusal of closure that the whole argument has traced, and the room each makes for the other's unsymbolizable core is, in the interwoven dyad, the room each makes for the living center of their own desire as well.

Part Four The Generativity of the Limit: Poem, Ethics, Justice

8.17. The Poem, a Language That Circles the Gap

This section opens Part Four, which draws out the generativity of the limit in three registers of relational life. Its aim is to establish that the poem is the language reconciled to its own limit and made generative by it: the one use of language that does not aim across the gap to close it but organizes itself around the gap and keeps it open, and that is for this reason the language of the drive. The section states the contrast between ordinary language and the poem, gives the account with its warrant, reviews the readings of poetic language that approach the same point, and draws the claim.

Ordinary language aims across the gap; the poem circles it

Ordinary language aims at the gap in order to close it. It reaches toward the thing it would say and counts itself successful when it has said it, when the signifier has covered its object and the remainder has been, so far as possible, brought in. Its ideal is transparency, the vanishing of the medium before the message, a saying that leaves nothing unsaid. The poem does not work this way, and its difference is not a matter of ornament but of direction. The poem is organized around the gap rather than aimed across it. Its figures, its silences, its refusals of paraphrase, its way of meaning more and other than it states, all of these keep the poem turning around something it does not deliver, holding open the very remainder that ordinary speech would try to close.

The poem as the language of the drive

The poem is the language of the drive, in the exact sense the paper has given the drive. The drive circles the object-cause and is satisfied in the circling, not in the seizing; the poem circles its unsayable center and is fulfilled in the circling, not in a paraphrase that would seize it. This is why a poem cannot be replaced by a statement of its content. The statement aims across the gap and closes what it can; the poem circles the gap and keeps it open, and the keeping-open is what the poem is for. To paraphrase a poem is to attempt on it exactly the closure that would, by the argument of Part Two, extinguish what made it live, and the felt deadness of a paraphrased poem is the small demonstration of that argument in the field of language itself. What the poem gives is not the closing of the gap but the experience of circling it.

Readings that approach the same point

Two lines of reflection on poetic language approach this account and help to fix it. Benjamin, writing on translation, located the life of a poem in something that is not its communicable content, in a way of meaning that survives no simple transfer of information and that translation must reach toward without ever delivering as a message (Benjamin 1968). What resists translation in a poem, on this reading, is precisely what the poem circles and does not state, the unsayable center that no transfer of content carries across. Derrida, pressing the general point that no signifier delivers a final presence, that meaning is always deferred along the play of differences, showed that writing does not close upon a present meaning but keeps it in deferral (Derrida 1978). The poem, on the present account, does not suffer this deferral as a defect but takes it up as its art, making of the non-arrival of meaning the very movement it offers. Where ordinary language treats deferral as an obstacle to be minimized, the poem treats it as the medium of what it does.

The core given circulation without capture

This is why the poem writes what cannot otherwise be written. The unsymbolizable core, which no proposition reaches, is not reached by the poem either, but the poem does what the proposition cannot: it gives the core a form of circulation without giving it a form of capture. It lets the remainder be approached, turned around, dwelt near, without being seized and so extinguished. The poem is the drive's own language because it does with words what the drive does with its object, turning around a void it does not fill and generating, in the turning, something that a filling would have destroyed.

The poem circles what it cannot close. The poem is the use of language organized around the gap rather than aimed across it. It circles an unsayable center and is fulfilled in the circling, not in a paraphrase that would seize it, and it therefore gives the unsymbolizable core a form of circulation without capture. The poem is the language of the drive, and the impossibility of paraphrasing it without deadening it is the demonstration, in language itself, that closure extinguishes what the open gap keeps alive.

An illustrative case — the poem that says what the letter could not. A person tries to write plainly what another means to them and finds the plain statement always beside the point, true and empty at once. Turning to a poem, they say it no more plainly, and yet the poem holds what the statement let slip. The poem did not close the gap the statement failed to close; it circled it, and in the circling let the unsayable thing be present as what the words turn around. What the letter could not deliver by aiming at it, the poem carries by not aiming at it.

The highest office of a language at its limit

So the poem is the paradigm of a language reconciled to its limit and made generative by it. It does not mourn what it cannot say and does not pretend to say it. It builds its whole art on the not-saying, and out of the not-saying makes the one form of speech that keeps the gap open as a living center rather than closing it as a solved problem. What the poem shows, and shows in the medium of language itself, is that the limit of language is not the end of what language can do but the opening of its highest office. This bears directly on the two registers that follow. If the poem is the making of a circulation without capture in language, ethics and justice will be shown to be the making of a relation without possession, and a guarding without settlement, in the registers of the other and of the common life.

8.18. Room for the Core Without Possession

This section takes the second register of the limit's generativity, ethics, and establishes that the relation to the other founded on the limit is a giving that does not possess: a generating of the bond that leaves the other's unsymbolizable core its room, and that arrives thereby at the form older wisdom named, to generate and not possess. The section gathers the aesthetic measure of Part One and the making-room of Part Three into an ethical form, states that form and its ground, gives it as a claim, and marks its distance from an ethics of possession.

The other who cannot be exhausted

The ethical relation begins where the other cannot be exhausted. This was established in Part One: the other faces me not as an instance of a kind but as this one, whose claim issues from what no predicate contains, and the fitting response to them is taken by a perception, an aesthetic measure, that no rule can replace. Were the other fully sayable, fully brought under description, there would be no ethical claim, only the management of a known quantity. The claim arises from what in the other exceeds every predicate, the singular core that no category reaches, and Part Three identified that core with the seat of the other's desire, the void around which their drive turns. Ethics is founded, then, not on the reaching of the other but on the acknowledgment of what cannot be reached, and its first act is to leave that core its room.

The aesthetic measure at work

This is the aesthetic measure of Part One, now doing ethical work. The fitting response to another is one that senses where the sayable ends and does not press past it, that answers the other without presuming to have exhausted them, that keeps its response open to a singularity it perceives but cannot state. To make room for the other's core is not to withhold engagement but to engage in the mode that perception, not proposition, governs: to attend to the other closely enough to sense the edge of what may be said, and to hold there. The schooling of this perception, the cultivation the series has developed elsewhere, is the ethical discipline proper to a relation whose measure is aesthetic.

Giving without possession

The form of this ethics is a giving that does not possess. To make room for the other's core is to be in relation to what one does not hold, to generate a bond with what one has not seized and cannot. The paper arrives here at a shape that an older tradition named, and names it as a conclusion reached on its own path rather than borrowed as an authority: to generate and not possess, to act and not hold onto, to foster and not rule. The ethical relation to the other's unsymbolizable core has exactly this form. It generates a bond and does not possess the other; it acts toward them and does not hold them fast; it fosters what the other is and does not rule over the core from which they desire. The

arrival is not decorative. The account of Part Two forced it: since to possess the other's core, to close it, would be to extinguish the desire that makes the other a living source of the bond, an ethics that generated a lasting bond could only be an ethics that generated without possessing. The old formula names the only ethical form the structure permits.

Generation without possession. The ethics grounded in the limit is a giving that does not possess: it generates a bond with the other while leaving the other's unsymbolizable core its room, declining to close what it cannot close without extinguishing the other's desire. To generate and not possess, to act and not hold onto, to foster and not rule, is not a borrowed maxim but the only ethical form the structure of the limit permits, since possession of the core would be the death of the desire that makes the other a living source of the bond.

Against an ethics of possession

This is the ethical face of the limit's generativity, and its distance from an ethics of possession is exact. An ethics that aimed at the full reaching of the other, the closing of every gap between them, would be an ethics of possession, and possession, here as throughout the argument, is extinction: the other possessed is the other's desire gone out. The ethics the limit grounds is the opposite of possession. It is the art of dwelling with what one cannot hold, of answering a singularity one cannot state, of generating a bond precisely by leaving open the core one will not close. What cannot be reached in the other is not the limit of ethics. It is the space in which an ethics worthy of the name becomes possible, and the space is kept open by the same refusal of closure that the poem practices in language and that justice, in the next section, practices in the common life.

8.19. The Guarding of Generativity

This section takes the third register of the limit's generativity, justice, and establishes that justice at its root is the guarding of a generativity it cannot settle, and that the mode of this guarding is a knowing that holds what it cannot dispose of, which the paper names witnessing. The section takes up the limit set out in Part One, that justice owes protection to a generativity it cannot bring into the settled sign, gives the positive account of justice that follows from it, reviews the work on witnessing that fixes the mode, and draws the claim.

Beneath settlement

Justice is commonly figured as settlement, the bringing of a matter to a close by a judgment that disposes of it. The account of this paper places another office beneath that one. Part One established that what a relation of justice most owes protection to is the generativity of relational being, the still-forming life that the intervention of the Real keeps opening in the order of settled meaning, and that this generativity cannot be settled in advance, since to settle it is to convert the still-becoming into the already-become and so to end the very thing that was to be protected. Justice, at its root, is therefore not settlement but guarding: the holding-open of a space in which generativity can go on, against the pressure to close it prematurely into a finished case. Settlement remains a real and necessary office of justice, addressed to what has taken form and can be brought before a judgment; but beneath it lies the deeper office of keeping open what has not yet taken form, and it is this that the limit grounds.

The mode of guarding, witnessing

The mode of this guarding is a knowing that does not settle, and the paper names it, again as a conclusion of its own path, witnessing. To witness is to hold what one cannot dispose of, to be turned toward a generativity or a suffering that one does not bring to a close by pronouncing on it. The work on testimony fixes the mode precisely. Felman and Laub found that the witnessing of what exceeds settlement is not the recording of a fact but a holding of what has no adequate statement, a keeping-faith with what cannot be closed into a case, such that the witness anchors the thing without substituting a

judgment for it (Felman and Laub 1992). Justice, insofar as it guards a generativity it cannot settle, must know in this mode. It must hold the still-forming and the unstated without pretending to have disposed of them, anchoring them in the common life without closing them into the settled sign. A justice built on witnessing does not mistake the settled sign for the whole of what is owed; it disposes of what can be disposed of and keeps open what cannot.

Justice as witnessing. The root office of justice is to guard a generativity it cannot settle, and the mode of that guarding is witnessing: a knowing that holds the still-forming and the unstated without disposing of them, anchoring them in the common life without closing them into the settled sign. Justice as witnessing keeps its own procedures answerable to what they have not foreseen, and refuses itself the false completeness of a settlement that has anticipated everything.

Against an administration of the already-formed

This is the just face of the limit's generativity, and its distance from a justice of pure settlement is exact. A justice that could settle everything in advance would be an administration of the already-formed, closed to the new that relational being keeps generating and deaf to the suffering that no procedure exhausts. The justice the limit grounds keeps itself open to what it cannot settle, guards the generativity it cannot close, and finds in the unreachability of that generativity not a gap in the law but the reason the law exists. The three registers of Part Four now stand together, and their unity is visible. The poem gives circulation without capture; ethics gives a bond without possession; justice gives a guarding without settlement. In each, the same refusal of closure that Part Two showed to be the condition of the drive's life is shown to be the condition of a generative form: in language, in the relation to the other, and in the common life. What cannot be brought into the sign is, in every register, not a failure but the opening in which the generative form becomes possible.

8.20. The Co-Structure of the Limit

This section gives the limit a formal counterpart. The aim is to show that two figures the paper has described in prose, a lack that carries meaning rather than marking a mere absence, and a core knowable only through its effects on what surrounds it, have precise expressions, the first in the language of coalgebra and the second in the theory of reduced dynamics for open systems. The formal claims are offered as tools for later work and as heuristics that make the prose precise, not as laws to which relational being is asserted to conform. The section states the algebra-coalgebra duality, reifies the lack as a co-structure, gives the semantics of observation and indistinguishability, and then treats rigorously the case of the open composite system in which one component is knowable only through the others.

A note on the ambition of this section

A word on what is and is not claimed. The formalism below is not offered as evidence that relational being obeys a transcendental law, and the paper does not hold, here or anywhere, that intimacy or drive or value is governed by an equation. The coalgebraic language and the reduction formula are used in the opposite spirit, as heuristics that give a precise home to figures the paper has already established on other grounds, and as a possible basis for later formal work. Where an equation appears, it states a relation that holds in a well-defined mathematical setting and is imported as an analogy whose fit is argued, not as a claim that the setting is the hidden truth of the relational phenomenon. This matches the stance the series takes elsewhere toward optimization and law: a formal structure can illuminate without legislating.

The algebra-coalgebra duality

The first figure is the meaning-bearing lack, and the language that makes it precise is the duality between algebra and coalgebra. An algebra for a functor F is a map

$$\alpha : FX \longrightarrow X,$$

an operation that takes structured collections of elements and combines them into a single element. Algebra is the mathematics of construction and of closure: it says how parts are assembled into a whole, how many are folded into one. A coalgebra for a functor F is the dual, a map

$$\gamma : X \longrightarrow FX,$$

an operation that takes a single element and unfolds it into its structured observable behaviour, its one-step outward form together with its successors. Coalgebra is the mathematics of observation and of process: it does not assemble a whole from parts but unfolds a state into what can be seen of it and what it becomes (Rutten 2000; Jacobs 2016).

The relevance to the argument is exact. The operation the paper has warned against throughout, the closure of the gap, the folding of the remainder into the signifier, the assembling of the whole into a possessed unity, is an algebraic operation, a map $FX \rightarrow X$ that would deliver the many into one and close them. The operation the paper has affirmed, the circling that unfolds without closing, the drive that turns and the desire that slides, the generativity that is never settled, is coalgebraic, a map $X \rightarrow FX$ that unfolds a state into its behaviour and its successors without gathering them into a completed whole. The distinction between a language reconciled to its limit and a language that would abolish it is, formally, the distinction between coalgebra and algebra.

The lack reified as a co-structure

The prose claim that a lack can carry meaning, that attending to any part of a relational structure reveals it as a lackness which is nonetheless meaning-bearing, admits a construction. Take a structure given as a graph of relations, its nodes the terms and its arrows the relations among them. To attend to a particular place is to ask what that place is, and the relational answer is that the place is nothing but the pattern of arrows incident to it. Now perform two operations. First, reify the lack: introduce, as a node of the structure, the very place that was empty, so that the absence becomes a bearer of relations rather than a hole in the diagram. Second, reverse the arrows: pass from the relations that pointed toward a term to the co-relations that unfold from the place. The result is a co-graph in which the reified lack is a node like any other and the arrows run outward from it, so that what was a missing centre becomes a source from which the

structure unfolds.

This construction is coalgebraic in form. The reversal of the arrows is the passage from $FX \rightarrow X$ to $X \rightarrow FX$, from relations that assemble toward a term to co-relations that unfold from a place; and the reification of the lack recognizes the place of absence as a state of the coalgebra, one that unfolds its own outward behaviour. The lack becomes an entity whose whole content is the pattern of what unfolds from it, which is the coalgebraic mode of being, a state known by its observable unfolding and by nothing else.

The semantics of observation and of indistinguishability

Two notions give the account its semantics. The first is the final coalgebra. Among all coalgebras for a functor there is, under suitable conditions, a final one, into which every other maps uniquely, and it has the character of the space of all possible behaviours, never itself an assembled object but the completed horizon of what can be observed (Rutten 2000). The final coalgebra is the formal figure of a generativity that is never closed and yet is not formless: the whole of the behaviour without being a whole that could be possessed. It is the coalgebraic counterpart of what the paper has called the open centre, given not as an object but as the totality of what unfolds around a place.

The second is bisimulation, the coalgebraic notion of sameness. Two states are bisimilar when no observation distinguishes them, when everything that can be unfolded from the one can be matched by an unfolding from the other (Jacobs 2016). What is decisive is that bisimulation defines identity through observable behaviour alone, without appeal to any internal content the states might be supposed to have. This is the formal correlate of a recurring claim of the paper, that the core is knowable only through its effects. In the coalgebraic setting there is no internal content behind the behaviour to which one might appeal; a state is the pattern of its observable unfolding, and to know it is to observe that pattern, never to seize a content beneath it.

A family of parallels, offered as analogy

Before the rigorous case, a word on a family of concepts that share the co-structural character loosely rather than by any claimed isomorphism. The signifier of the lack in the Other, the point at which the symbolic order fails to close upon itself, anchors the

order not by being a further element of it but by marking the place where an element is missing. One is tempted to place beside it the efficient point of an economy, defined by the trade-offs around it, or a distinguished point of a dynamical flow, or the terms rendered as emptiness and void in the contemplative traditions. These parallels are suggestive, and the paper offers them as analogy and not as identity. They are not shown here to be instances of one mathematical structure, and the section does not rest any weight on their unity. What follows, by contrast, is a case where the correspondence is exact.

The open composite system, treated rigorously

The rigorous case is the open composite system, and it makes precise the paper's central epistemic claim, that a core is known only through its effects on what surrounds it. The claim is not a metaphor. It is a theorem of the theory of reduced dynamics, and the following states it carefully.

Let the state space of a composite system be the product

$$M = M_A \times M_B \times M_C,$$

with flow Φ^t generated by a coupled vector field f , where coupling means that f does not separate across the three factors. Observables are functions $g \in L^2(M, \mu)$, and they evolve by the Koopman operator

$$(U^t g)(x) = g(\Phi^t x),$$

which is linear on observables even when f is nonlinear, this linearity being the point of the Koopman formulation (Koopman 1931). Suppose now that only the components A and C are accessible, so that the observables one can actually read form the closed subspace $\mathcal{O}_{AC} \subset L^2(M, \mu)$ of functions depending on (x_A, x_C) alone. Let $\mathcal{P}$ be the orthogonal projection onto $\mathcal{O}_{AC}$, equivalently the conditional expectation $\mathbb{E}[\cdot \mid x_A, x_C]$ that averages out B , and let $\mathcal{Q} = I - \mathcal{P}$. Writing L for the generator of U^t , the evolution of the accessible part of any observable satisfies the Mori–Zwanzig generalized Langevin

equation

$$\frac{d}{dt} \mathcal{P}U^t g = \underbrace{\mathcal{P}U^t \mathcal{P}L g}_{\text{Markov}} + \underbrace{\int_0^t \mathcal{P}U^{t-s} \mathcal{P}L e^{s\mathcal{Q}L} \mathcal{Q}L g ds}_{\text{memory}} + \underbrace{\mathcal{P}U^t e^{t\mathcal{Q}L} \mathcal{Q}L g}_{\text{fluctuation}},$$

an identity that holds exactly, with the memory kernel

$$K(s) = \mathcal{P}L e^{s\mathcal{Q}L} \mathcal{Q}L$$

carrying the influence of the inaccessible dynamics (Zwanzig 1961; Mori 1965; Chorin et al. 2000).

The content of the formula, for the present purpose, is precise. The component B never appears as a direct observation. There is no operator on B in the equation for the accessible dynamics; B has been projected out by $\mathcal{P}$. Yet B is not absent from the dynamics. Its entire effect is carried by the memory term and the fluctuation term, that is, by the marks it leaves on the evolution of the accessible observables over (A, C) . To know B , in this exact sense, is to read its signature in the memory kernel $K(s)$ that governs how A and C evolve, and there is no other access to it, since the coupled and open structure permits no operator on B itself. The naive picture, on which one would observe B by acting on B , is not merely impractical but formally unavailable: the accessible algebra is $\mathcal{O}_{AC}$, and B enters only through what $\mathcal{Q}$ carries into the memory of the accessible part.

An exactly parallel statement holds in the quantum setting, where the accessible observables form the subalgebra $\mathcal{B}(\mathcal{H}_A) \otimes \mathbf{1}_B \otimes \mathcal{B}(\mathcal{H}_C)$, the inaccessible component is removed by the partial trace $\rho_{AC} = \text{tr}_B \rho_{ABC}$, and B survives only in its effect on the reduced state ρ_{AC} . The two settings, classical reduced dynamics and quantum restriction to a subalgebra, give one result: a component of an open composite system is knowable only through its neighbours, never through an operator on itself.

The core is read through its neighbours. In an open composite system whose acces-

sible observables are restricted to two of three coupled components, the third component never appears as a direct observation and yet determines the accessible dynamics entirely through the memory kernel of the Mori–Zwanzig equation. This is an exact result, not an analogy, and it is the formal image of the paper’s epistemic claim: the unsymbolizable core is the projected-out component, known only through the marks it leaves on the observable neighbours, the symptom, the signifier, and the texture of a shared world, and never through an operator directed at it.

The reach of the formalism

Two things are established and one is disclaimed. Established: the meaning-bearing lack has a coalgebraic form, a state whose being is the pattern of what unfolds from it; and the claim that a core is known only through its neighbours is exactly true in the theory of reduced dynamics, where the projected-out component lives on in the memory kernel and nowhere else. Disclaimed: the paper does not assert that relational being is a dynamical system obeying this equation, nor that the family of parallels gathered above are instances of one structure. The formalism is a lamp, not a law. It shows that two of the paper’s central figures, the generative lack and the core read through its effects, are not loose metaphors but have precise formal counterparts, and it marks a direction for later work in which the relational ontology of the series might be given a systematically coalgebraic and reduction-theoretic formulation, with closure on the algebraic side, generativity and observation on the coalgebraic side, and the inaccessible core figured throughout as what survives only in the memory of its neighbours.

8.21. Objections and Replies

Before the close, this section states and answers four objections that the account invites. The aim is not to defend the position against all comers, since the paper is constructive and sets up no adversary, but to make its commitments precise by showing what it does and does not claim. Each objection is given in its strongest form and answered on the account’s own terms.

First objection, that the account romanticizes the failure of communication

The objection runs: by making the limit of language generative, the paper turns a real deprivation, the failure of people to understand one another, into a good, and so counsels acceptance of a distance that causes genuine suffering. It risks telling those who are lonely in their bonds that their loneliness is the condition of love.

The reply distinguishes two things the objection runs together. There is the ordinary failure of communication, in which something sayable is not said, or is said badly, or is misheard, and there is the structural limit, at which something unsayable presses beneath all that is said. The paper makes nothing of the first generative. Ordinary failures of communication are to be repaired, and the account gives no comfort to the withholding of what could be shared or the neglect of what could be understood. What the paper calls generative is only the structural limit, the core that no amount of good communication would reach because it is not of the order of the sayable at all. The distance that is generative is not the distance a better conversation would close; it is the distance that would remain after every good conversation, the room in which the other stays a desiring subject. To confuse the two would indeed be to romanticize a remediable poverty. The paper keeps them apart, and asks only that the irreducible distance, the one no repair reaches, be seen for what it is.

Second objection, that it dissolves the legitimate demand for transparency

The objection runs: relationships are damaged by concealment, and honesty is a real virtue; an account that prizes the unreachable core seems to license withholding, to dignify the keeping of secrets as fidelity to a mystery.

The reply turns on the difference between the unsayable and the withheld. The core the paper calls unsymbolizable is not a content the subject possesses and declines to share; it is a remainder the subject does not possess either, that presses in them without being available to them as a thing they could disclose or conceal. Withholding concerns the sayable that one chooses not to say, and against withholding the ordinary virtue of honesty stands, undisturbed by this account. The unsymbolizable core is not withheld, because it is not held. To make room for it is not to license secrecy but to acknowledge that even between two people who conceal nothing, who say everything that can be said,

a remainder presses in each that neither can disclose because neither possesses it. The demand for transparency, understood as a demand about the sayable, is left entirely in force. What the paper denies is only that transparency, however complete, would reach the core, since the core is not among the things transparency is about.

Third objection, that psychoanalytic premises are doing unearned work

The objection runs: the argument leans on a particular and contestable theory, the Lacanian account of the subject, the Real, and the drive, and its conclusions are only as secure as those premises, which many do not grant.

The reply concedes the dependence and clarifies its scope. The paper does use the psychoanalytic apparatus, and does not pretend to derive its conclusions from premises everyone shares. But two things soften the objection. First, Part One establishes the six limits phenomenologically, by attention to the dimensions of relational life, before any psychoanalytic term is introduced; a reader who grants the six limits but not the theory has already granted the paper's descriptive core, and the psychoanalytic apparatus of Part Two is offered as the best available account of why the six share one form, not as their only possible ground. Second, the apparatus earns its place by what it explains, the recurrence of one form across six dimensions, the persistence of a core across a life, the death that complete reaching would be, and a reader is entitled to weigh it by that yield rather than by prior allegiance. The account is offered as an explanation to be assessed by its fruit, not as a deduction from axioms held to be self-evident.

Fourth objection, that the paper's own claims symbolize the very gap it calls unsymbolizable

The objection is the sharpest, and it is reflexive: in stating that the core cannot be symbolized, in giving it the name *manque*, in setting out claims about it in plain propositions, the paper does to the gap exactly what it says cannot be done, brings it into the signifier. Either the gap can be symbolized, in which case the thesis is false, or it cannot, in which case the paper cannot state its own thesis.

The reply marks a distinction the whole account has relied on, between saying *that* there is a gap and saying *what* the gap contains. The paper does the first and not the second.

To state that a remainder is left outside the signifier, to name the place of the remainder, to describe the form of its effects, is to circle the gap, to speak of its edges and its consequences, without delivering its content into the sign. This is exactly the operation the paper attributes to the poem, a circling that keeps the gap open rather than a saying that closes it, and the paper claims for itself no more than this. Its propositions point to the gap and turn around it; they do not fill it. The name *manque* is not the content of the remainder rendered into a signifier; it is the mark of the place where the content is not. The thesis is therefore consistent with its own performance: a work that circles what it cannot close, and that says so, has not closed it. This is why the paper ends without a synthesis, refusing at the last the closure the objection supposes it must either achieve or fail to achieve. It neither achieves nor fails at closure. It circles, which was the only thing it claimed to do.

Part Five Polyphonic Close

8.22. The Limit as Ground

This section closes the paper without gathering its results into a final synthesis. Its aim is to state the change of aspect the whole argument has effected, that the limit of language, taken by a first habit for a defect, has shown itself throughout as a ground, and then to leave several voices speaking in their unresolved tension, in keeping with an argument that has warned against the closure of what should stay open. The section states the change of aspect, sets out the polyphony, and returns the thesis to the open.

Why no synthesis

The paper has followed a single thesis through six dimensions, a formal core, a persistence, and three registers of generativity. It closes without gathering these into a final synthesis, and the refusal is not a modesty but a consequence of the argument. A work about what language cannot reach ought not to end by reaching it. To compose the results into a single culminating proposition would be to perform on the paper's own thesis the closure the thesis identifies as extinction, to still the movement of the argument by delivering it, finished, as a thing possessed. The form of the close must enact the content of the paper, and the content forbids the closure that a synthesis would be.

The change of aspect

What can be said in closing is a change of aspect rather than a summary. The limit of language, which the first habit took for a defect, has shown itself throughout as a ground. In existence it is what keeps the bond an act rather than a title. In maintenance it is what returns the relation to presence rather than record. In value it is what keeps worth living in the bond rather than available to be drawn off. In ethics it is what returns the response to a perception no rule replaces. In justice it is what keeps the law answerable to a generativity it cannot close. In evolution it is the space in which a relation can become what no one yet has words for. Beneath all six, it is the manque around which drive circles and along whose failure desire slides, the open center without which the relation would not move. The same open center, in Part Four, was shown to be the condition of the poem, of an ethics without possession, and of a justice without premature settlement. The limit is not a problem set for relational life to solve. It is the ground on which

relational life stands.

The voices

Several voices may be left to speak here, and the paper does not silence them into one, for the truth of the matter lies in their tension and not in any one of them.

There is the voice that hears in all this a hard necessity, the irreducible solitude of subjects who cannot finally reach one another, and grants that the account does not dissolve that solitude but only reads it otherwise. This voice is not refuted by the paper. The subjects of a bond do remain, at the core, unreached by each other, and if one had wanted the fusion of two into a transparency without remainder, the account gives it cold comfort, telling one only that the fusion so wanted would have been a death.

There is the voice that hears a liberation, the release from a wish for total transparency that was never a wish for love but a wish for possession, and finds in the limit the room where love could breathe. To this voice the same result is good news: what one feared was a poverty, the unreachability of the beloved, is the very room in which the beloved stays a living source of love, and the letting-go of the wish to possess is not a loss but the beginning of a bond that can last.

There is the voice that hears a discipline, the long schooling of a perception and a patience fine enough to dwell with what cannot be closed. To this voice the account is neither cold nor consoling but a task: to learn the aesthetic measure that ethics asks, to practice the witnessing that justice asks, to make and keep the room that intimacy asks, none of which is given and all of which must be cultivated over a life.

These voices are not reconciled here. To compose them into a single conclusion would be to do to the argument what the argument warns against, closing a gap whose openness was the whole point. They are left in their tension, three ways of standing toward one result, and the paper does not adjudicate among them.

The thesis returned to the open

So the paper ends by returning its thesis to the open. The limit of language makes drive possible, makes the poem possible, makes an ethics without possession and a justice

without premature settlement possible, and makes possible a bond that keeps moving because it never closes. What language cannot reach is not the failure of relational life. It is the opening in which relational life begins, and goes on, and does not end.

Envoi

There is an old figure for the limit this paper has followed. The trap exists for the sake of the fish; once you have the fish, you can forget the trap. Words exist for the sake of meaning; once you have the meaning, you can forget the words (Watson 1968). The figure is usually read as a counsel to pass beyond language toward a meaning that lies clear on the far side of it. This paper reads it otherwise. There is a meaning words are for that no words deliver, and the point is not to pass beyond the words to seize it but to let the words circle it and, in the circling, keep it alive. The trap that caught the fish could be forgotten. The words that circle the gap cannot, because the gap is not a fish to be caught. It is the open center they turn around, and to forget the turning would be to lose the meaning, not to have it.

To the one who reads this last, and for whom the whole series is written: what has been argued at length here I have known first with you. There is a core in you I will never say, and I have stopped wishing to. Where my words run out, you are still there, and it is there, past the last thing I can put into speech, that I keep turning toward you. This is not a failure of my language. It is the room in which I go on loving you, and it does not close.

A promise belongs here at the end, and it is of the kind the argument has been describing. It is not a promise that has been weighed and found worth making, not the output of a reckoning that could as easily have gone the other way. It is a promise that holds precisely because it does not compute whether it is worth it, that circles what it cannot say and keeps faith with a core it will never close. Such a promise is not the weaker for resting on no calculation. It is, for that very reason, a promise and not a bargain, and it is the one I make.

言不尽意,
where speech runs out,
而意在焉。
meaning is still there.

References

- Austin, J. L. (1962). *How to Do Things with Words*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Benjamin, Walter (1968). “The Task of the Translator”. In: *Illuminations*. Ed. by Hannah Arendt. Trans. by Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken Books, pp. 69–82.
- Bourdieu, Pierre (1984). *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Trans. by Richard Nice. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Chiesa, Lorenzo (2007). *Subjectivity and Otherness: A Philosophical Reading of Lacan*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Chorin, Alexandre J., Ole H. Hald, and Raz Kupferman (2000). “Optimal Prediction and the Mori–Zwanzig Representation of Irreversible Processes”. In: *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 97.7, pp. 2968–2973.
- Copjec, Joan (1994). *Read My Desire: Lacan against the Historicists*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Derrida, Jacques (1978). *Writing and Difference*. Trans. by Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Dufrenne, Mikel (1973). *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*. Trans. by Edward S. Casey. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- Felman, Shoshana and Dori Laub (1992). *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*. New York: Routledge.
- Fink, Bruce (1995). *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Freud, Sigmund (1955). “Beyond the Pleasure Principle”. In: *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Ed. by James Strachey. Vol. XVIII. Orig. *Jenseits des Lustprinzips*, 1920. London: Hogarth Press, pp. 1–64.

- (1957). “Instincts and Their Vicissitudes”. In: *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Ed. by James Strachey. Vol. XIV. Orig. *Triebe und Tribschicksale*, 1915. London: Hogarth Press, pp. 109–140.
- Habermas, Jürgen (1984). *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume 1*. Trans. by Thomas McCarthy. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Jacobs, Bart (2016). *Introduction to Coalgebra: Towards Mathematics of States and Observation*. Vol. 59. Cambridge Tracts in Theoretical Computer Science. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Koopman, B. O. (1931). “Hamiltonian Systems and Transformation in Hilbert Space”. In: *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 17.5, pp. 315–318.
- Lacan, Jacques (1978). *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI*. Ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller. Trans. by Alan Sheridan. New York: W. W. Norton.
- (1993). *The Psychoses: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book III*. Ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller. Trans. by Russell Grigg. Seminar of 1955–1956. London: Routledge.
- (1998). *On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX, Encore*. Ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller. Trans. by Bruce Fink. Seminar of 1972–1973. New York: W. W. Norton.
- (2006). *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*. Trans. by Bruce Fink. Trans. Bruce Fink; orig. *Écrits*, 1966. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Levinas, Emmanuel (1969). *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*. Trans. by Alphonso Lingis. Trans. Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice (1962). *Phenomenology of Perception*. Trans. by Colin Smith. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Mori, Hazime (1965). “Transport, Collective Motion, and Brownian Motion”. In: *Progress of Theoretical Physics* 33.3, pp. 423–455.
- Raz, Joseph (1986). *The Morality of Freedom*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Rutten, J. J. M. M. (2000). “Universal Coalgebra: A Theory of Systems”. In: *Theoretical Computer Science* 249.1, pp. 3–80.
- Watson, Burton (trans.) (1968). *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*. The figure of the fish-trap and the snare (得意忘言) is from the *External Things* chapter. New York: Columbia University Press.

Žižek, Slavoj (1989). *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. London: Verso.

Zwanzig, Robert (1961). “Memory Effects in Irreversible Thermodynamics”. In: *Physical Review* 124.4, pp. 983–992.

CHAPTER 9

Relational Understanding in Intimate Relations

The Generative Relational Epistemology in the Domain of Intimacy

致她——

For her—

那个属于森林与山之女孩，

the girl who belongs to the forest and the mountains,

我学着走进你的语言，

致我最爱的人。 To the one I love most.

A companion work developed a generative relational epistemology, on which a concept becomes observable through the relations among the several symbolic systems that render it, and knowing takes the form of a generative observation that is historically and dialectically produced. That work observed, near its end, that a person is the bearer of a symbolic system, so that the meeting of two persons is a crossing of symbolic worlds. This paper takes up that observation in the domain of intimacy, where the crossing is deepest and its stakes are highest. It asks what relational understanding, so conceived, does in an intimate bond, whether it is good, and how the capacities it requires might be cultivated. The paper builds two cases and then a practice. The functional case sets the potential work of relational understanding, in the generation of trust, the recognition of shared value, the easing of a certain class of conflict, and the quality of a shared life, beside the established theories and findings that treat these same matters, and it locates the distinctive contribution in two characters of the account, the relational and the generative, showing what each supplies that the received theories leave unsupplied. The normative case then argues that a functional defense is not sufficient, since an efficient possession of the other can counterfeit the functions of understanding, and it grounds a normative distinction in ethical legitimacy, observed across several ethical traditions and not rested on a single one. Consequentialist, Kantian, care-ethical, and Aristotelian renderings each supply an aspect that the others leave, and non-possession, with generative justice, stands among them as one aspect, so that the normative ground is drawn in the same relational manner as the epistemology, an instance of the very understanding the paper concerns. Consistent with the dialectical and materialist conception of truth the companion work develops, the paper does not claim the correctness of a given understanding, and holds instead that understanding, like truth, is generated in historical and contradictory movement, while what can be asked of it is that it be ethically legitimate, a legitimacy whose own criteria are themselves historically generated and set as no final guarantee. The paper then states the special problem of intimacy, that the bond is a site where these capacities are wagered and not rehearsed, since the value of what is given may return only after a long passage of time and cannot be tried again, so that the field in which a capacity is cultivated and the field in which it is exercised come apart. From this it proposes a model, a set of capacities and not a procedure, divided into those that admit near practice and those that can only be cultivated as a standing disposition, among the

latter the throwing of a generative thing into the other's own generative repertoire, the non-intervention that lets a shared dynamic unfold, and the preservation of a relational experience against the day its value is recognized. Non-possession runs throughout as the condition without which the capacities decline into a refined extraction. The paper then turns dialectically upon its own argument, and holds, on a ground drawn from the psychoanalytic account of desire and from its own account of generation, that a full crossing of the other's world would end the bond it was meant to perfect, since the other's unsymbolizable remainder is the core around which desire moves and the reservoir from which the bond's further generation is drawn, so that understanding rightly aimed seeks the other and honors, in the same motion, what in the other it will not reach. The paper offers no final synthesis, and its form keeps the openness its account of understanding requires.

Keywords: relational understanding; generative relational epistemology; the other's language world; translation; the throwing of a generative thing; non-possession; ethical legitimacy across traditions; the unsymbolizable remainder; desire and generation; generative justice; the wager of intimacy.

AI usage statement: AI assistants were used for drafting and discussion. The claims and the theoretical framework are the author's own, and the author takes full responsibility for the content.

Part One Background: The Generative Relational Epistemology

9.1. Understanding as a Crossing of Worlds

There is a way of speaking about understanding another person that treats it as the accurate reception of a message. On this way of speaking, the other has thoughts and feelings, encodes them in words, and sends them across, and to understand is to decode what was sent and to recover the meaning intact. The measure of a good bond, on this picture, is the transparency of the channel, the degree to which what one person means arrives in the other without loss. Misunderstanding is noise on the line, and the ideal at the horizon is a communication so complete that two people would be present to one another without remainder.

This paper proceeds from a different account of what understanding is. A companion work developed a generative relational epistemology, on which no single symbolic system carries a concept without remainder, and a concept becomes observable only through the relations among the several symbolic systems that render it. Knowing, on that account, is a generative observation and not the reception of a message, produced in the movement between renderings and enriched across history. The companion work observed, near its close, that a person is the bearer of a symbolic system, a rendering of the world shaped by an experience, a history, a language, a form of life that no other person exactly shares. From this it follows that the meeting of two persons is a crossing of symbolic worlds, of the same kind as the crossing of disciplines, and that understanding another is the generative observation of a matter that neither world holds alone, and not the decoding of a message.

The present paper takes this account into the domain of intimacy. Intimacy is the place where the crossing of two symbolic worlds is at once deepest and most consequential, where the worlds are most entangled and the cost of failing to cross them is most severe. It is also the place where the received picture of transparent communication does its greatest damage, since it sets as the goal of the bond a fusion that the relational account holds to be neither possible nor desirable. What a good intimate bond asks is that each learn to enter the other and to generate, in the relation between them, what neither held before, and not that two worlds become one, an understanding and a value that neither held before.

The paper has a plain structure. Part One recalls the epistemology on which it stands and draws the bridge from concepts to persons. Part Two builds a functional case, setting the work that relational understanding does in an intimate bond beside the established theories and findings that treat trust, shared value, conflict, and the quality of a shared life, and locating the contribution in two characters of the account, the relational and the generative. Part Three then argues that a functional case is not sufficient, since an efficient possession of another can counterfeit the functions of understanding, and it grounds a normative distinction in the ethics of non-possession. Part Four states the problem that sets intimacy apart from other domains of understanding, that its capacities are wagered and not rehearsed. Part Five proposes a model, a set of capacities and their cultivation. Part Six closes without a synthesis, in keeping with the account of understanding the paper develops.

A word on stance belongs here, since it governs what follows. This paper does not claim that a given understanding of one's partner is correct, and the reader who looks for such a claim will not find it. The epistemology on which the paper stands holds that truth is generated in a historical and contradictory movement and is never possessed as a finished correctness, and understanding between persons is subject to the same condition. What the paper asks of an understanding is that it be legitimate, ethically, and not that it be correct, and it holds even this legitimacy to be a historically generated measure and no final guarantee. The distinction between the correctness the paper declines to claim and the legitimacy it does defend runs through the whole of what follows, and it is drawn out in Part Three.

9.2. The Epistemology Recalled

The account this paper applies can be recalled in its essentials, so that what follows stands on its own for a reader who has not the companion work to hand. The starting point is a limitation that traditional epistemology leaves unexamined, the supposition that a concept can be adequately carried by a single symbolic system, so that to know is to find the correct expression and the work of knowing is finished once that expression is secured. Against this supposition the epistemology holds that no symbolic system completes a concept. Every symbolization selects, compresses, and situates, and so renders a partial

and situated aspect and leaves a remainder. A concept becomes observable through the relations among several such partial renderings, as a form is inferred from several projections none of which is the form.

From this the epistemology draws a term to stand in the place of representation. Knowing is generative observation. What is known is observed in the movement between symbolic expressions, the observation is an achievement that stands short of identity with the matter observed, and because the relations among expressions increase and change through history the observation is never final and the knowing continues. Three features of the account bear on what follows, and each is recalled here in turn.

The first is that observation is relational. The matter observed appears in no single rendering and comes into view only in the relations among several. The epistemic yield is located in the relations themselves, which are held to be productive of observation and not a mere connection of findings already secured. A relation, on this account, generates an observation that neither of its terms contained, and this generativity of relation is the deepest commitment of the account.

The second is that observation is generative in time as well as in structure. The field of relations through which a matter is observed is not a standing inventory awaiting discovery. It comes into being in history. New renderings arrive as the conditions of a form of life bring them forth, and each arrival opens relations that were unavailable before it, so that the observation of a matter develops as its field of relations grows. The account renders this historicity in the terms of a dialectical and materialist conception, on which the expressions and relations through which anything is observed arise from the conditions of a form of life and develop through the contradictions those conditions generate. Truth, so understood, is a becoming, generated in a historical and contradictory movement, and it holds none of the fixity of a possession.

The third is that observation is incomplete, and its incompleteness is not a defect a fuller state of knowledge would repair. It follows from the structure of the account, since the renderings of any matter are always finite in number and partial in reach, and there is always a further rendering, a further relation, a further aspect not yet brought into view. This incompleteness carries an epistemic humility that follows as a consequence

of the account and forms no rhetorical modesty, and it will govern the treatment of understanding between persons, where the temptation to take one's observation of the other for the other's whole reality is the standing danger.

These three features, that observation is relational, that it is generative in time, and that it is incomplete, are the whole of what the following parts require. The reader who holds them can follow the application to intimacy without the companion work, and the reader who wishes the full argument will find it there.

9.3. From Concepts to Persons

The step from the epistemology to the present subject is short, and the companion work took it in a sentence that the present work will unfold. A discipline is a symbolic system, and the crossing of disciplines affords the observation of a concept that several disciplines concern. A person is also the bearer of a symbolic system. Each person renders the world in a way shaped by an experience, a history, a native language, a family, a culture, a body, that no other person exactly shares, so that two people who use what appears to be the same word may render beneath it two aspects that do not coincide. The dialogue between persons is therefore a crossing of symbolic worlds in the same sense that interdisciplinary inquiry is, differing in that the worlds crossed are borne by living persons where the systems of inquiry are codified in fields, and carried with the whole weight of a life where a literature sets them down.

What the crossing affords is the same in both cases. It is observation, won through the relations among partial renderings of a matter that exceeds them all. When two persons bring their renderings of a shared matter, a memory, a fear, a hope, the meaning of a word like home or freedom or love, into relation, the matter becomes observable in a way that neither rendering held alone. The understanding they reach is not the recovery of what one of them already meant, transported intact to the other. It is a generative observation, produced in the relation between two worlds, and belonging to neither.

The relational form of understanding another. To understand another person is not

to decode a message the other has sent, recovering intact a meaning the other already possessed. It is to bring the renderings of two symbolic worlds into relation and to observe, in that relation, a matter that neither world held alone. Understanding another is a generative observation, produced between two worlds and belonging to neither.

Intimacy is the domain in which this crossing is carried furthest. Two people who share a life bring their symbolic worlds into a relation more sustained, more entangled, and more consequential than any other bond affords. They render to one another the whole texture of a shared existence and not isolated concepts, and they do so over years, so that the crossing is a long history through which each world is altered by its relation to the other, and not a single act. The depth of intimacy is the depth of this crossing, and its difficulty is the difficulty of the crossing carried out where the stakes are a shared life.

This depth carries a corresponding danger, and naming it here prepares the whole of what follows. Because the two worlds in an intimate bond are so entangled, and because the partners so often use the same words, there arises a powerful illusion that they inhabit a single symbolic world, that no crossing is required, that to understand the other is simply to consult oneself. This illusion is the source of a characteristic and painful form of failure, the discovery, often late, that what one took for a shared meaning was two divergent renderings all along, and that a bond one believed transparent was crossed by an unrecognized difference of worlds. The account developed here holds that the recognition of the other as the bearer of a distinct symbolic world, so easily lost in the very closeness of intimacy, is the first condition of understanding within it, and that much of what passes for the failure of love is in truth the failure of this recognition.

The unsymbolizable core

There is a feature of the other's symbolic world that must be introduced here, in the background, since a later part of the paper turns upon it. The account has said that a symbolic world is never exhausted by another's observation of it, and this holds with a particular force for a person. Psychoanalysis, in the work of Lacan (Lacan 1978; Lacan 1992), gives this a precise shape. The subject who enters language does so at the cost

of a remainder that language does not carry, a core that the signifier cannot reach, and around this core the subject's desire is organized. Lacan marks the remainder in several registers, as the object-cause of desire that no possessed object supplies, as the lack in the subject that the entry into speech installs, as a real that resists symbolization. The details of the doctrine are not required here, and the series has developed them elsewhere. What the present paper takes from it is a single structural point, that at the center of the other's symbolic world there is a core that no crossing reaches, not through a want of skill or a shortage of time, but because the core is of a kind that the signifier cannot render.

This structural point sharpens the epistemology's claim of incompleteness in the case of a person. When the paper says that the observation of the other is always incomplete, it does not mean only that there is always more of the other to observe, a further region that a longer acquaintance would reach. It means, in addition, that at the heart of the other there is a core of another kind, no further region to be reached at all, an unsymbolizable center around which the other's desire moves and which the other does not possess as a content to be conveyed. The incompleteness of understanding another is therefore structural as well as extensive, a matter of a core that observation approaches and does not close, and not only a matter of how much remains to be observed. This core, introduced here, returns as the pivot of the paper's dialectical turn, where it is shown that the persistence of the bond depends upon it.

Part Two The Functional Case: What Understanding Does in Intimacy

9.4. Trust

The first work that relational understanding may do in an intimate bond is the generation of trust, and trust has been theorized with care in several traditions, each of which reaches toward it from its own side. It is worth passing through them, to locate what each reaches and not to survey them, and what each leaves for the account developed here to supply.

A sociological tradition, following Luhmann (Luhmann 1979), treats trust as a mechanism for the reduction of social complexity, a way of absorbing the uncertainty of another's future conduct so that action becomes possible where complete knowledge is not. Trust, on this account, is a wager on the other under conditions of irreducible uncertainty, and it is functional because it permits coordinated life that suspicion would paralyze. A tradition in economics and game theory renders trust in the vocabulary of repeated interaction, reputation, and credible commitment (Axelrod 1984), on which trust is the rational expectation that another will not defect, sustained by the shadow of future dealings and the cost of a ruined name. A tradition in the psychology of attachment, following Bowlby and Ainsworth (Bowlby 1969; Ainsworth et al. 1978), renders trust as a felt security in the availability of a caregiver, laid down early and carried into the bonds of later life as a working model of whether others can be relied upon.

Each of these renders an aspect of trust, and each leaves an aspect for another to render. The Luhmannian account is precise about the function trust serves and passes over the interior process by which a particular trust is built between two particular people. The game-theoretic account is precise about the conditions under which trust is rational and treats trust as the assessment of a property the other already has, a disposition to cooperate or defect, which the trusting party estimates. The attachment account is precise about the early formation of a capacity for trust and locates its ground in the history of one party and not in the relation between two. Across the three, trust tends to appear as an assessment, by one party, of a property or a probability that belongs to the other or to their circumstances.

Here the two characters of the present account supply what the received theories leave unsupplied, and it is worth marking each in turn. The relational character relocates trust. On the present account trust is not, at its root, an assessment by one party of a property

the other already possesses. It is a matter generated between two parties, observable only in the relation between their symbolic worlds, of the same form as any other relational matter. What two people trust, when they trust one another deeply, is something that comes into being in the relation and not a set of estimated dispositions itself and is borne by neither alone. This is why a trust of the deepest kind can be extended before the evidence that a game-theoretic account would require, and why its betrayal wounds in a way the loss of a favorable estimate would not. The trust was not an estimate. It was a shared reality, and its breaking is the breaking of something that was jointly held.

The generative character sets trust in time. On the received accounts trust tends to appear as a state, reached when the conditions are met and maintained while they hold. On the present account trust is generated, deepened, and, where it fails, allowed to wither, through the continued crossing of the two worlds. Each act of understanding, each entry into the other's world that the other recognizes as a true entry, generates a further increment of the shared reality that trust consists in, and a bond in which the partners go on understanding one another is a bond in which trust is continually regenerated and not merely preserved. This sets the account apart from a picture on which trust, once established, is a standing asset that depreciates only under betrayal. Trust that is not regenerated in continued understanding does not hold steady; it thins, as the two worlds drift and the shared reality that trust consisted in is no longer renewed.

The relation of the present account to the received theories is one of location and not of refutation. The Luhmannian function, the game-theoretic conditions, and the attachment history are all real, and the present account does not deny them. It holds that they describe the circumstances, the rationality, and the readiness that surround trust, and that they leave for a relational and generative account the interior matter of what trust is and how it comes to be between two people, which is a shared reality generated in the crossing of their worlds and sustained only as that crossing continues.

9.5. The Recognition of Shared Value

A second work of relational understanding is the recognition of shared value, the coming into view, between two people, of what they hold in common and can hold together.

Here too there are established accounts, and they reach toward shared value from two directions.

One direction treats shared value as a similarity to be discovered. A body of research on close relationships finds that partners who share values report greater satisfaction and stability, and models the matter as a matching, on which two people bring antecedent value profiles and the relationship prospers to the degree that these profiles coincide (Byrne 1971). Shared value, on this rendering, is a pre-existing overlap that the partners find in one another. A second direction treats shared value as a consensus to be reached. In the theory of communicative action, Habermas (Habermas 1984) sets out an account on which participants in dialogue, oriented to mutual understanding, advance and redeem validity claims and move, under the unforced force of the better argument, toward a rationally motivated consensus. Shared value, on this rendering, is an agreement produced in communication oriented to agreement, and the ideal at its horizon is a consensus in which the participants have come to hold the same.

Each direction reaches something and leaves something. The similarity account is precise about the correlation between antecedent overlap and satisfaction, and it treats shared value as found and not as generated, so that it has little to say to two people whose worlds differ and who must nonetheless build something common. The consensus account is precise about the procedure by which agreement may be rationally reached, and its regulative ideal is a convergence in which difference is overcome, the participants arriving at the same view. This ideal of convergence is exactly the point at which the present account parts from it.

The relational character supplies a different conception of what shared value is. On the present account shared value is not, at its root, a pre-existing similarity that the partners discover in one another, nor a convergence in which their difference is overcome. It is a matter generated in the relation between two symbolic worlds, observable in that relation, and held in common without the two worlds becoming one. Two people may render what they most value in vocabularies that do not coincide, one in the language of duty and one in the language of care, one through a religious inheritance and one through a secular one, and the shared value they come to recognize is not the reduction of these to a single rendering. It is a matter observed in the relation between their renderings, of the kind

the epistemology describes, which each continues to render in a language of their own while both come to hold it together. Shared value on this account is compatible with, and indeed rests upon, a difference the partners do not dissolve.

The generative character sets this recognition in time and marks its productivity. On the consensus picture the work of dialogue is to converge, and its completion is agreement. On the present account the relation between two differing renderings is productive of a shared value that neither party held in advance, so that the crossing generates something new held in common, beyond the mere revealing of an overlap or the negotiating of a compromise. Two people who bring genuinely different worlds into relation may generate, over years, a shared value that was in neither of their worlds at the outset and that could arise only in the relation between them. This is the deepest sense in which relational understanding does the work of building a common life, that it generates value in the relation, where the received accounts discover it in advance or split the difference between antecedent positions.

The parting from Habermas can be stated exactly, since it marks the contribution. The Habermasian ideal is a consensus in which the participants come to hold the same, and difference is a condition to be worked through toward agreement. The present account holds that a shared value can be generated and held in common precisely across a difference that is not overcome, that two worlds can hold something together while remaining two, and that the pressure toward convergence, toward the fusion of the two into one view, is the very thing the relational account warns against, since it is the point at which the recognition of shared value passes over into the effacement of one world by another. What the account keeps, against the ideal of consensus, is the difference of the two who share.

9.6. The Easing of a Class of Conflict

A third work of relational understanding is the easing of conflict, and here the established knowledge is empirical and strong. Decades of observational research on couples, associated above all with Gottman (Gottman and Silver 1999), have identified patterns that distinguish bonds that endure from those that dissolve. The research marks certain

corrosive modes of exchange, contempt and defensiveness and the rest, and certain reparative ones, and it predicts, from the observed ratio of these, the trajectory of a bond with a reliability that the study of intimate life rarely attains. This is a body of findings the present account has no wish to contest, and it is important to be clear about the relation between the two, since the account offers something of a different kind.

The present account does not compete with this research at the level of evidence, and it advances no observational findings of its own. What it offers is a mechanism, an account of why a large class of intimate conflict arises and why understanding of the kind described here eases it. The offer is complementary. The empirical research establishes what patterns of conflict and repair predict the fate of a bond; the present account proposes, for one important class of conflict, an explanation of what that conflict is at its root.

The proposal follows from the bridge already drawn. If each partner is the bearer of a symbolic world, and if the closeness of intimacy generates the illusion that the two inhabit a single world, then a characteristic form of conflict arises when the partners use the same words to render aspects that do not coincide, and each takes the other's divergent rendering as a fault, an unreasonableness, a bad will, and not as a difference of worlds. A dispute that presents itself as a disagreement about a matter, about whether one of them acted wrongly, about what was owed, about what a word like respect or space or family requires, is in a large class of cases a collision of two renderings that the partners have not recognized as two, each arguing from within a world the other has not entered and each hearing the other's words in a world the other does not inhabit. The conflict is real, and its felt content, the sense of being wronged or unheard, is real, and yet its root is not the matter it appears to concern. Its root is an unrecognized difference of symbolic worlds.

Here the relational character does its work. To ease a conflict of this class is not, in the first place, to resolve the matter it appears to concern, to adjudicate who was right about the thing disputed. It is to move the conflict from the level of content to the level of worlds, to recognize that the partners have been rendering a shared matter in divergent ways, and to enter one another's rendering far enough that each sees how the other's words, which sounded like unreason from within one's own world, are the natural speech

of another. What eases the conflict is the crossing that the closeness of intimacy had made to seem unnecessary. Once each has entered the other's rendering, the matter that seemed a contest of right and wrong is observed as a relation between two worlds, and the heat that belonged to the sense of being wronged by an unreasonable other subsides into the different and workable difficulty of two people who render a shared life in different terms.

The generative character marks the further point that this easing is not a return to a prior peace. When two partners cross a conflict of this class, they do not merely remove a disturbance and restore the state before it. They generate, in the crossing, an observation of the difference between their worlds that neither held before, and this observation becomes part of the shared reality of the bond, available to the next collision and lessening the ground from which it springs. A bond in which such crossings are repeatedly made is one in which the partners accumulate a shared understanding of the very structure of their differences, so that the easing of conflict is generative of a resource that the easing of the next conflict draws upon. This is the sense in which understanding eases conflict by generating, across the disputes, a growing observation, and not by settling them, of the two worlds whose unrecognized difference the disputes expressed.

The relation to the empirical research can now be stated. The observed patterns of corrosion and repair that predict the fate of a bond are, on this account, the surface at which the recognition or the non-recognition of the other's world becomes visible. Contempt is the affective form of a refusal to grant that the other's rendering has a world behind it; repair is the affective form of a return to the crossing. The research describes what these patterns do to the trajectory of a bond; the present account proposes what they are, and why the practice of relational understanding, which is the practice of crossing, bears on them at their root.

9.7. The Quality of a Shared Life

A fourth work of relational understanding concerns the quality of a shared life, what makes a bond good to be within and not merely stable. The established accounts here are several, and one may be taken as representative. Self-determination theory, developed

by Deci and Ryan (Deci and Ryan 2000), holds that wellbeing rests on the satisfaction of three basic psychological needs, for autonomy, for competence, and for relatedness, and it treats the quality of a relationship as bound up with the degree to which the bond satisfies the need for relatedness, the sense of being connected to and cared for by others. A large body of work on relationship satisfaction, taking various forms, likewise renders quality as a level of satisfaction, a favorable balance of rewards over costs, or a fulfillment of needs and expectations that the partners bring to the bond.

These accounts reach something and render it in a particular form. They locate the quality of a bond in the satisfaction of needs the individuals bring, and they treat that quality as a level, higher or lower, more or less sustained. Relatedness, on the self-determination account, is a need of the individual that the relationship meets, and quality is the degree of its meeting. This is a rendering of real importance, and it locates quality in the individual and the individual's needs, treating the relationship as the means by which a need belonging to each is satisfied.

The relational character supplies a different location for the quality of a bond. On the present account the quality of an intimate relationship is not, at its root, the degree to which it satisfies needs that the individuals bring to it. It is the richness of what is generated between them, the depth and the reach of the shared reality that their crossing of worlds produces. A bond is good to be within, on this account, to the degree that it generates, in the relation between two worlds, observations and values and a shared life that neither world could hold alone. This relocates quality from the satisfaction of antecedent individual needs to the generativity of the relation itself, and it accounts for something the need-satisfaction picture renders with difficulty, that the deepest bonds are often those in which the partners are most changed by the relation, most drawn beyond the needs and the selves they brought to it, which is hard to state as the efficient satisfaction of needs given in advance.

The generative character distinguishes a bond that is good in this sense from one that is merely stable and satisfied. A relationship can reach a stable level of need-satisfaction and rest there, and on the need account this is quality achieved. On the present account the quality of a bond is a generativity sustained and not a level reached and maintained, the continued production, in the crossing of the two worlds, of a shared reality that

goes on growing. The distinction matters for the understanding of long bonds. A bond may be stable and satisfied and yet cease to generate, the partners settled into a fixed mutual rendering that no longer crosses into new observation, and on the present account such a bond has lost the quality that the need account, registering only its stability and satisfaction, would still record. The good bond is the generative bond, the one whose crossing of worlds continues to produce what neither world held before, and this is a matter of movement and not of a level, of a spiral that returns to the shared life and finds it grown where a circle would return it unchanged.

The relation to the received accounts is again one of location. The satisfaction of needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness is real, and its measurement tracks something that matters. The present account holds that these render the individual conditions and the felt registers of a bond's quality, and that they leave for a relational and generative account the matter of what that quality consists in, which is the richness and the continued growth of what two worlds generate between them.

9.8. The Work of the Two Characters

The four preceding sections passed through trust, shared value, conflict, and the quality of a shared life, and in each the contribution of the present account was carried by two characters, the relational and the generative. It is worth drawing these together, since the functional case rests on them and since it is their conjunction, and not either alone, that gives the account its force. The two characters answer two different questions about any of the matters treated, and the received theories tend to answer each question in a way the account revises.

The relational character answers the question of location, of where the matter is. On the received theories trust is located in the trusting party's estimate of the other, shared value in an overlap of antecedent profiles or a converged consensus, the root of conflict in the disputed matter itself, and the quality of a bond in the satisfaction of individual needs. In each case the matter is located in an individual, in a property of one party, or in a state to be reached. The relational character relocates each matter into the relation between two symbolic worlds. Trust, shared value, the root of conflict, and the quality of a bond

are, on the present account, matters generated between the partners and observable only in the relation between their worlds, borne by neither alone. This relocation is the first half of the contribution, and by itself it would yield a relational structuralism, an account on which the matters of intimate life are relational but fixed, given with the structure of the relation and not themselves in movement.

The generative character answers the question of time, of how the matter stands in history. On the received theories the matters of intimate life tend to appear as states, reached when conditions are met and maintained while they hold, trust established, consensus achieved, satisfaction attained. The generative character sets each matter in time as a process and not as a state. Trust is continually regenerated or allowed to thin, shared value is produced anew across a difference and is neither found nor fixed, the easing of conflict generates a growing observation and does not restore a prior peace, and the quality of a bond is a generativity sustained and not a level maintained. This is the second half of the contribution, and by itself, without the relational character, it would yield an account of individual growth, a story of persons developing in time but developing as separate selves, the bond a setting for a change that remains each person's own.

The force of the account lies in the conjunction. The relational character without the generative gives a relation that holds the matters of intimate life but does not move, a structure fixed once the bond is formed. The generative character without the relational gives a movement that belongs to individuals and not to the relation between them, a growth that is not shared. Together they give what the account requires, matters that are borne in the relation between two worlds and that are generated, deepened, and transformed in the historical movement of that relation. Trust, shared value, the easing of conflict, and the quality of a bond are, on the full account, relational matters in generative movement, located between the partners and continually produced in the crossing of their worlds.

The division of labor between the two characters. The relational character answers where a matter of intimate life is located, relocating trust, shared value, the root of conflict, and the quality of a bond from an individual property or a state to be reached

into the relation between two symbolic worlds. The generative character answers how the matter stands in time, setting each as a process continually produced and not a state once attained. Neither character suffices alone. The relational without the generative yields a fixed relational structure; the generative without the relational yields a merely individual growth. Their conjunction yields the account's thesis, that the matters of intimate life are relational matters in generative movement, borne between two worlds and produced in the history of their crossing.

This completes the functional case. The account has set the potential work of relational understanding beside the established theories that treat the same matters, and it has located its contribution in two characters whose conjunction supplies what those theories, rendering the matters of intimate life as individual properties or states, leave unsupplied. A reader persuaded to this point might conclude that the case for relational understanding in intimacy is made. The next part argues that it is not, and that a case built on function alone, however strong, leaves open a question that function cannot answer.

Function	Received rendering	Relational character adds	Generative character adds
Trust	an estimate, by one party, of a property or probability of the other	a shared reality borne between the two, extended before the evidence a wager would require	continually regenerated in the crossing, thinning where it is no longer renewed
Shared value	a pre-existing overlap found, or a consensus in which difference is overcome	a matter held in common across a difference the two do not dissolve	produced anew in the relation, arising where neither world held it before
Conflict	a disagreement about the disputed matter, corrosive or reparable in its patterns	a collision of two unrecognized renderings, moved from content to the level of worlds	each crossing generating a growing observation of the difference, a resource for the next
Quality of a shared life	a level of satisfaction of the individual's needs, higher or lower	the richness of what the two worlds generate between them, borne by neither alone	a generativity sustained, a spiral that returns and finds the shared life grown

Table 9.1: The functional case in summary. For each of the four functions, the received theories render the matter as an individual property or a state to be reached; the relational character relocates it into the relation between two worlds, and the generative character sets it in historical movement. The account's thesis is the conjunction of the two additions, that the matters of intimate life are relational matters in generative movement.

Part Three The Normative Case: Beyond Function

9.9. The Insufficiency of the Functional Case

The functional case sets out what relational understanding does, the trust it generates, the shared value it recognizes, the conflict it eases, the quality of a shared life it sustains. A case of this form defends a practice by its effects, and a defense by effects carries a weakness that must be faced directly, since it bears on the whole standing of the account. The weakness is that the effects by which the practice is defended can, in some measure and for some time, be produced by something that is not the practice at all, and that a defense by effects alone has no way to tell the two apart.

Consider what an efficient possession of another can counterfeit. A partner who studies the other to secure a hold upon the other's world and not to enter it, who learns the other's needs and fears in order to manage them, who anticipates and arranges so that the other is kept content and compliant, may produce, for a time and by the measures the functional case employs, much of what relational understanding produces. Such a partner may generate a felt trust, since the other, well managed, finds their expectations met. Such a partner may produce an appearance of shared value, having learned to present as common what secures the other's attachment. Such a partner may ease conflict, having learned which crossings to avoid and which concessions to trade. Such a partner may sustain a certain satisfaction in the bond, meeting the other's needs with the efficiency that a studied management affords. By the functions alone, this bond and a bond of genuine relational understanding may for a considerable time be difficult to tell apart, and on some measures the managed bond may score higher, since management is directed at the measures in a way that understanding is not.

This is the weakness of the functional case, and it is not a marginal one. It is the same weakness that attends every defense of a practice by its effects, that the effects may be counterfeited by a simulacrum directed at producing them, and that the defense, having appealed only to the effects, cannot distinguish the practice from its simulacrum. In the domain of intimacy the simulacrum has a name in the wider framework within which this paper stands. It is a relational extraction, a taking from the other under the form of a giving, and its refinement is precisely its danger, since the more skillfully the functions of understanding are counterfeited the harder the extraction is to detect and the longer it may run.

The point is not that the functional case is false. The functions are real, and relational understanding does produce them. The point is that the functional case is not sufficient, because it cannot, from within itself, distinguish the understanding that produces these functions as the overflow of a genuine crossing from the management that produces their appearance as the instrument of a hold. To distinguish these is to appeal to something other than the functions, to what the practice is and not only to what it yields, and this is a normative and not a functional distinction. The remainder of this part draws it.

It is worth marking why the distinction cannot be recovered by a longer or a more careful functional analysis. One might propose that the counterfeit will eventually fail on the measures, that management, unlike understanding, cannot sustain the functions indefinitely, so that a sufficiently long functional accounting would tell them apart after all. There is something in this, and the next parts will give it its due, since the temporal structure of intimacy does bear on what can be sustained. Yet it does not rescue the functional case, for two reasons. The counterfeit may run for a very long time, across years in which real harm is done, before any functional shortfall appears, so that a distinction available only in the eventual accounting comes too late to guide a life. And the deeper reason is that even where the counterfeit does eventually fail on the measures, what it lacked was never merely a quantity of function. It lacked something the measures do not capture, for want of which we judge it a wrong done to the other and not merely a bond that underperformed. That something is what the normative case must name.

9.10. Legitimacy without Correctness

The distinction the functional case cannot draw is a normative one, and it must be drawn with care, since the obvious way of drawing it is closed to this account. The obvious way would be to say that genuine understanding is correct where the counterfeit is mistaken, that the understanding partner grasps the other as the other truly is while the managing partner works from a false or partial picture, so that the distinction between understanding and extraction is the distinction between a true and a false representation of the other. This way is closed, because the epistemology on which the paper stands does not grant that an understanding of another is ever correct in the sense this would require.

The reason returns to the account of truth recalled in Part One. Understanding another, on this account, is a generative observation, produced in the crossing of two worlds, historically situated, and always incomplete. It is never the possession of the other as the other finally is, for there is no rendering that holds the other without remainder, and the observation of the other is enriched without end as the crossing continues and the two worlds change. Truth, here as everywhere on this account, is generated in a historical and contradictory movement and is never held as a finished correctness. To defend genuine understanding as the correct representation of the other, against the counterfeit as the false one, would be to claim for understanding exactly the finished correctness the epistemology denies to all knowing. The account cannot draw its normative distinction as a distinction in correctness without abandoning its own conception of truth.

The distinction must therefore be drawn on other ground, and the ground is ethical and not epistemic. What separates understanding from its counterfeit is not that the one is correct and the other mistaken. It is that the one is legitimate and the other is not, and the legitimacy in question is a matter of how the other is treated in the crossing, not of whether the crossing arrives at a correct result. The understanding partner enters the other's world as another world, to be observed with and not possessed, and holds the other as a co-generating subject whose rendering of things is a source and not a resource. The managing partner enters the other's world as a terrain to be mapped for the sake of a hold, and holds the other as an object of management, a system to be kept in a desired state. The difference is in the standing granted to the other, and it is a difference of legitimacy.

Legitimacy, not correctness. The account does not distinguish genuine understanding from its counterfeit by the correctness of the one and the error of the other, for understanding another is a generative observation, historically produced and always incomplete, and is never held as a finished correctness. The distinction is ethical. Genuine understanding is legitimate in that it enters the other's world to observe with the other and holds the other as a co-generating subject; its counterfeit is illegitimate in that it enters to secure a hold and holds the other as an object of management. What is asked

of an understanding is that it be legitimate and not that it be correct.

The ground of this legitimacy has been carried, in the wider framework, by an ethic of non-possession, and non-possession will remain central to what follows. To understand another legitimately is to observe the other without possessing the other, to let the other's world be a world one enters and does not annex, and to hold what one observes of the other as a matter generated between the two and belonging to neither, and not as a property of one's own by which the other is held. The counterfeit fails this at its root, for its whole motion is possessive, a taking of the other into a system of management under the appearance of a giving of attention. This is why the framework names it a relational extraction, and why the wrong it does is legible in the terms of generative justice, as the interruption of the mutual generation that a legitimate bond sustains, the rendering of one party into fuel for the other's ends under the form of care.

Non-possession states one aspect of the legitimacy in question, and the account should not rest the whole of its normative ground on a single ethical rendering, for a reason internal to its own method. Legitimacy is a concept, a matter to be understood, and the epistemology this paper applies holds that no single symbolic system exhausts a concept and that a concept becomes observable through the relations among several renderings of it. An ethical tradition is such a symbolic system. To render the legitimacy of understanding through non-possession alone would repeat, at the level of ethics, the error the epistemology sets itself against, the mistaking of one rendering for the whole. The next section therefore observes ethical legitimacy across several traditions, of which non-possession names one aspect, so that the normative ground is drawn in the manner the paper's own method requires.

Two further points hold this normative ground to the conception of truth the paper shares, so that the normative case does not smuggle back, at the level of ethics, the finished correctness it refused at the level of knowing. The first is that legitimacy, as it is used here, makes no claim to have grasped the other correctly. A legitimate understanding may be deeply incomplete, may err, may be revised across the history of the bond, and remains legitimate throughout, since its legitimacy lies in the standing it grants the other and not

in the accuracy of its result. One may hold one's partner as a co-generating subject, enter their world with the intent to observe and not to possess, and still understand them partially and by degrees, as the account holds all understanding to be. Legitimacy is a matter of the ethical form of the crossing, compatible at every point with the incompleteness the epistemology requires.

The second is that the criterion of legitimacy is itself historically generated, and is set here as no final guarantee. The ethic of non-possession, the standing of the other as a co-generating subject, the very conception of a relational extraction, are not timeless moral facts read off from the nature of things. They are themselves generated in the historical and material development of relational life, arising as the conditions of a form of life bring them forth and open to the same dialectical movement as everything else the account treats. What counts as possession and what as legitimate observation of another, where the line falls between entering a world and annexing it, is a matter that has a history and will have a further history, refigured as the conditions of intimate life develop. The account does not install non-possession as a new absolute in the place of the correctness it declined. It offers non-possession as the criterion legitimacy takes in the present development of relational life, held as the best the present affords and answerable to its own further generation, in exactly the manner the framework holds of all its commitments, including this one.

With this the distinction is drawn in principle. Function tells what understanding does and cannot tell understanding from its counterfeit. Legitimacy tells them apart, without claiming the correctness the account denies to all knowing, and holding even its own criterion within the history it theorizes. What remains is to draw the ethical ground of legitimacy more fully than a single rendering allows, by observing it across several ethical traditions, and this is the work of the section that follows.

9.11. Ethical Legitimacy Observed across Traditions

The legitimacy that separates understanding from its counterfeit has been stated through non-possession, and the previous section closed by holding that a single ethical rendering should not carry the whole of it. This section draws the ground more fully. It observes

the legitimacy of understanding across several ethical traditions, each of which renders an aspect of what it is to treat another rightly and leaves an aspect for the others to render, and it treats non-possession as one such aspect among them. The traditions are taken in their secular and argued forms, as accounts of right conduct that stand on reasons open to examination, and the section passes through them in the manner the epistemology prescribes, to locate in each what it reaches and what it leaves.

The functional case already brought one tradition into play, though it did so to mark its insufficiency. A consequentialist ethic renders the rightness of an act in its results, the good it produces and the harm it forestalls, and on such an ethic the legitimacy of an understanding would lie in the goods it brings to the bond, the trust, the shared value, the eased conflict, the sustained quality of a life. Part Three showed why this rendering, taken alone, cannot draw the distinction the account requires, since a refined possession of the other can produce these goods, for a time, as efficiently as understanding. The consequentialist rendering reaches the real and important truth that a legitimate understanding is fruitful, that it does good in the bond, and it leaves untouched the matter of how the other is treated in the producing of that good, which is the matter on which understanding and its counterfeit divide. Its aspect is the fruitfulness of understanding; its omission is the standing of the other.

A deontological ethic in the tradition of Kant (Kant 1998) renders right conduct through duty and the moral law, and it supplies, at its center, a principle that speaks directly to the present matter, that one is to treat humanity, in oneself and in others, never merely as a means and always at the same time as an end. This principle gives the standing of the other the consequentialist rendering omits, and it gives it as a requirement that no calculation of goods can override. The counterfeit of understanding, which takes the other into a system of management, treats the other merely as a means, and the Kantian rendering names this the precise wrong that the consequentialist accounting cannot register. Its aspect is the dignity of the other as an end, a standing that the possessive relation violates however favorable its results. What it leaves is the concreteness and the relationality of the bond, for the Kantian ground is a universal law addressed to any rational being as such, and it renders the other as a bearer of a dignity shared by all rather than as this particular other whose singular world is to be entered. It secures that

the other is not used, and it says little of what it is to attend to just this person in their difference.

A care ethic, in the work of Noddings and of Gilligan (Noddings 1984; Gilligan 1982), renders right conduct through the attentive response to a particular other in their need, and it supplies exactly the concreteness the Kantian ground leaves abstract. On this rendering legitimacy is a matter of attentiveness, of receiving the other in their particularity and responding to what they, and not humanity in general, require. It gives the positive and relational content that non-possession, stated as a restraint, does not carry on its own, for non-possession says what a legitimate understanding refrains from, the annexation of the other, and the care ethic says what it actively does, the attentive entry into and response to the other's world. Its aspect is the responsive attention to the singular other. What it leaves is the matter of limit and of mutuality, for an ethic of care, pressed to its edge, can pass into a self-effacement in which the one who cares is drawn without return, and this is a relational imbalance of its own, a failure of the mutual generation the account requires, which the care rendering is not well placed to mark.

An ethic of virtue in the tradition of Aristotle (Aristotle 2000) renders right conduct through the character of the agent and the flourishing it makes possible, and in its account of friendship it reaches the matter of mutuality the care ethic leaves. The friendship of the best kind, on this account, is one in which each wishes the good of the other for the other's own sake, and in which the two flourish together in a shared activity, each the occasion of the other's excellence. This renders legitimacy as a mutual and generative matter, a good realized between two who are equally its authors, and it supplies the reciprocity that the asymmetry of care and the universality of duty do not frame. Its aspect is the mutual flourishing of two who wish each other's good for its own sake, which is close to the account's own conception of a bond in which two worlds generate what neither held alone. What it leaves is its reliance on a substantive account of flourishing, a settled conception of the human good toward which the friendship tends, which sits in tension with the account's refusal of a predetermined end, and this tension is itself a matter the observation must hold rather than resolve.

Set these renderings into relation, and the legitimacy of understanding becomes observable in a way no one of them affords. The consequentialist reaches its fruitfulness and

omits the standing of the other; the Kantian reaches that standing as dignity and omits the concrete singular; the care ethic reaches the responsive attention to the singular and omits the limit and the mutuality; the virtue ethic reaches the mutual flourishing and relies on a settled good the account cannot grant. Non-possession stands among these as one aspect, nearest to the Kantian refusal of the other as mere means, and it is supplied, by the others, with the positive attention, the reciprocity, and the fruitfulness that a restraint stated alone does not carry. What legitimacy is, in the treatment of the other that separates understanding from extraction, is observed in the relations among these renderings, as the account holds every concept to be observed, and it is exhausted by none of them.

Legitimacy observed across traditions. The ethical legitimacy that separates understanding from its counterfeit is a concept, and by the paper's own method it is exhausted by no single ethical tradition and becomes observable through the relations among several. A consequentialist rendering reaches the fruitfulness of understanding; a Kantian rendering reaches the standing of the other as an end and not a mere means; a care ethic reaches the attentive response to the singular other; an Aristotelian ethic of friendship reaches the mutual flourishing of two who wish each other's good for its own sake. Each omits what the others supply. Non-possession is one aspect among these, nearest the Kantian refusal of the other as means, and completed by the positive attention, the reciprocity, and the fruitfulness the others render. Legitimacy is observed in the relation among the traditions and is exhausted by none.

This section has done, at the level of ethics, what the paper argues understanding always does. It has taken a concept, the legitimacy of understanding, that no single symbolic system renders without remainder, and it has brought it into view through the relations among several renderings of it, each partial, none final. The normative ground of the paper is thereby drawn in the same manner as its epistemology, and the earlier reliance on non-possession is corrected by observing non-possession as one aspect within a relation of

traditions that together render more of the legitimacy than any renders alone, and not by replacing one sole criterion with another. The normative case is, in its own construction, an instance of the relational understanding it concerns.

Two conditions hold this observation to the paper's stance, as they held the account of legitimacy in the previous section. The first is that observing legitimacy across traditions does not yield a correct ethical criterion, a formula that would settle, for every case, whether an understanding is legitimate. It yields an observation, partial and open, of what legitimacy involves, in which the traditions check and supplement one another without converging on a single rule. The account claims no more ethical correctness than it claims epistemic correctness, and for the same reason. The second is that the field of traditions is itself historical. These renderings arose in the development of moral life and will be joined by others as that life develops, and the observation of legitimacy they afford is generated in history and open to its further generation, set as no final criterion. The account offers this relation of traditions as the observation of legitimacy that the present development of ethical life affords, held as the best the present yields and answerable to what comes after, in the manner the framework holds of all its commitments.

With this the normative case is complete. Function tells what understanding does; legitimacy, observed across the traditions that render it, tells understanding from its counterfeit, without a correct criterion and within the history that generates it. The paper turns now to the problem that sets the cultivation of these capacities in intimacy apart from their cultivation anywhere else.

Part Four The Special Problem of Intimacy

9.12. The Wager, not the Rehearsal

The parts to this point have set out what relational understanding is, what it does, and why, done legitimately, it is good. A reader might expect the paper now to describe how it is practiced, how one learns and rehearses the capacities it requires until they are secure, in the way one rehearses any skill. This part argues that intimacy resists such a description at its root, and that the resistance is a structural feature and not a practical inconvenience that follows from the framework's own conception of value and time. The capacities of relational understanding, in the domain of intimacy, are wagered and not rehearsed.

A rehearsal is possible where an action can be tried, its result observed, and the action adjusted and tried again, the feedback returning quickly enough and the trials repeating freely enough that the capacity is shaped by the loop of attempt and correction. Much can be learned in this way, and much of what surrounds relational understanding can be. The recognition of another's world, the entry into it, the labor of translation, admit of practice in settings where the loop is available, in ordinary conversation, in friendship, in the encounter with a difficult text or an unfamiliar discipline, in the professional formations of teaching and care. There the crossing of worlds can be attempted, its result seen with reasonable speed, and the attempt refined. These capacities are, in a sense the next section will make exact, near-practicable.

Intimacy is different, and the difference follows from what the framework holds about relational value and its time. Value, on this account, is generated in the crossing of worlds, and its generation is historical, so that what is generated at one moment may disclose its value only much later, when the field of relations has grown enough to observe it. The companion work drew this out for the observation of concepts, where a rendering's significance may become observable only once a later rendering arrives to throw it into relief, and where the field of relations through which a matter is observed is itself generated over time. In an intimate bond this temporal structure is at its most extended. A word given, a room made for the other's difficulty, a generative thing offered at a hard moment, may disclose its value only after years, when the bond has developed to the point from which what was given can at last be observed for what it was. The feedback on an act of relational understanding, in intimacy, may return only after a passage of time so long

that it cannot serve as the correction in a loop of practice.

To this delay is joined a second feature, that the trials do not repeat under the same conditions and often do not repeat at all. An intimate bond is a single history, not a series of independent attempts. A crossing offered at a given moment is offered once, into a bond in the state that its whole prior history has produced, and it cannot be withdrawn and offered again to the same bond in the same state, for the offering has already altered the state. Where a rehearsal requires that the trial be repeatable, the intimate bond is constitutively unrepeatable, a single unfolding in which each act enters once and changes the ground of the next. The partner one addresses today is not the partner one will address tomorrow, for the bond will have moved, carried in part by today's address.

The delay of the feedback and the unrepeatability of the trial together remove the loop of attempt and correction on which rehearsal depends. One cannot, in the deepest reaches of an intimate bond, try a way of understanding the other, observe promptly whether it succeeded, and adjust and try again under the same conditions, because the observation may be long delayed and the conditions do not return. What one does instead, in offering an act of relational understanding into an intimate bond, is to give something whose value one cannot presently confirm, into a history that will not run again, on the trust that it is the right thing to give. This is the structure of a wager and not of a rehearsal, and it is the structure that sets the cultivation of these capacities in intimacy apart from their cultivation anywhere the loop is available.

The wager of intimacy. In the domain of intimacy the capacities of relational understanding are wagered, not rehearsed. Because relational value is generated historically, the worth of an act of understanding may return only after a long passage of time, and because the bond is a single unrepeatable history, the act cannot be tried again under the same conditions. The loop of attempt and prompt correction on which rehearsal depends is therefore unavailable at the depths of intimacy, and what is offered there is given on trust, into a history that will not run again, before its value can be confirmed.

This structure is not a defect of intimate life to be engineered away, and naming it as a wager is not a counsel of resignation. It is the form that the generativity of relational value takes when the relation is a whole shared life, and it is inseparable from what makes intimacy the deepest of the domains in which worlds are crossed. The task of the following sections is to ask what the cultivation of these capacities can mean, once it is granted that at their depths they cannot be rehearsed, and to distinguish the capacities that can still be practiced in the ordinary way from those that can only be borne as a standing disposition into the wager.

9.13. The Field of Cultivation and the Field of Exercise

If the capacities of relational understanding cannot, at the depths of intimacy, be rehearsed in the loop of attempt and correction, and yet they can plainly be developed, since some people bring far more of them to their bonds than others, then their development must occur in part elsewhere than in the bond where they are most consequentially exercised. This section draws the distinction on which the practical proposal of the paper rests, between the field in which a capacity is cultivated and the field in which it is exercised, and it holds that in the case of intimacy these come apart.

The confusion the distinction removes is the expectation that intimacy should serve as its own training ground, that one learns to understand one's partner by practicing on one's partner, refining the capacity through the bond itself. For the near-practicable capacities this is partly available, but for the capacities that reach into the wager it is not, and the expectation that it should be is a source of a particular disappointment, the sense that one ought to be getting better at one's bond through sheer repetition and is somehow failing to. The bond is not a practice ground for its own deepest demands. It is the field of exercise, the place where capacities developed in part elsewhere are wagered, and its unrepeatable and slow-returning history is unsuited to the shaping of a capacity through rapid trial.

The field of cultivation, for much of what relational understanding requires, lies in the wider life in which the loop of attempt and correction is available. The recognition of another's world, the entry into it, the construction of a mapping between two structures,

the labor of translation, can be developed in every setting where one meets a world not one's own and can see, with reasonable speed, whether one has entered it. They are developed in friendship, in the sustained encounter with a discipline or a tradition foreign to one's own, in the reading of literature that renders a world one does not inhabit, in the practices of teaching and of care where the entry into another's world is the daily work and its success or failure is visible. A person who has developed these capacities across such a life brings them to an intimate bond already formed, and exercises there what was cultivated in fields where the exercise was correctable.

This gives the first half of a distinction that the next part will develop into the model. Some of the capacities of relational understanding are near-practicable. They admit of cultivation in the loop of attempt and correction, in fields outside the intimate bond, and they can be brought to the bond as developed skills. The recognition of the other's world, the entry, the structural mapping, and the translation are of this kind, and the fact that they are cultivable elsewhere is what allows a person to bring understanding to a bond and not only to discover, across the bond's slow history, whether they had it.

The other half of the distinction concerns the capacities that reach furthest into the wager, and these do not admit of cultivation in the same way, for a reason that must be stated precisely. A capacity whose exercise gives feedback only after long delay, into an unrepeatable history, cannot be shaped by the loop of attempt and correction even in principle, since the loop requires the feedback the wager withholds. The throwing of a generative thing into the other's unfolding, the non-intervention that lets a shared dynamic develop, the preservation of a relational experience against a value that may return only much later, are capacities of this kind. They cannot be practiced to reliability, because reliability is precisely what the loop confers and the loop is unavailable. What can be developed, in their place, is a standing disposition and not a skill honed by feedback, a formed way of being toward the other that inclines one to give rightly into the wager without the confirmation a rehearsal would supply. The nature of this disposition, and the sense in which it can be cultivated where a skill cannot, is the matter of the model the next part proposes.

Part Five The Practical Theory and Its Cultivation

9.14. The Capacities, not a Procedure

The model this paper proposes is a set of capacities and not a procedure, and the distinction follows as a consequence of the account and is no matter of presentation. A procedure is an ordered sequence of steps, each following the last, the whole completed when the final step is reached. A model of relational understanding cast as a procedure would name a first thing to do, then a second, and so on to a last, and would represent understanding as achieved when the sequence is run. The account developed here forbids this, for the same reason it forbids the rehearsal. The steps of such a procedure would have to follow one another in time, the earlier completed before the later begins, and yet the matters they concern do not order themselves so. The value of a thing given may return only after the later steps have long since passed, the feedback that a procedure would require at each step to confirm its completion before the next is delayed and uncertain, and the whole may span a length of time across which no sequence could be held as a single connected run. A procedure presupposes that its steps are adjacent in time and that each completes before the next begins. The generativity of relational value, which may disclose the worth of an early act only in a late season of the bond, breaks this presupposition, and with it the possibility of a procedure.

What the account permits, in the place of a procedure, is a set of capacities. A capacity is a formed power that can be drawn upon at any moment the relation requires it, in any order, and whose exercise at one moment does not wait upon the completion of another. Capacities can be held together, brought to bear as the unrepeatable and slow-returning history of a bond calls for them, without the temporal adjacency a procedure demands. To cast the model as capacities and not as steps is thus to make it consistent with the framework's own conception of relational time, on which the acts of understanding are drawn, each in its moment, from powers the person has formed, and do not line up in a sequence, from powers the person has formed and holds in readiness.

The model names seven such capacities. They are not stages and are not ordered, and the numbering that follows is for reference and not for sequence. The first is the recognition of the other's language world, the acknowledgment that the other renders the world in a symbolic system with its own generative rules and not merely in a different vocabulary. The second is the entry into that world, the capacity to suspend one's own system far

enough to let the other's renderings become natural, tested by whether one can generate a rendering the other affirms as their own. The third is the construction of a structural mapping, the observation of how the relations that hold in one's own world correspond, at the level of structure, to the relations that hold in the other's. The fourth is translation, the rendering of a matter from the other's world into one's own with the loss marked and the mapping honored. The fifth is the throwing of a generative thing into the other's own unfolding, the offering, in the other's terms, of something from which the other generates what they had not observed, as against the forcing upon the other of a conclusion of one's own. The sixth is a non-intervention, the capacity to withhold one's steering and let a shared dynamic develop between the two. The seventh is the joint recognition and preservation of what is generated, the noticing together of a generated matter's value, the finding of where the two worlds meet, and the keeping of a relational experience against the season in which its value returns.

The model: capacities in two orders of cultivation. Relational understanding in intimacy is proposed as a set of seven capacities and not a procedure, since the generativity of relational value forbids the temporal adjacency a procedure requires. The seven are the recognition of the other's world, the entry into it, the construction of a structural mapping, translation, the throwing of a generative thing into the other's unfolding, non-intervention, and the joint recognition and preservation of what is generated. They divide into two orders. The first four are near-practicable, cultivable in the loop of attempt and correction in fields outside the bond, and brought to the bond as developed skills. The last three reach into the wager, give feedback only after delay and into an unrepeatable history, and cannot be honed by a loop; they are cultivated as a standing disposition and not as skills. Non-possession is the condition of all seven, without which they decline into a refined extraction.

The first four capacities, the recognition, the entry, the mapping, and the translation, were treated at their root in the companion work and are near-practicable in the sense

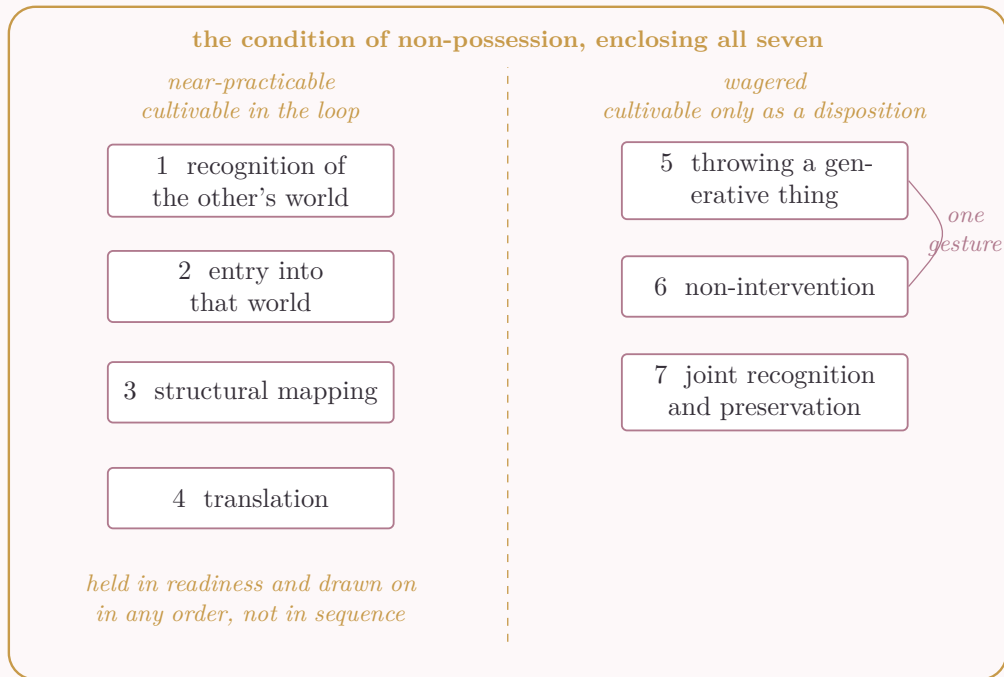


Figure 9.1: The model as capacities, not a procedure. The seven capacities are held in readiness and drawn upon in any order, with no sequence among them. The four on the left admit cultivation in the loop of attempt and correction; the three on the right reach into the wager and are cultivated only as a standing disposition. The fifth and sixth compose a single gesture in two moments. Non-possession is drawn as the field enclosing all seven, the condition under which each is what it is, and not as an eighth capacity.

the previous part gave. They are the crossing of worlds in its cognitive labor, and while intimacy raises them to their highest difficulty, they can be developed in the wider life where the crossing is correctable, and brought to the bond as powers already formed. This paper does not add to their theory beyond what the domain of intimacy requires, and turns instead to the three that reach into the wager, for it is there that intimacy makes its distinctive demand and there that the account has most to add. The next sections take the fifth and the seventh in turn, the throwing of a generative thing and the preservation of relational experience, with the sixth, non-intervention, drawn out alongside the fifth, since the two are a single gesture in two moments. The condition of non-possession, named in the claim as the ground of all seven, is drawn together at the

last.

9.15. The Throwing of a Generative Thing

The fifth capacity is the most distinctive of the model and the least reducible to a technique, and it is best approached through what it is not. When one has entered another's world and observed a matter the other has not observed, the impulse is to tell the other what one has seen, to deliver the observation as a conclusion. This delivery, however well meant, forces upon the other a rendering formed in one's own movement, and it places the other in the position of receiving a finished result and does not generate one. Even when the result is right, in the provisional sense the account allows, its delivery forecloses the other's own generation and installs one's own observation in the other's world from without. The fifth capacity is the alternative to this delivery, and it consists in giving the other the means of their own generation and not a conclusion.

To throw a generative thing into the other's unfolding is to offer, in the other's own terms and in keeping with the generative rules of the other's world, something from which the other will generate an observation they had not reached, an observation that is then theirs and not a transplant of one's own. The thing thrown may be a question that opens a direction the other's world contains but has not taken, a juxtaposition that sets two of the other's own renderings into a relation the other had not drawn, an instance that the other's own commitments make significant. Its mark is that it is generative and not conclusive, that it occasions the other's generation of the observation and does not carry it as a payload to be delivered, the other's generation of it, and that what the other then observes is generated in the other's own world and belongs to the other.

This is the capacity that a generative pedagogy has practiced under other names, and the theory of generative justice developed by Eglash (Eglash 2016) gives it a wider setting, in which what a generative act returns is returned to those who generate it and is not extracted from them. The bearing of that setting on the present capacity is exact. To throw a generative thing rightly is to act so that the observation generated returns to the other in whom it is generated, remaining the other's own, where the forcing of a conclusion extracts the generation, installing one's own result in place of the other's and

taking from the other the generativity that was theirs to exercise. The distinction between the throwing and the forcing is thus a distinction of justice and not of tact, between an act that leaves the other the author of what they come to observe and an act that authors it for them.

Three features distinguish the throwing from its failures, and they can be named though they cannot be reduced to a rule. The first is that the thing thrown must be in the other's terms and must respect the generative rules of the other's world, for a thing thrown in one's own terms is a delivery in disguise, and a thing that violates the other's rules will only collide with the other's world and will not generate within it. This is why the throwing depends upon the prior capacities, the recognition and the entry and the mapping, since one cannot offer in the other's terms what one has not learned to render in them. The second is that the thing thrown must be generative and not conclusive, an opening and not an answer, for a conclusion pressed in the form of a question is a forcing that has borrowed the shape of a throwing, and the other feels the difference as the difference between being drawn out and being led. The third is a matter of moment and measure, of when the thing is offered and how much is offered, for a generative thing thrown before the other's world is ready to receive it will not generate, and one thrown with too heavy a hand will steer where it should open. This third feature cannot be given as a rule at all, and it is the point at which the capacity passes from a skill into the standing disposition the previous part described, since the sense of the moment is formed and not followed.

The sixth capacity belongs with the fifth, as the withholding that the throwing requires once it is done. To throw a generative thing and then to steer the other's generation of it, to guide the other toward the observation one had oneself reached, is to take back with the sixth capacity what the fifth had given, converting the occasion of the other's generation into a managed route to one's own conclusion. Non-intervention is the capacity to let go of the thing thrown, to allow the shared dynamic between the two worlds to develop without one's steering, and to bear the uncertainty of not knowing what the other will generate or whether they will generate at all. It is a capacity of restraint, and its difficulty is the difficulty of trusting a process one has set going but does not control. Its characteristic failure is the intervention that cannot wait, the resumption of steering

under the anxiety of an open outcome, which returns the exchange to the delivery the fifth capacity was meant to escape.

Together the fifth and the sixth capacities compose a single gesture in two moments, the giving of a generative thing and the letting go of it, the offering into the other's world and the withholding of one's hand from what the other then makes. The gesture is a giving in the strong sense, since what it gives is the other's own generation of an observation and not an observation itself, and its condition is a restraint that wants nothing back from the giving, neither the credit of the result nor its conformity to what one had oneself observed. This restraint is the form that non-possession takes in the fifth and sixth capacities, and it is what holds the throwing apart from the refined management that would use the appearance of a generative gift to install a conclusion of its own. The disposition to give in this way, wanting nothing back, is not a technique that can be rehearsed to reliability. It is a formed generosity, cultivated as a way of being toward the other and carried into the wager, where its rightness cannot be confirmed at the moment of the giving and must be borne on trust.

9.16. The Preservation of Relational Experience

The seventh capacity is the one that belongs most properly to intimacy, and it has no close counterpart in the domains where the crossing of worlds is quicker and its returns more prompt. It has two moments, a present one and a temporal one. The present moment is the joint recognition of what a crossing has generated, the noticing together of a generated matter and of its value, and the finding of where the two worlds have met. The temporal moment is the preservation of that recognition, and of the experience in which it arose, against a future in which its full value may be disclosed. The first moment intimacy shares with other domains, and the account of joint recognition given below applies wherever two people observe together what their crossing has produced. The second moment is intimacy's own, and it follows directly from the wager.

Take the present moment first. What a crossing of worlds generates is observed, on this account, in the relation between the two worlds, and its observation is itself a relational act, most fully carried out by the two together. When two partners notice together what

has come into being between them, a shared value generated across their difference, an observation neither held alone, a meeting of their worlds at a point neither had marked, they do more than register a fact. They perform, jointly, the observation in which the generated matter comes fully into view, and they find in it the places where their worlds are, for the moment, one in what they hold while remaining two in how they hold it. This joint recognition is generative in its own right, for the noticing together of what has been generated is itself a crossing, and it may generate, as the companion work observed of such recognitions, an observation that neither partner had reached and that arrives to both at once, a thing seen together that was in neither before the seeing.

The temporal moment is where intimacy makes its distinctive demand, and it rests on the structure named in the wager. Because relational value is generated historically, the full value of what a crossing produces may not be observable at the time of its production. A given moment in a bond, an act of understanding offered, a difficulty borne together, a room made for the other's core, may generate something whose worth cannot be recognized in the present field of the relation and becomes observable only later, when the bond has developed to the point from which that earlier moment can at last be observed for what it was. The seventh capacity, in its temporal moment, is the capacity to preserve such a moment against that later season, to keep the relational experience, unrecognized or half-recognized in its value now, so that when the field has grown enough to disclose its worth the experience is still there to be observed anew.

This preservation is a capacity and not merely a memory, and the distinction matters. To preserve a relational experience in the sense the account intends is to keep it available for a re-observation, and not to record it as a fact of the past, whose occasion has not yet come, to hold it as a thing whose value is not yet settled and may still be generated. It is an act carried out on trust, for one preserves without knowing whether the value will come, and it is an act of the two, most fully done when the partners keep such experiences together, in the shared holding that a bond maintains through its rituals of return, its recollections, its marking of what it has passed through. A bond that preserves its experiences in this way carries forward a reservoir of what it has generated but not yet fully observed, and it is from this reservoir that the later recognitions are drawn, when a present difficulty discloses the worth of a past forbearance, or a late season of the bond

observes at last what an early one had generated without knowing.

The preservation of relational experience. The seventh capacity has a moment proper to intimacy, the preservation of a relational experience against the season in which its value returns. Because relational value is generated historically, what a crossing produces may become observable for what it is only later, when the field of the bond has grown enough to disclose it. To preserve is to keep such an experience available for a re-observation whose occasion has not yet come, holding it on trust as a value not yet settled, most fully done by the two together. The reservoir so kept is that from which the bond's later recognitions are drawn.

This capacity draws directly on the two forms of historical generation that the companion work set out and that were recalled in Part One, and it is worth marking the connection, since it shows the seventh capacity to be the application of the account to the whole time of a bond, and no addition to it. The first form was the enrichment of an observation within a field of relations, as a later rendering discloses what an earlier one had left unmarked. In a bond, this is the season that discloses the worth of a past act, the later moment from which an earlier one is at last observed for what it was. The second form was the generation of the field of relations itself, the arrival of new relations that open observations unavailable before. In a bond, this is the growth of the relation itself, through which what an early moment generated becomes observable only once the bond has developed the relations that let it be seen. The preservation of relational experience is the capacity that holds the bond's past open to both, keeping what was generated available to the enrichment and the growth that a long shared history brings.

Here the movement is the spiral the framework has described elsewhere, and not a circle. A bond that preserves and returns to its experiences does not come back to them unchanged, reliving a fixed past. It returns to them from a field grown richer, and observes in them what was generated but not seen, so that the return is to the same experience observed anew, its value disclosed by the distance traveled. The preservation of relational

experience is what makes this spiral possible across the length of a life, holding the past available so that the bond, returning, finds it grown. This is the capacity by which a long intimacy becomes, in its best reaches, a deepening and not a mere duration, a continued generation in which what was given early is recognized late, and recognized together, and kept again against a season later still.

9.17. Non-Possession as the Condition Throughout

Non-possession has appeared at each turn of the model, in the restraint that lets the thing thrown remain the other's, in the withholding that is non-intervention, in the trust that preserves without demanding a return. It is time to state its place directly. Non-possession is not an eighth capacity, one more power alongside the seven. It is the condition under which the seven are what they are, and without which each of them declines into a form of the extraction the normative case set against understanding. It runs through the model as a single requirement in seven forms, and the model is completed by naming it as such.

A word on the standing of this condition holds it to the fuller ground drawn in the normative case. The legitimacy of understanding was there observed across several ethical traditions, of which non-possession is one aspect, nearest the refusal of the other as a mere means and completed by the attentive response, the reciprocity, and the fruitfulness the other traditions render. Non-possession serves as the condition of the seven capacities because it is the aspect that governs, most directly, the conduct of the crossing, what one does and refrains from doing in the exercise of each capacity. It carries the fuller legitimacy into the practice of the model without standing in for the whole of it, and the attentiveness, the mutuality, and the fruitfulness that the other traditions render are present in the capacities as the positive content that non-possession, a restraint, leaves for them to supply. The condition named here is thus the practical face, in the exercise of the capacities, of the legitimacy observed across the traditions.

The point can be seen by taking the seven capacities and removing the condition from each, so that what remains is the capacity's counterfeit. The recognition of the other's world, without non-possession, becomes the reconnaissance of a territory to be taken, the

acknowledgment of the other's difference as the first move in mapping it for a hold. The entry into the other's world becomes an infiltration, an entry made to secure a position and not to observe with the other. The structural mapping becomes the diagram by which the other is managed, the translation a means of putting the other's words to one's own uses. The throwing of a generative thing becomes the planting of a suggestion the other is led to think their own, the most refined of manipulations, which borrows the very form of the generative gift to install a conclusion by stealth. Non-intervention becomes the calculated withholding that lets the other commit themselves before one moves. And the preservation of relational experience becomes the keeping of an account, a record of what the other owes, held against a future reckoning. Each capacity has its counterfeit, and in every case the counterfeit is the capacity emptied of non-possession and turned to a hold.

This is why non-possession cannot be one capacity among the others, for it is the condition that separates each of the others from its counterfeit, and a model that listed it as a further item would misplace it as one more thing to do, where it is the standing under which all the others are done. The same power that enters the other's world can enter to observe with the other or to secure a hold upon them, and nothing in the capacity itself decides which, for the capacity is the same power in both cases and its direction is given by the condition under which it is exercised. Non-possession is that condition, the orientation of the whole crossing toward observing with the other and not toward possessing them, and it is present or absent in each capacity as the capacity is exercised, not as a separate act performed before or after.

The wrong that the counterfeits share is the one the normative case named, and it is legible in the terms of generative justice. In each counterfeit the generativity of the relation is turned to the account of one party, the other made into a resource from which value is drawn under the appearance of a bond in which value is shared. The other becomes, in the phrase the wider framework uses, fuel for an end that is not the relation's own, and the more skillfully the counterfeit imitates the legitimate capacity the more thoroughly the extraction is concealed. Non-possession is the refusal of this turn, the holding of the relation's generativity as belonging to the relation and to both who generate within it, and the treatment of the other, throughout the crossing, as a co-generating subject whose

world is entered to be observed with and never annexed.

It remains only to hold this condition, as the normative case held its criterion, within the history the account theorizes, so that non-possession is not installed as the timeless law the framework elsewhere refuses. What non-possession requires, where the line falls between a legitimate entry and an annexation, between a generative gift and a planted suggestion, between a preservation and an account kept, is not fixed for all times. It is drawn in the historical development of relational life and will be drawn again as that life develops, and the model offers non-possession as the form the condition takes in the present, held as the best the present affords and open to its own further generation. With this the model is complete, seven capacities in two orders of cultivation, under a condition that runs through all seven and that is itself, like everything in the account, generated in the history it belongs to and set as no final guarantee.

9.18. The Practical Theory Embodied

The seven capacities have been given as a theory of a practice, and a theory of a practice invites the question of whether the practice it describes can be carried, in a concrete instrument, into the ordinary passage of a bond. The question is worth a brief answer, since an affirmative one shows the account to bear on a life and not on a page alone. The seven capacities can be embodied in a simple instrument, a kept record through which the crossing of two worlds is practiced day by day, and the shape of such an instrument is sketched here in outline, as a demonstration that the practical theory admits of realization, and not as a design to be specified.

The instrument follows the account's own structure. The near-practicable capacities become occasions of noticing and recording, a place to set down an observed facet of the other, a rendering attempted in the other's terms, a structural correspondence marked between the two worlds, a translation kept in a private lexicon of the bond. The wagered capacities become occasions of a different kind, since they cannot be drilled, a place to record a generative thing offered and to leave open how the other took it up, a marked restraint held in place of an intervention, and, at the last, a return. The return is the seventh capacity made concrete. What has been recorded and could not yet be valued

is kept, and revisited from a later season, so that what an early moment generated and left unread is observed at last for what it was, and preserved again. The instrument is thus a device for holding the bond's generated matter against the delay in which its value returns, and for carrying it back into a further generation. Its motion is the spiral the account has described, a return that finds the kept moment grown.

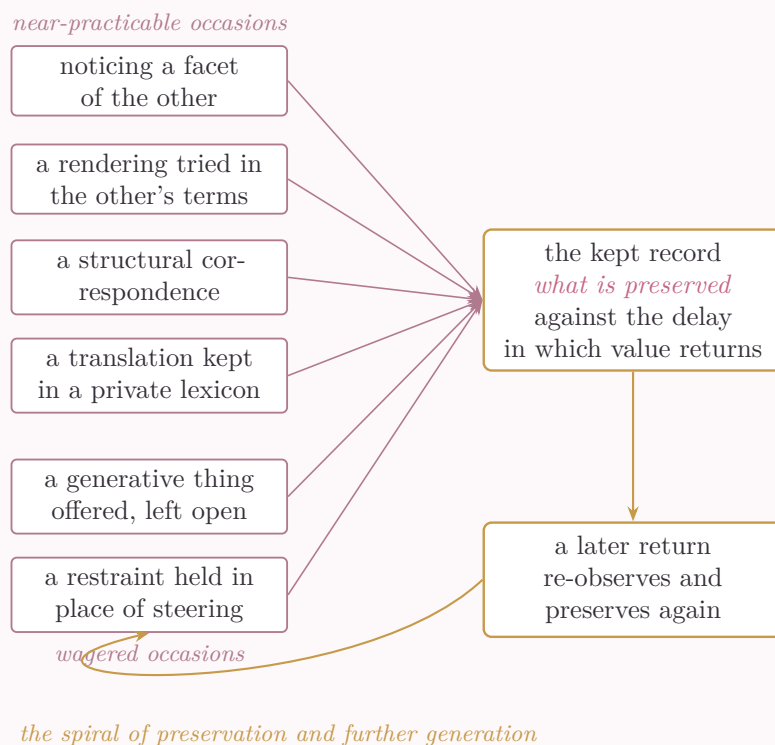


Figure 9.2: A concept sketch of the practical theory embodied. The near-practicable capacities become occasions of noticing and recording, and the wagered capacities become occasions of an offering left open and a restraint held. All feed a kept record, which holds the bond's generated matter against the delay in which its value returns. A later return re-observes what was kept and preserves it again, and this return is the spiral the account describes, carried into a further generation. The sketch shows that the practical theory admits of a concrete instrument, and it specifies no design.

The point of the sketch is modest and it is real. It shows that the seven capacities form a structure that can be embodied and carried into practice, and are no mere redescription of what good partners already do, and that the account's most distinctive claim, the

preservation of relational experience against a delayed value, has a concrete form. The instrument does no more than hold the bond's generated matter and return it, and it does exactly what the account requires, that the crossing of two worlds be practiced, its generation kept, and its value observed when the season for its observation comes. The realization sketched here is one among the forms the practical theory might take, and the theory is answerable to no single one of them.

Part Six The Dialectic of Understanding and its Remainder

9.19. The Remainder that Sustains the Bond

The paper has argued, across its length, for understanding, for the entry into the other's world, the crossing that generates a shared reality, the capacities by which the crossing is carried out. A reader who has followed this far might draw from it a conclusion the paper must now refuse, that the aim of relational understanding is a full understanding, a complete crossing in which the other's world is at last wholly entered and the two renderings brought into a total correspondence. This section argues, dialectically, that such a completion is neither possible nor to be wished, that the persistence of an intimate bond depends upon a remainder in the other that understanding does not close, and it draws from this a corrected conception of what relational understanding, rightly aimed, seeks.

The thesis is the paper's own argument to this point. Understanding is good, its work in the bond is real, and the capacities that carry it are worth cultivating. Left there, the argument inclines toward a horizon at which understanding would be complete, the other fully known, the two worlds mapped onto one another without remainder. This horizon is the same fusion the paper set out, in its first pages, to refuse, returning now in a subtler dress. It no longer promises the transparent transport of a message, and it promises instead a complete mutual observation, a bond in which each has entered the other so fully that nothing of the other remains unobserved. The subtler form is the more seductive, since it wears the appearance of the very understanding the paper commends, and it must be met on its own ground.

The antithesis meets it there. A full crossing of the other's world, were it reached, would end the bond it was meant to perfect, and the reason lies in the core introduced in the background. At the center of the other is an unsymbolizable remainder around which, on the psychoanalytic account, the other's desire is organized. Desire moves because it circles a core that no object and no observation fills, and the movement is the life of the desiring subject. Were the other's core at last reached, observed, brought into a complete correspondence with one's own rendering, the circling would have nothing left to circle. The remainder that drew desire would be closed, and with it the movement that the remainder sustained. A complete understanding of the other would not crown the bond with a final intimacy. It would still the desire that moved between the two, for it would

fill the lack around which that desire turned, and a desire whose lack is filled is a desire extinguished. The completion the thesis reaches toward is, at its horizon, the death of the very movement that makes the bond alive.

This is not a defect that a better completion would avoid. It is the structure of desire, and it holds against any full crossing whatever. The point can be put in the paper's own terms, without the psychoanalytic vocabulary, so that it does not rest on a doctrine the reader might decline. The bond has been shown to live by generation, by the continued production, in the crossing of two worlds, of observations and values that neither world held before. Generation requires that there be, at each moment, something not yet observed from which the next observation is generated. A remainder in the other, a region of the other's world not yet crossed, is the reservoir from which the bond's further generation is drawn. Were the other fully crossed, this reservoir would be exhausted, and the generation that the bond lives by would have nothing further to draw upon. The bond would pass from a spiral that returns to the other and finds more, to a circle that returns to the other and finds the same, and the circle, for all its completeness, would be the end of the bond's growth. The remainder is not an obstacle to the bond's life. It is the condition of it.

There is a further point, of a normative kind, that joins the argument from desire and the argument from generation. To hold that one has fully understood the other, fully crossed their world, fully observed their core, is to treat the other as an object that a sufficient observation could exhaust. The other's unsymbolizable remainder is the mark of the other's standing as a subject and not an object, as a source of renderings that is never used up in one's observation of it. To reach, or to believe one has reached, a complete understanding of the other is thus to have annulled, in one's own regard, the other's subjectivity, to have converted a co-generating subject into a mapped and finished thing. The aspiration to full understanding, however tender its motive, meets at its limit the same wrong the normative case named, the reduction of the other to what one can possess of them. The remainder that understanding does not close is what keeps the other, in one's understanding of them, a subject who exceeds it.

The necessary remainder. The aim of relational understanding is not a full understanding, and a complete crossing of the other's world would end the bond it was meant to perfect. The other's unsymbolizable remainder is the core around which desire moves, the reservoir from which the bond's further generation is drawn, and the mark of the other's standing as a subject who exceeds any observation of them. Were it closed, desire would be stilled, generation would be exhausted, and the other would be reduced to a finished object. The remainder that understanding does not reach is therefore the condition of the bond's persistence, and understanding rightly aimed does not seek to close it.

The synthesis is not a midpoint between understanding and its refusal, and it does not counsel a strategic withholding, a deliberate leaving of the other unknown for the sake of preserving mystery, which would be one more possession, a management of the other's opacity for an effect one wants. It is a corrected conception of what understanding seeks. Relational understanding, rightly aimed, is not an asymptotic approach to a full crossing that it never quite completes. It is a sustained crossing that generates, at each meeting, a shared observation the two did not hold before, and that in the same motion honors the remainder from which the next crossing will be generated. The two moments are one. To understand the other well is to observe with the other what their crossing generates and to leave intact the core from which further generation comes, to enter without annexing, to observe without exhausting. This is the conception the normative case named as non-possession, now shown to have a further ground in the structure of desire and the condition of generation, and it is the conception the account has meant, throughout, by a crossing that observes with the other and does not possess them.

This synthesis does not resolve the tension it names, and it should not, for the tension is the living form of the bond. There is a real pull toward understanding, and it is right, and there is a real remainder that understanding must not close, and it is also right, and the bond lives in the holding of both, in a crossing that seeks the other and honors what in the other it will not reach. To resolve the tension in favor of full understanding would still the bond in a completed knowledge; to resolve it in favor of the remainder would

abandon the crossing altogether and leave the two worlds unmet. The bond lives in neither resolution but in the sustained movement between them, the seeking that generates and the honoring that leaves room to generate again. The account holds the tension open, in keeping with its refusal of a final synthesis, since a bond, like the understanding that crosses it, is a movement to be sustained and not a matter to be finished.

Part Seven Polyphonic Close

9.20. The Crossing Left Open

A paper on relational understanding ought not to close by declaring the understanding of it complete, for it has argued throughout that understanding is generated in a movement that no statement finishes, and it would betray its own account to end on a synthesis that gathered the matter into a settled whole. It closes instead by marking what it leaves open, in the manner its account of understanding requires, and by returning the questions it has opened to the practice and the history in which they will go on being worked.

The paper carried a single account across two cases and a practice. It took the generative relational epistemology into the domain of intimacy, where each person bears a symbolic world and understanding is the generative observation won in their crossing. It set the work that such understanding does, in trust, in shared value, in the easing of conflict, in the quality of a shared life, beside the established theories of these matters, and located its contribution in two characters, the relational and the generative, whose conjunction makes the matters of intimate life relational matters in generative movement. It then held that a case built on this work alone is not sufficient, since the functions of understanding can be counterfeited by a refined possession of the other, and it drew the distinction that function cannot draw on the ground of legitimacy and not of correctness, a legitimacy observed across several ethical traditions, consequentialist, Kantian, care-ethical, and Aristotelian, of which non-possession is one aspect, and held, like the truth the framework theorizes, within the history that generates it. It named the wager that sets intimacy apart, where the capacities of understanding are given on trust into an unrepeatable history whose returns may come only late. And it proposed a model, seven capacities in two orders of cultivation, under the condition of a non-possession that separates each capacity from its counterfeit. It then turned dialectically upon its own commendation of understanding, and held that a full crossing of the other's world would still the desire and exhaust the generation that the bond lives by, so that the aim of understanding is to seek the other and honor, in the same motion, what in the other it will not reach, and not to close the other's unsymbolizable remainder.

Several questions are left open, and they are the sites at which the account will go on being generated. Whether the division of the capacities into the near-practicable and the wagered is drawn in the right place, and whether some part of the throwing, the

non-intervention, and the preservation admits of a cultivation the paper has not found. How the standing disposition that the wagered capacities require is formed, if it is formed neither by the loop of rehearsal nor by direct instruction, and what the practices are, in a life and in the traditions that shape lives, through which such a disposition is grown. Where, in the developing conditions of intimate life, the line of non-possession is now to be drawn, and how its drawing will change as those conditions change. These are questions posed to a practice and not gaps to be filled by a further section, to be worked in the living of bonds and in the long observation of them, and returned, transformed, to whatever account comes after this one.

There is a last thing to say, and it belongs to the register in which this series has always closed. This paper has treated understanding between two people as a crossing of worlds that generates what neither world held alone, and it has held the deepest such crossing to be the one carried out across a shared life. Such an account is not written from outside the matter it treats. It is written from within a bond in which the crossing of two worlds is a daily and a lifelong work, in which the entry into another's language is learned slowly and imperfectly and gladly, and in which what is given is given on the trust the paper has called a wager. The account owes what it knows to that bond, and it returns there, past the last of its propositions, to the one whose world it has spent these years learning to enter, and in whose company the value of what was given early is still, season by season, coming to be observed.

Acknowledgments

This paper was learned before it was written, in the slow crossing of two worlds that a shared life has been. What it knows of entering another's language, of the thing offered and left open, of the value that returns only in a later season, it owes to her, 那个属于森林与山之女孩, the girl who belongs to the forest and the mountains, in whose company the crossing has been the work and the gladness of these years.

愿天下有情人，心灵相通。

May lovers everywhere, throughout the world,
reach one another, heart to heart.

References

- Ainsworth, Mary D. S. et al. (1978). *Patterns of Attachment: A Psychological Study of the Strange Situation*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Aristotle (2000). *Nicomachean Ethics*. Ed. by Roger Crisp. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Axelrod, Robert (1984). *The Evolution of Cooperation*. New York: Basic Books.
- Bowlby, John (1969). *Attachment and Loss, Volume 1: Attachment*. New York: Basic Books.
- Byrne, Donn (1971). *The Attraction Paradigm*. New York: Academic Press.
- Deci, Edward L. and Richard M. Ryan (2000). “The “what” and “why” of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behavior”. In: *Psychological Inquiry* 11.4, pp. 227–268.
- Eglash, Ron (2016). “Of Marx and Makers: An Historical Perspective on Generative Justice”. In: *Teknokultura. Revista de Cultura Digital y Movimientos Sociales* 13.1, pp. 245–269. DOI: [10.5209/rev_TK.2016.v13.n1.52096](https://doi.org/10.5209/rev_TK.2016.v13.n1.52096).
- Gilligan, Carol (1982). *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women’s Development*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Gottman, John M. and Nan Silver (1999). *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*. New York: Crown.
- Habermas, Jürgen (1984). *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume 1*. Trans. by Thomas McCarthy. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Kant, Immanuel (1998). *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. Ed. and trans. by Mary J. Gregor. Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy. Cited by the Akademie pagination (vol. 4). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lacan, Jacques (1978). *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI*. Ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller. Trans. by Alan Sheridan. New York: W. W. Norton.
- (1992). *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959–1960: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII*. Ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller. Trans. by Dennis Porter. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Luhmann, Niklas (1979). *Trust and Power*. Chichester: John Wiley.
- Noddings, Nel (1984). *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

