Recommendation Injustice: Pathologies of Shared-Experience Transmission through the Alienation of Recommenders into Relational Credit

Wanhong HUANG
huangwanhong@serendip.ngo

Abstract

Institutions that select people ask others to vouch for them. This paper asks what circulates when they do. Classical political economy studies the circulation of goods, and the economics of collateral-free lending the circulation of skill where no assessment reaches; what a reference circulates is neither. It is co-experience: what a relation generated between two parties, available only from the positions those parties occupied. Co-experience so understood is heterogeneous, and heterogeneous things do not circulate directly. A generalised order of circulation therefore requires a general equivalent, one term excluded from the set it measures and installed as the measure of the rest. The paper's central claim is that this position is occupied by the standing of the recommender, and that occupying it is what alienation consists in here: the recommender ceases to be a party to the relation whose product is reported and becomes the measure by which such products are made comparable. What then circulates is their standing rather than their observation, and the relational labour that produced the standing becomes invisible in the same movement that makes the name liquid. The derivation is taken from the critique of political economy, and the paper states what does not transpose, since co-experience embodies no labour time and is not alienable by its producer in the way a product is.

The alienated standing takes two forms. As a general equivalent it measures, circulates, and is indifferent to what it purchases; as an underwriting it binds the recommender's future to conduct they will not control. The first excludes and the second encumbers; the first is debased by over-issuance, whose cost falls on every holder, and the second impaired by default, whose cost falls on the signatory alone. This explains why the same party writes uniformly favourable accounts and declines to write at all. Three consequences follow. Disclosure theory predicts that voluntary disclosure unravels toward candour, and references conspicuously fail to unravel, because the unravelling logic bears on content while the instrument's force is separable from it, so the content compresses while the market in signatures thickens. Decision weight then falls onto the standing of the issuer, which is the unequally distributed quantity, and at the limit of that distribution are people with access to no issuer at all. Correcting the instrument does not correct this, since reconstructing well where positions are numerous while reporting honestly that reconstruction is unavailable where they are few improves accuracy and worsens distribution.

Two levels of injustice resist different remedies. Under ideal transmission injustice remains and is irreducible to the conduct of any party; and transmission is one use among several, the others being permitted by the equivalent form rather than corrupting it. Neither level yields to better behaviour or to prohibition. The order described here presents candidates as competing on equal terms, and does so by means of an equivalent that is not equally available to them.

Keywords: alienation; general equivalent; recommendation; structural injustice; epistemic injustice; commensuration.

Discussion Paper Note

This paper is a preliminary discussion paper intended to share an evolving idea and invite further dialogue, criticism, revision, and independent development. Its definitions, distinctions, and constructions remain provisional. Circulation across scholarly and practical communities is part of the purpose of releasing the manuscript at this stage.

The author treats the viewpoints, concepts, and lines of reasoning presented here as contributions to a shared field of inquiry. Similar or related ideas may have appeared in other intellectual, cultural, and disciplinary traditions. The manuscript therefore states its known antecedents, separates the researcher-origin proposal from later formal reconstruction, and leaves historical priority open pending a systematic originality review.

The arguments should be understood as provisional and historically situated. Readers are encouraged to question, test, revise, extend, reinterpret, or independently develop the ideas presented here. Where appropriate, acknowledgment of this paper as one point of encounter in the development of a related idea is appreciated. Such acknowledgment records an intellectual route; the ideas themselves remain available for criticism, revision, and independent development.

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The author encourages good-faith discussion, criticism, independent inquiry, and responsible use of the material in this work. Separately from the licence's terms, the author asks users to consider foreseeable harms when adapting or applying the arguments made here. This paper argues that an instrument widely relied on is the site of injustices that its ordinary correction leaves in place. An argument of that shape can be used to justify withdrawing the instrument from those who depend on it, and Section 15 records evidence that removing information from a selection process can worsen outcomes for the people it was meant to protect. The paper states the conditions under which each of its findings holds, and the author asks that the findings and those conditions be applied together. This ethical request leaves the licence's permissions and legally authorized uses unchanged.

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Publication status of this draft. This working draft records an evolving stage of the author's position and is circulated for discussion. Definitions, section structure, statements, and numbering remain subject to revision. The paper transposes an argument from the critique of political economy to an object that is not a commodity, and Section 6.6 states what the transposition preserves and what it abandons; specialist review of that transposition, of the economic material, and of the material on structural injustice remains a future research stage, as does a systematic originality audit.

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Statement on the use of language models. The exploratory discussions and preparation of this paper involved Anthropic's Claude. The model supported exploratory dialogue, source discovery followed by verification against publisher, journal, governmental, and institutional pages, argumentative criticism, and drafting in LaTeX. Every source cited here was verified before it was written into the manuscript rather than after. The author selected the research question, directed and approved the theoretical commitments and the epistemic status of the claims, and bears sole responsibility for the manuscript, including its definitions, constructions, arguments, conclusions, and errors. Authorship credit remains with the human author. The access level and claim limit for every cited source are recorded in the accompanying literature audit.

Declared interest. The author is subject to procedures of the kind examined here, has been the subject of accounts written by others, and is an applicant in processes that rely on them. The paper is written as a general analysis of the circulation of shared experience, no individual process or person is described, and its findings are assessed against criteria stated in advance. The interest is declared because a paper arguing that an instrument distributes opportunity unjustly should say where its author stands with respect to that distribution.

Related research programme. This paper is project P007 and the seventh in a series on trust, neutrality, and the transmission of shared experience. Project P001 takes responsibility for the account of neutrality as the governance of a field of relational conditions; P002 for the individual-scale credibility problem; P003 for the procedure of reference-based selection; P004 for the ontology of the judged subject and for the finding that such instruments transmit a field of relational conditions rather than an account; and P005 for the duties of the issuing and receiving parties. The present paper takes responsibility for the derivation of a general equivalent in the circulation of shared

experience, for the account of what its occupation does to the party who occupies it, and for the distribution of the resulting injustices. The economy of circulation, the authority to interpret a shared experience, and the general theory of conversion between heterogeneous value systems belong to later projects in the series and are marked where they arise rather than argued here.

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1 Introduction

An institution that is about to decide something about a person asks somebody else to vouch for them. The request is ordinary and its object is unusual. What the institution wants goes beyond a fact about the candidate that could be looked up, and beyond a demonstration of skill that could be performed on demand. It wants what somebody learned about the candidate by working with them, which is to say what a relation between two people generated and which is available only from the positions those two people occupied.

This paper asks what circulates when such requests are met, and it begins by distinguishing the object from two others with which it is easily confused.

Classical political economy studies the circulation of goods, and its categories were built for objects that are produced, separable from their producer, and exchangeable. The economics of collateral-free lending studies the circulation of skill and productive capacity where no assessment reaches, and it was built for the problem of moving resources to people whom no institution can evaluate. What a reference circulates is neither a good nor a capacity. It is co-experience, and co-experience is generated in a relation, held by neither party alone, and available differently from each position within it.

That last property is the difficulty. Two accounts of the same candidate, written by parties who stood in different relations, are not two measurements of one quantity but two presentations from positions that afforded different things. They are, in the strict sense, heterogeneous, and heterogeneous things do not exchange directly against one another. A market in which every account had to be compared with every other, on its own terms, fails to scale.

Section 6 draws the consequence. An order of generalised circulation requires a general equivalent: one term withdrawn from the set of things being exchanged and installed as the measure of all of them. The equivalent arises without selection on merit and without adoption by decision. It is forced into existence by the requirement to circulate at all, and and whatever occupies the position acquires its properties by occupying it.

The paper's central claim is that in the circulation of shared experience this position is occupied by the standing of the recommender.

What follows from that occupation is the sense in which the title speaks of alienation. The recommender is a party to the relation whose product is being reported. In becoming the measure by which such products are made comparable, they are removed from the set of parties and installed opposite it. What circulates thereafter is their standing rather than their observation; the account they write is the justification offered for the movement rather than the thing that moves; and the relational labour by which the standing was accumulated becomes invisible in the same movement that makes the name liquid. Section 7 develops this, and it uses a reconstruction of alienation that severs the concept from any account of human essence, since the paper must say that a person is alienated into a form of credit while remaining free of a metaphysics of species-being [34].

The transposition is from the critique of political economy and the paper declares its shortfall rather than concealing it. Section 6.6 states what does not carry over. Co-experience embodies no labour time, arises outside any intention to exchange, and remains with the party who generated it, where a product is separable from its producer. A value-form derivation is being applied to something that is not a value, and a reader is entitled to know that before the conclusions are drawn.

Section 7 then distinguishes two forms of the alienated standing, because the evidence has been treated as one phenomenon and is two. As a general equivalent, the standing measures, circulates, and is indifferent to what it purchases. As an underwriting, it binds the recommender's future to the conduct of a person they will not control. The first alienation is an exclusion and the

second an encumbrance; the first is impaired by over-issuance and the loss falls on everyone holding the currency, while the second is impaired by default and the loss falls on the party who gave it. That distinction explains something otherwise puzzling: the same person writes accounts that are uniformly favourable and declines to write at all, and the two behaviours are rational under different forms of the same standing.

Four consequences are developed and each rests on a body of evidence stated at the strength that evidence supports.

Theory of voluntary disclosure predicts unravelling: where information is verifiable and disclosure is costless, disclosure should cascade toward candour, because a party who withholds is assumed to be withholding something bad [28, 53]. References conspicuously fail to unravel, and Section 10 explains why in terms stated as a premise in Section 2.3. The unravelling logic bears on content; the instrument's force is separable from its content; so the content compresses toward uniformity while the market in signatures thickens.

Where the signal no longer discriminates, the decision falls back on something else, and Section 11 argues that what it falls back on is the standing of the issuer. That is not a neutral substitution. Standing is precisely the quantity distributed unequally, so a uniform signal is not merely uninformative but distributively harmful.

Positions of observation are themselves unequally distributed, and cumulatively so [49, 13], with the consequence developed in Section 12 that some people have access to no issuer of relational credit at all.

And the correction of the instrument does not correct this. Section 13 states the result and its limits: an instrument that reconstructs well where positions are rich, and honestly reports that it cannot reconstruct where they are poor, has improved its accuracy and worsened its distribution. This is not a novel claim, and the paper concedes its owner. It is the established result that where signal quality differs by group, parties with identical underlying qualities receive systematically different outcomes from a decision-maker doing nothing worse than responding rationally to the information available [59, 3].

The paper's architecture follows two levels of injustice which resist different remedies, and the distinction is the reason the title speaks of pathologies in the plural.

Section 8 treats the ideal case. Where an account is honest, within the scope its author's access supports, and written by someone who genuinely observed what they report, injustice remains. Positions of observation were unequally available. The account is rendered in a register some candidates can supply and others cannot. The person judged holds a position on the co-experience that nobody collects. None of this is remediable by better conduct, because none of it is produced by conduct.

Section 9 treats the other level. Transmission is one use of the instrument among several. Accounts are given in exchange for future cooperation, in discharge of an obligation owed to a third party, or with no underlying relation at all. These are ordinarily treated as abuses of an instrument whose proper function is transmission, and the paper argues that the equivalent form permits them rather than being corrupted by them. An equivalent does not discriminate among the things it buys; that is what makes it an equivalent.

Neither level yields to the remedy usually proposed for it. Better behaviour leaves the first in place and prohibition leaves the second in place, because both follow from what is required to circulate co-experience at scale.

Where the paper's claims have prior owners they are conceded at the point they arise. The reconstruction of alienation without an essence is not the paper's [34]. The conversion of persons into transferable financial identity is documented history [41, 57]. The formal treatment of relationships as collateral exists [36]. The result on unequal signal quality is decades old [59, 3]. The account of

responsibility for an injustice with no identifiable wrongdoer is not the paper's either [74, 75]. What remains after these concessions is stated in Section 3.10.

Section 2 supplies the practice and the vocabulary. Section 3 locates the account and Section 4 states the method. Section 5 develops the framework's account of circulated standing, Section 6 derives the equivalent, and Section 7 states what its occupation does. Section 7 distinguishes the two forms. Section 8 and Section 9 treat the two levels of injustice. Section 10, Section 11, Section 12 and Section 13 develop the four consequences. Section 14 treats the absence of a record, Section 15 the evidence against the paper's own direction, and Section 16 the question of who is answerable. Section 17 states what the analysis returns to the wider framework, Section 18 records the limits, and Section 19 consolidates the position.

2 Background and Preliminaries

The role of this section is preparatory: it supplies the practice, the distributional facts, and the vocabulary that later sections use, and it advances no argument of its own. It stands before Section 3, which locates the account among existing literatures, and supplies the premises on which Section 6 and Section 7 depend, so that those sections need not restate results established elsewhere in this series. It is arranged in three parts. Section 2.1 describes the practice examined. Section 2.2 records what is known about access to those who issue accounts. Section 2.3 states the vocabulary and the three carried premises. Analysis begins in Section 5.

2.1 The Requirement of Vouching in Selection

Four features of the practice bear on the argument and each is used later.

The requirement is near-universal and the object is unusual. Academic admission, academic appointment, and much professional hiring require that somebody who has worked with the candidate say what they are like. What is asked for is an account of what a working relation contained, rather than a verifiable fact or a demonstrated capacity.

The accounts resist comparison on their face. Two accounts of one candidate are written by parties who stood in different relations, observed under different conditions, and had access to different things. Two accounts of two candidates were written by different parties altogether. The documents establish no common scale, and the receiving institution supplies none.

The weight an account carries tracks its author's standing. An account signed by a party of high standing in the relevant field counts for more than an account of the same content signed by a party of low standing. This is the ordinary understanding of those who solicit, write and read such accounts, and is openly held.

The instrument performs weakly at what it is said to do. Accounts of this kind relate positively but weakly to later outcomes [38]; agreement between two parties describing one candidate is lower than agreement between two accounts written by one party about different candidates [1]; and of a corpus of nearly seven thousand reference ratings, ninety-six per cent rated candidates above average and fewer than one per cent below [1]. In performance rating more generally, the variance attributable to the individual rater substantially exceeds that attributable to the person rated [66].

The persistence of a weakly performing practice is what one expects of a formal structure adopted for the legitimacy it confers and decoupled from the activity it purports to govern [51]. The differential language of such accounts is documented: letters written for women are shorter, contain more expressions of doubt, and describe their subjects in more communal terms [72, 43]. That explanation accounts for survival and answers a different question from this paper's. This paper asks what circulates.

2.2 Distribution of Access to Issuers

Two features of the distribution are recorded here and developed in Section 12.

Access to well-placed parties is cumulative. Advantage in recognition accumulates: those already eminent receive disproportionate credit, and small initial differences compound over a career [49, 50]. The general mechanism by which small differences become large inequalities across the life course is documented [13], and social ties are strongly homophilous, so that access to those who can vouch tracks existing position [46].

Exposure borne by those who vouch. Employers treat workers' connections as an asset [23], and those asked to refer sometimes withhold assistance in order to protect their own standing with the institution they would refer to [69]. The second finding matters for Section 7: the party who vouches exposes something of their own as well as conveying information.

Selection on the receiving side compounds the distribution, since employers have been found to weigh cultural similarity heavily and at times above productivity [63].

2.3 Vocabulary Carried from the Preceding Papers

The account uses a small vocabulary established across this series.

A *relation* is an ongoing process between parties rather than a state obtaining at a moment. The *generativity* of a relation is its capacity to continue producing outcomes, including outcomes no party can specify in advance; it is a property of the relation and not of either party.

Co-experience is what a relation generates between its parties: the undertakings, difficulties, judgments and understandings that arose in it and belong to neither party alone. A *relational position* is the standpoint from which a party stands in a relation, which fixes what of the relation is available to that party. A *projection* is an account of a co-experience given from one relational position, complete with respect to that position and partial with respect to the co-experience.

A *relational condition* is an arrangement whose presence or absence changes which relations can be formed or continued, and the *field* of a person is the set of relations available to them under the conditions then in place.

Three results of the preceding papers are carried as premises and are not re-argued.

The first is that a judgment of a person carries warrant with respect to the relation in which what it reports was exhibited, so that extending it to relations supplying different conditions is an error about scope rather than about accuracy.

The second is that instruments of this kind transmit a field of relational conditions rather than an account: they alter the relations available to the person in the receiving system, and they do so whether or not any account of a prior relation underlies them, the account being the justification offered for the alteration rather than the thing transmitted.

The third follows from the second and is the premise Section 10 and Section 9 both use. The force of such an instrument is *separable* from its content. That separability is one property with

two consequences: it is what allows the instrument to be given in exchange for consideration other than an account, and it is what allows a person no institution can assess to be admitted.

Two terms are introduced by this paper and defined where they are derived. The *general equivalent* in an order of circulation is the term excluded from the set of things exchanged and installed as the measure of all of them, and Section 6 derives its necessity. *Relational credit* is the standing that occupies that position in the circulation of shared experience, and Section 7 distinguishes its two forms.

3 Literature Review

The role of this section is to locate the account among existing literatures and to concede what those literatures already establish, so that later sections may claim only what remains. It supplies the sources on which Section 6 draws for its derivation, Section 7 for its diagnosis, and Section 13 for its central result, and it fixes the boundaries that Section 3.10 records.

It is arranged in nine parts and the order follows the argument rather than the chronology of the literatures. Section 3.1 states the tradition from which the central derivation is taken and Section 3.2 the reconstruction that permits its use without the original metaphysics. Section 3.3 and Section 3.4 treat the conversion of persons into transferable credit and the institution of vouching. Section 3.5 and Section 3.6 treat the distribution of access and the consequences of unequal signal quality. Section 3.7, Section 3.8 and Section 3.9 treat epistemic injustice, the suppression of grievance, and responsibility without a culprit. Section 3.10 states the boundary of the present contribution.

3.1 Alienation and the Critique of Political Economy

The paper takes an argument from the critique of political economy and should begin by saying which argument and from where.

Alienated labour. The account of estranged labour distinguishes the worker's alienation from the product of their labour, from the activity of labouring, from their species being, and from other human beings [45]. The first and fourth dimensions bear on this paper: something a party produced stands over against them as an alien thing, and the arrangement that effects this also alters that party's relation to others.

The form of value and the emergence of a general equivalent. The argument this paper transposes is not the account of alienated labour but the derivation of the money-form, which is presented in the third section of the first chapter of *Capital* rather than in the fourth [44]. Its structure is the one Section 6 follows. A simple relation of value expresses the value of one commodity in one other. Expanded, it expresses the value of one commodity in an indefinite series of others, and the expansion produces an incompleteness that cannot be repaired within the same form: there is no common expression, only an endless series. The general form arises by inversion, when one commodity is excluded from the series and made the term in which all the others express their value. The excluded commodity does not become the equivalent by any property of its own; it acquires the equivalent form by being placed in it.

Two features of that derivation are carried into Section 6. The equivalent is *compelled* rather than chosen, since generalised circulation cannot proceed without it. And the equivalent is *excluded* from the set it measures, so that occupying the position and being a member of the set are mutually exclusive.

Fetishism and reification. The adjacent argument, in the fourth section, holds that a definite social relation between people assumes the form of a relation between things [44]. The development of this into a general theory of reification holds that a relation between people takes on the character of a thing and thereby acquires an apparent objectivity that conceals its origin [42]. Both are relevant in form: the present paper describes a case in which what a relation generated circulates as though it were a thing.

Cautions attaching to the borrowing. The passage the paper borrows from is contested within its own tradition. The value-form reading of the first chapter is disputed at length [56], the section has also been dismissed from the opposite direction as dispensable, and the structure of the chapter's exposition is itself the subject of a specialist literature [71]. A paper that takes a derivation from a contested passage should say so rather than present the derivation as settled, and Section 6.6 states what the transposition preserves and what it abandons.

And the classical account of alienation carries a conception of human essence that this paper does not want and does not need. The next subsection supplies the reconstruction that removes it.

3.2 Reconstruction of Alienation without an Account of Essence

The concept of alienation fell out of use with the rejection of essentialist conceptions of human nature, and the reconstruction this paper relies on was undertaken to recover it.

On that reconstruction, alienation is *a relation of relationlessness*: it does not indicate the absence of a relation but is itself a relation, a deficient one, consisting in a distorted relation to oneself and to one's world that can be characterised as a failure to appropriate oneself or the world, to make them one's own [34]. The reconstruction is deliberately formal, severing the concept's link to a problematic conception of human essence while retaining its social-philosophical content.

Two features of it are load-bearing for this paper.

The first is what it permits. The paper claims that a person is alienated by being installed in the position of a general equivalent. On a formal account of alienation this claim can be made out by exhibiting the deficient relation and its structure, without any premise about what human beings essentially are.

The second is a constraint on what the paper may propose, and it bears on Section 18.3. On the same reconstruction, overcoming alienation does not mean returning to an undifferentiated state of oneness with oneself and the world; it too is a relation, a relation of appropriation [34]. It follows that the remedy for the condition described in Section 7 cannot be stated as the restoration of some prior unity between the recommender and the relation they report on. Section 18 records that the paper describes the condition and does not supply a relation of appropriation that would answer it.

A neighbouring reconstruction recasts reification as a forgetfulness of recognition, an antecedent recognitive stance lapsing into detached cognition of persons as things [31]. The present paper does not use it, because its diagnosis requires a prior recognitive substrate that the formal account does without, and the formal account is sufficient here.

3.3 Conversion of Persons into Transferable Credit

The paper's central mechanism has a documented history, and the concession is made here rather than after the mechanism is stated.

Nineteenth-century American commerce faced the problem of whom to trust at a distance and solved it institutionally, moving from credit judgments circulating informally through personal acquaintance to formalised intermediaries, interchanges and associations, which pressed businesses

toward standardised financial transparency and converted private character into transferable information about creditworthiness [57, 58]. The consumer counterpart is documented in detail: by converting individual reputations into brief written reports and later into ratings and scores, credit bureaus, whose first appearance dates from the 1870s, invented the modern concept of financial identity [41].

That is the mechanism the paper's title names, established as history. What is conceded is the general form: a person's standing among others is convertible into a transferable, comparable, circulating quantity, and the conversion is accomplished by an institution that has an interest in the comparability.

What is not established there is the transposition this paper makes. Section 7 concerns the conversion of the party who *vouches*, not the party assessed. The historical literature describes the subject of a credit report becoming a financial identity; this paper describes the author of an account becoming a measure.

The contemporary sociology of classification extends the historical material to the sorting of persons generally, holding that classificatory position shapes life chances while presenting itself as merit [24, 25], and the analysis of commensuration holds that rendering qualitative differences as quantities on a common scale is a social process that makes some aspects of what it measures invisible [20]. The second is the sociological cousin of Section 6 and differs from it in what it undertakes to explain: it describes what a common measure does, and the present paper asks why one must arise.

3.4 Collateral, Suretyship, and the Institution of Vouching

A second literature bears on the other form of the alienated standing and supplies its closest formal anchor.

Trust in the absence of formal enforcement has been modelled as informal contract enforcement over a social network, in which connections function as *social collateral*: the value of a relationship secures an obligation, because the threat of losing it enforces performance [36]. Among the applications the model names is the job-recommendation network, in which ties between employers and trusted recommenders reduce asymmetric information about candidates.

The concession and the difference should both be stated. The model establishes that relationships function as collateral and that recommendation is a case of it, which is a substantial part of what Section 7.4 claims. What it models as collateral is the *tie* between the parties. This paper's claim concerns the instrument: that an account operates as a transferable undertaking underwritten by the issuer's standing, so that what secures it is not the relationship between issuer and institution but the issuer's position in a wider order of circulation.

The anthropological literature on credit supplies the general point that lending, borrowing and indebtedness are moral before they are economic, and that entrustment is the social substrate on which credit rests [67, 68].

3.5 Cumulative Advantage and Access to Observers

The distribution of access to those who can vouch is unequal, and the literature establishes that inequalities of this kind compound rather than persist at constant size.

Recognition accrues disproportionately to those already recognised, so that the same contribution receives greater credit when made by an established party than by an unknown one, and the effect operates in collaboration and in independent multiple discovery alike [49]; the mechanism is subsequently developed as cumulative advantage in the accumulation of intellectual property and

standing [50]. The general form, by which small initial differences become large inequalities over a life course, is reviewed comprehensively [13].

Applied to this paper's object, the consequence is that access to well-placed issuers is not distributed once but accumulates: those who have had access acquire the standing that attracts further access. Homophily in social ties supplies the mechanism by which that access tracks existing position [46], and the referral literature establishes both that employers treat employees' connections as an asset [23] and that those in a position to refer sometimes decline in order to protect their own standing [69].

The last finding is used twice. In Section 7.4 it is evidence that the party who vouches exposes something of their own, and in Section 14 it is evidence that declining is a real and frequent option whose exercise leaves no record.

3.6 Statistical Discrimination under Unequal Signal Quality

The paper's result on the distribution of improvements is established in economics, and this subsection concedes it in the form the paper will use.

The relevant model holds that two groups with identical underlying distributions of the quality being assessed will nonetheless receive systematically different treatment where the assessor has better information about one than the other [59]. The formal development shows that where signals are noisy but unbiased, a decision-maker responding rationally to the information available treats applicants of equal *expected* quality alike while treating applicants of equal *actual* quality differently, the difference tracking the precision of the signal available for each group [3]. A parallel model derives the disparity from self-fulfilling employer beliefs rather than from signal precision [6].

Three qualifications belong with the concession and each constrains Section 13.

The first is that the modern characterisation locates the operative property in the failure to identify signals from underlying qualities rather than in informativeness as such, so the gloss on which one group's signal is simply noisier should be handled with care too far [8].

The second is that the direction of the result is not uniform. Where precision is improved specifically for the group about which information is poorest, disparities narrow rather than widen. The strong claim that any improvement in accuracy worsens distribution is therefore false, and Section 13.3 states the weaker claim the paper defends.

The third concerns a neighbouring literature that is often assimilated to this one and should not be. Formal results in algorithmic fairness establish that calibration and equality of error rates across groups cannot in general be satisfied together where base rates differ [37, 9]. These are incompatibilities among fairness criteria rather than demonstrations that accuracy improvements worsen distribution, and the paper cites them as evidence that formal tensions of this family are real and well understood, not as its own result.

3.7 Epistemic Injustice and the Distribution of Credibility

This paper takes responsibility for the treatment of epistemic injustice in the series, the two preceding papers having deferred it here.

The foundational account distinguishes two kinds. *Testimonial injustice* occurs when a hearer accords a speaker less credibility than they are due owing to prejudice attaching to the speaker's identity, a deficit that operates prior to and independently of any assessment of what was said. *Hermeneutical injustice* occurs when a gap in the collective resources for interpretation leaves someone unable to render an important area of their experience intelligible, a condition whose structural

precondition is hermeneutical marginalisation, the unequal participation of some groups in generating the shared meanings by which experience is understood [26]. The remedies proposed are corrective virtues in the hearer.

Four developments bear on this paper and the first is the one it most needs.

Credibility is comparative, so that an excess granted to some entails a deficit suffered by others, from which it follows against the foundational account that credibility excess is itself a form of epistemic injustice [47, 48]. Section 11 uses this directly: where the content of accounts ceases to discriminate and weight falls onto the standing of their authors, the excess accorded to well-placed issuers is not epistemically innocent.

A speaker may pre-emptively curtail their own testimony where the audience is unable or unwilling to receive it and the testimony is risky, which is described as testimonial smothering and analysed alongside contributory injustice as a form of epistemic oppression [14, 15]. The refusal of dominant knowers to draw on the interpretive resources of the marginalised is analysed as an actively maintained rather than merely passive ignorance [60]. And the argument that epistemic injustice must be addressed through institutional design rather than through individual virtue alone [4] is congenial to a paper whose injustice has no identifiable individual wrongdoer.

Section 8 places this material where the paper needs it, which is in the analysis of the ideal case: credibility deficits and hermeneutical marginalisation operate where every party is conducting themselves properly.

3.8 Emergence and Suppression of Grievance

A literature on why complaints are not made bears on what an institution can know about its own failures.

The classical treatment describes three transformations through which an injurious experience must pass before it becomes a dispute: it must be perceived as injurious, blame must be attributed, and a claim must be made to the party held responsible. Most injurious experiences never complete the sequence, so that disputes reaching an institution are a small fraction of the events that could have matured into them [22].

Organisational work supplies the mechanism and the consequence. Employees withhold concerns where they anticipate negative consequences, producing a climate of silence, and management then reads the absence of complaints as the absence of problems [55, 54]. Where exit is available and voice is costly, voice atrophies [29]. And the institutional processing of complaints has been studied directly: complaints are absorbed, delayed and outlasted, doors close on those who make them, and keeping the process behind closed doors prevents a record of resistance from being formed [2].

The last point is what Section 14 requires. The absence of a record is not a byproduct of the arrangement but among its effects, and an arrangement that generates no record of its failures will be assessed on the evidence it generates.

Empirical work on what follows the raising of a grievance completes the picture: those who voice resistance to mistreatment face both work and social retaliation, in forms depending on the relative positions of the parties, and health costs attach to silence as well [11].

3.9 Structural Injustice and Responsibility without a Culprit

The paper describes an injustice that no party intends and to which many parties contribute, and an account of responsibility for injustices of that shape already exists.

On that account, structural injustice arises when many agents act within accepted rules and norms in ways that jointly place some people under threat of domination or deprivation, so that no

Table 1: Antecedent literatures and contribution boundaries

Literature	Licensed role	Boundary of the present contribution
Critique of political economy	The derivation of a general equivalent, compelled and excluded from the set it measures [44]; estranged labour [45]; reification [42]	Supplies the derivation. Its object is a commodity and the present object is not, which Section 6.6 states.
Reconstruction of alienation	A formal account requiring no conception of essence [34]	Supplies the licence and constrains the remedy, since appropriation rather than restored unity is what would answer the condition.
History of credit	Reputation converted into transferable financial identity [41, 57]	Concerns the subject of a report. The present paper concerns the author of an account.
Social collateral	Relationships as collateral, with recommendation among its applications [36]	Models the tie. The present claim concerns the instrument and the issuer's position in an order of circulation.
Cumulative advantage	Compounding of recognition and access [49, 13, 46]	Supplies the distribution. It does not ask what is being distributed.
Statistical discrimination	Unequal signal quality yielding unequal outcomes from identical distributions [59, 3]	The result is theirs. The paper applies it to corrections of an instrument and states the weaker claim that survives.
Epistemic injustice	Credibility deficit and hermeneutical marginalisation [26]; credibility excess as injustice [47]	Applied here to the ideal case, and to the displacement of weight onto the standing of issuers.
Grievance and silence	Failure of injuries to become disputes [22]; silence read as absence of problems [55]; institutional absorption of complaint [2]	Supplies the mechanism by which the arrangement generates no record of its own failures.
Structural injustice	Responsibility without a culprit [74, 75]	Supplies the model of responsibility, which the paper adopts rather than reconstructs.

single agent can be identified as its author. Responsibility for it is therefore not the backward-looking liability appropriate to a wrong with a wrongdoer, but a forward-looking, shared and political responsibility discharged through collective action to change the structure [74, 75]; the analysis of the several faces of oppression in the same programme supplies its taxonomy [73].

The concession is made here and Section 16 builds on the model rather than restating it. The objection that must be met there is that a responsibility so described yields no assignable duties, which has been pressed directly [76].

The normative position closest to this paper holds that the point of equality is the elimination of oppression and the establishment of relations in which people stand as equals, so that distributions matter for the relations they sustain rather than in themselves [5], a view developed as an ideal of social and political relationship rather than of distributive pattern [65]. The ideal the paper's mechanism defeats is fair equality of opportunity, on which those of equal talent and equal willingness to use it should have equal prospects irrespective of social origin [62].

3.10 Boundary of the Present Contribution

Table 1 records what each literature licenses and where the contribution begins.

Five positions are left unoccupied by the literatures surveyed.

No treatment located here derives the necessity of a general equivalent in the circulation of shared experience, or identifies the standing of the party who vouches as what occupies that position.

None distinguishes two forms of that standing, as a measure that circulates and as an undertaking that binds, or draws the consequence that the two are impaired by opposite behaviours.

None holds that the uses of such an instrument other than transmission are permitted by the form of the equivalent rather than being corruptions of a transmissive function.

None names the population that has access to no issuer of relational credit at all, though the components of the condition are documented.

And none states that the injustice remaining under ideal transmission is irreducible to the conduct of any party.

The claim is that these five are unoccupied, not that their components are unprecedented; the components are conceded above.

A terminological caution belongs here. *Credit*, *currency*, *liquidity*, *solvency* and *underwriting* all carry established and entirely different technical meanings in finance and accounting. This paper uses them for structural properties of a standing that circulates, claims no continuity with their financial senses, and asserts no magnitude that would make the analogy quantitative. *Reputation capital* is likewise an established term in adjacent literatures and is not used here.

A bounded search for prior use of the paper's own formulations, covering the derivation of a general equivalent in the circulation of shared experience, the distinction between a standing that measures and a standing that underwrites, and the naming of a population with access to no recognised issuer, returned no related scholarly use. Applications of the value-form derivation to non-commodity objects were sought and none bearing on accounts of persons was located. A bounded search establishes that a formulation was not found rather than that it does not exist, and a systematic originality audit remains outstanding and is recorded in Section 18.

Two questions arising here belong to later projects in this series and are marked where they arise rather than argued: the economy of circulation, which concerns how such standing accumulates and what it is exchanged against at scale; and the authority to interpret a shared experience, which concerns who may determine what a relation contained. A third, the general theory of conversion between heterogeneous value systems, is the subject of the final project in the series, and Section 6 is one instance of the problem it addresses.

4 Method and Conditions of Disconfirmation

The role of this section is methodological: it states the form of the paper's central argument, the terms on which a derivation is borrowed from another domain, and the conditions under which the account should be withdrawn. It governs Section 6, whose transposition it licenses and bounds, and Section 18.1, which reports the status of each condition stated here.

It is arranged in three parts. Section 4.1 states the obligations attaching to the borrowing. Section 4.2 states the organising distinction between the two levels of injustice, which Section 8 and Section 9 develop. Section 4.3 states six conditions of disconfirmation.

4.1 Transposition of a Derivation to a Different Object

The paper's central move is a transposition. An argument developed to explain why generalised commodity exchange requires a money-form is applied to the circulation of something that is not a commodity, and both halves of that description carry obligations.

The obligation on the borrowing is to state what the argument requires and whether the new object supplies it. The derivation requires that the things to be circulated be heterogeneous, that direct exchange between them be insufficient for generalised circulation, and that the resulting incompleteness be repairable only by excluding one term and installing it as the measure of the rest. Section 6 argues that co-experience satisfies the first two and that the third follows. Section 6.6 states what the new object fails to supply and what is therefore abandoned.

The obligation on the application is to keep the derivation's conclusions within the reach of its premises. The paper does not claim that co-experience has a magnitude, that the standing of issuers has a magnitude, or that anything here obeys a law of value. What it claims is structural: that a position exists, that it is compelled rather than chosen, and that occupying it has consequences for whoever occupies it.

4.2 Levels of Injustice Distinguished by the Remedies They Resist

The paper's findings are organised by which remedy they resist, and the organisation is a claim rather than a convenience.

The first level concerns what remains wrong when the instrument is used as it is said to be used: an account is honest, within the scope its author's access supports, and written by someone who observed what they report. Section 8 argues that injustice remains and that it is not produced by conduct, from which it follows that improving conduct does not remove it.

The second level concerns the uses of the instrument other than transmission. Section 9 argues that these are permitted by the form the standing takes rather than being deviations from a transmissive function, from which it follows that prohibiting them addresses instances rather than the condition that produces them.

A finding assigned to either level is falsified by showing that the corresponding remedy removes it, and Section 4.3 states this among the paper's conditions.

4.3 Conditions of Disconfirmation

The account should be narrowed or withdrawn under any of the following conditions.

First, if accounts of co-experience can be shown to circulate at scale without any term being installed as their measure, the derivation of Section 6 is unnecessary and the paper's central claim fails. The condition is not idle: an order in which every receiving institution formed its own judgment of every account on its own terms would satisfy it.

Second, if the weight an account carries can be shown to track the extent of its author's access to the candidate rather than the author's standing in a field, then the standing does not occupy the equivalent position and Section 7 is false.

Third, if the two forms distinguished in Section 7 do not predict different behaviour, or predict it in settings where it does not occur, the distinction is idle. The prediction stated in Section 7.8 is testable and is not tested here.

Fourth, if the injustice described in Section 8 is removed by improvements in the conduct of issuers and recipients, it is not irreducible to conduct and the first level collapses into the ordinary case for better practice.

Fifth, if the uses described in Section 9 disappear under prohibition without the instrument ceasing to function, they are corruptions rather than permitted forms and the second level fails.

Sixth, if improving the accuracy of the instrument can be shown to improve its distribution as well, Section 13 is false in the form stated there. The literature already establishes that this occurs under a specifiable condition, and Section 13.3 states the claim so as to accommodate it.

5 The Generative Relational Account of Circulated Standing

The role of this section is to state the framework's account of the object at issue and to fix the criteria against which the arrangement is later assessed. It supplies Definition 5.1, on which the derivation in Section 6 depends, and Claim 5.2, which identifies what is available to occupy the position that derivation produces. The criteria it states are those against which Section 8 finds the arrangement wanting in the ideal case.

It is arranged in four parts. Section 5.1 states the positional character of co-experience and defines heterogeneity. Section 5.2 distinguishes the two relational systems in which a party's access and a party's weight are generated. Section 5.3 states the requirement that what is generated jointly return to its generators. Section 5.4 states four criteria on an order of circulation.

5.1 Co-Experience and the Positions from Which It Is Observed

The framework may be stated in one sentence: it is a theory of how subject, meaning, value, creation, and normativity co-emerge through generative relational processes. Three consequences are used here.

What a relation produces is held by neither party. A working relation generates undertakings, difficulties, judgments and understandings that neither participant would have produced alone and that neither possesses afterwards as a person possesses a memory of a fact.

Access to what a relation generated is positional. Each party stands in the relation from somewhere, and that standpoint fixes what of the relation is available to them. The differences between standpoints run along several dimensions rather than along a single scale of completeness.

And an account of a co-experience is therefore a projection: complete with respect to the position from which it is given, partial with respect to what the relation generated, and not a degraded copy of anything.

The consequence for this paper is stated as a definition because Section 6 depends on it.

Definition 5.1 (Heterogeneity of projections)**.** Two projections of co-experience are *heterogeneous* when they are given from positions that afforded different things, so that neither can be expressed in terms of the other and no third term is supplied by either. Projections of distinct co-experiences, given by distinct parties, are heterogeneous in this sense by default.

Definition 5.1 is what makes the circulation problem a problem. It does not say that accounts cannot be compared; institutions compare them daily. It says that nothing internal to the accounts supplies the terms of comparison.

5.2 Generation of Standing within a Second Relational System

The party who writes an account holds a position in two relational systems and the distinction between them carries the paper's argument.

The first is the relation to the person judged, in which the co-experience was generated and from which the account is drawn. What that relation supplies is access: what the party was placed to observe, over what period, under what conditions.

The second is the relation to a field: to colleagues, institutions, publics and records, in which the party's standing accumulates. What that relation supplies is weight: how much an account signed by this party will count.

Claim 5.2 (Separate origins of access and weight)**.** Access and weight are generated in different relational systems and nothing connects them. A party may hold a great deal of the first with

respect to a given person and little of the second, or the reverse; and the conditions that produce weight tend to consume the time in which access would be acquired.

Claim 5.2 is established in the preceding papers of this series and is restated because Section 6 needs it. Its role here is to identify what is available to occupy the equivalent position. Access is particular to a relation and cannot be compared across relations; standing is already a quantity held in a field and already comparable within it. If some term must serve as the measure, standing is the term that can.

5.3 Return of Value to Those Who Generated It

The framework holds that value generated jointly should return to those who generated it, and that those who generate it hold a claim over the conditions under which it is produced. The second clause is inherited from an account of generative justice, which states the position in three limbs: a right to generate unalienated value and to participate directly in its benefits; a right of value generators to create their own conditions of production; and a right of communities of value generation to sustain paths for its circulation [18]. The first two limbs are taken; the third is not, since this paper concerns an act between particular parties rather than the design of a circulatory system.

Applied here, two things follow and both are developed later.

What accumulates to a party who writes accounts that are accepted was generated in relations that other parties co-produced, and it returns to the writer. Section 7.9 states this.

And the person judged has no say in the conditions under which the account of their own shared past is produced: who writes it, when, in what form, under what confidentiality, or against what questions. Section 8.4 states this as one of the injustices that survives ideal transmission.

5.4 Criteria the Account Imposes on an Order of Circulation

The account yields four criteria. They are stated here so that Section 8 onward assess the arrangement against a standard fixed in advance.

1. **Availability of positions of observation.** An order that transmits accounts of relations presupposes that relations affording observation were available to those it assesses, and it is answerable for the distribution of that availability.

2. **Participation of the co-producer.** Every party in whose relation a co-experience was generated holds a position on it, and an order that collects from one and not the other is transmitting a part while representing a whole.

3. **Return of what is generated.** What accumulates from the circulation of accounts should return to those in whose relations the reported experience was generated, and not solely to those who sign.

4. **Revisability of what is fixed.** An account given durable force should remain open to being reopened, and the conditions under which reopening is possible should themselves be preserved.

Two remarks. The criteria are requirements on an order of circulation rather than on any party's conduct, which is what allows Section 8 to find them unmet where every party behaves well. And the fourth is stated in the form the preceding paper in this series established, in which preserving the conditions of revision is part of the requirement rather than a courtesy owed to a future contestant.

6 Circulation of Co-Experience and the Emergence of a General Equivalent

The role of this section is to derive the paper's central result: that an order in which accounts of co-experience circulate at scale requires a general equivalent, and that the standing of those who vouch is what can occupy that position. It depends on Definition 5.1 and Claim 5.2 from Section 5, on the derivation conceded in Section 3.1, and on the obligations stated in Section 4.1. Its results are used by Section 7, which states what occupying the position does, and by Section 9, which draws the consequence for non-transmissive uses.

It is arranged in six parts. Section 6.1 distinguishes what is circulated here from goods and from productive capacity. Section 6.2 states the resulting incommensurability and Section 6.3 the limits of direct exchange. Section 6.4 derives the necessity of an equivalent and Section 6.5 states the exclusion that occupying the position entails. Section 6.6 states what the transposition abandons.

6.1 Objects of Circulation: Goods, Skills, and Co-Experience

Three things circulate in the arrangements this paper is placed among, and they differ in ways that matter for what a general equivalent must do.

Goods. The critique of political economy takes as its object things that are produced, separable from their producer, and exchanged [44]. A good is alienable in the strict sense: it passes from one holder to another, and the producer's relation to it ends when it does.

Skills and productive capacity. A second body of work concerns the movement of resources to people whose capacity no institution is placed to assess, where the difficulty is that the capacity is real and unverifiable and the remedy is a substitute for assessment [36]. What circulates in such arrangements is not the capacity, which stays where it is, but the entitlement to act on it.

Co-experience. What a reference circulates is neither. It is what a relation generated between two parties, held by neither alone, and available from each position within the relation as something different. It arises outside any intention to exchange, remains inseparable from the relation that generated it, and is held by no party in a form that could pass to another.

The differences bear directly on the argument. Section 6.6 states what follows from them for the transposition, and Section 6.2 states what follows immediately for circulation.

6.2 Positional Character of Co-Experience and Its Incommensurability

Under Definition 5.1, two projections of co-experience given from positions that afforded different things are heterogeneous: neither is expressible in terms of the other, and no third term is supplied by either.

Three features of the resulting incommensurability are distinguished here, since they are often run together.

The difficulty lies elsewhere than in the accounts being about different people. Two accounts of the same candidate, written by a supervisor and by a junior colleague, are heterogeneous in the same sense, because the positions afforded different things.

Nor does it lie in disagreement. Two parties may agree entirely about what occurred, and their accounts remain heterogeneous, because the question is what each was placed to observe rather than whether their reports conflict.

And it survives the accounts being longer, more careful, or better written. Fidelity to a position falls short of a common measure. A perfectly faithful account from one position remains an account from one position.

6.3 Limits of Direct Exchange between Heterogeneous Accounts

An order of circulation may be constructed in which each account is weighed on its own terms by whoever receives it. Orders of that kind exist and function at small scale: a department that knows every plausible referee personally can read each account against what it knows of its author.

Three features prevent that arrangement from generalising, and the third is the one the derivation turns on.

The number of comparisons grows with the number of accounts rather than with the number of candidates, since each account must be placed against each other account rather than against a common term.

The receiving party must possess, for each account, knowledge of what its author's position afforded. That knowledge is itself acquired relationally and is therefore subject to the same limits as the accounts.

The account must also travel, and an inscription travels because it has been made mobile without deforming, so that what circulates is the document rather than the circumstances that produced it [40]. And the arrangement supplies no way to place an account from an unfamiliar quarter. A receiving institution confronted with an account whose author it cannot place has no term in which to express what the account is worth, and therefore either discounts it entirely or accepts it entirely, neither of which is a comparison.

This is the incompleteness that the expanded form of value exhibits in the argument the paper borrows from: an indefinite series of particular expressions with no common expression among them [44]. Extending the series leaves it unrepaired.

6.4 The General Equivalent as a Condition of Generalised Circulation

The repair, in the argument borrowed, comes by inversion. One term is withdrawn from the set of things being exchanged and installed as the term in which all the others express their worth [44]. The withdrawn term acquires the properties of the position by being placed in it, rather than acquiring the position by any property that recommends it.

Claim 6.1 (Necessity of an equivalent)**.** An order in which heterogeneous accounts of co-experience circulate at scale requires a general equivalent: a term excluded from the set of accounts and installed as the measure in which their worth is expressed. The requirement arises from necessity rather than convenience. Without such a term the order is confined to the conditions of Section 6.3, in which accounts from unfamiliar quarters cannot be placed at all.

Claim 6.1 is a claim about what generalised circulation requires and not about anyone's intention. Nobody decides that a measure shall exist. The requirement is imposed by the attempt to circulate, and whatever comes to occupy the position does so because the position is there to be occupied.

Two candidates present themselves and one is disqualified by Claim 5.2.

The extent of an author's access might serve as the measure: an account resting on longer, closer, more varied observation counting for more. It cannot serve, because access is particular to a relation and resists comparison across relations, which is the incommensurability the measure was needed to repair. Access is a member of the set to be measured and is thereby disqualified as its measure.

The standing of the author can serve, because it is already a quantity held in a field and already comparable within it. The general condition under which impersonal and transferable measures are adopted has been described directly: they arise where personal authority is weak and judgment must travel among parties who do not know one another [61]. Two parties' standing can be compared without reference to any candidate, which is exactly the property the position requires.

6.5 Exclusion of the Equivalent from the Set It Measures

The feature of the borrowed derivation that matters most for this paper is that the equivalent is *excluded* from the set it measures.

Claim 6.2 (Exclusion)**.** The term installed as a general equivalent is thereby debarred from membership of the set whose worth it expresses. Occupying the equivalent position and being one of the things measured are mutually exclusive.

Claim 6.2 is what makes the argument of Section 7 structural rather than metaphorical. The party who vouches is, in the first instance, one of two parties to the relation whose product is being reported: a participant, a co-producer, one of the terms in the set. In coming to serve as the measure by which such products are made comparable, that party is placed opposite the set rather than within it.

Three consequences are recorded here and developed in Section 7.

The party's own position on the co-experience ceases to be what the arrangement is interested in, since what the arrangement now requires from them is a quantity rather than an account.

The account they write is retained but changes function: it becomes the justification offered for a movement rather than the thing that moves, which is the finding this series established on independent grounds.

And the exclusion holds for a party who continues to participate, since the order reads accounts for what the signature is worth whatever the signatory intends. A party whose accounts carry weight has a standing, and the standing is what the order uses.

6.6 Departures from the Commodity Form

The derivation has been transposed to an object it was not built for, and this subsection states what the object fails to supply. The paper's conclusions should be read as reaching no further than what survives.

Absence of an embodied labour time. The argument borrowed rests on a substance of value expressed by the form, and the magnitudes it develops are magnitudes of that substance [44]. Co-experience embodies no such substance. Everything here stands outside measurement in socially necessary labour time, and the paper claims no magnitude for what circulates. What is taken is the argument's *form* — the insufficiency of direct exchange, the inversion, the exclusion — and not its content.

Generation outside any intention to exchange. A commodity is produced in order to be exchanged, and that intention is part of what constitutes it as a commodity. Co-experience is generated in the course of relations entered for other reasons. The order of circulation examined here finds its object already in existence rather than calling it into being.

Retention by the party who generated it. A producer parts with a product, and the parting is complete. A party to a relation gives an account of what the relation generated and retains what they had. The instrument transfers nothing in the sense in which a sale transfers something, which is the finding this series reached from another direction.

The passage borrowed is contested in its own tradition. The value-form reading of the chapter this derivation comes from is disputed at length [56], and the section has been dismissed from the opposite direction as dispensable. This paper takes no position in that dispute. It uses the derivation's structure, which is common to the readings, and it does not rely on any claim about the determination of magnitude, which is what the dispute concerns.

Elements surviving the departures. Three things, and they are what Section 7 onward use. (1) **Heterogeneous things do not circulate at scale without a common term.** (2) **The common term is compelled by the attempt to circulate rather than chosen for its merits.** (3) **Whatever occupies the position is excluded from the set it measures.** Each of these stands free of any theory of value and can be assessed on its own.

7 Forms Taken by the Alienated Standing

The role of this section is to state what occupation of the equivalent position does to the party who occupies it, and to distinguish two forms the resulting standing takes. It depends on Section 6, which established that a general equivalent is compelled, that the standing of those who vouch can occupy the position, and that occupying it excludes the occupant from the set measured; and on Section 3.2, which supplies the account of alienation used. Its distinction between two forms is used by Section 9.6 to sort the pathologies and by Section 10.3 to explain the persistence of an uninformative instrument.

It is arranged in nine parts. Section 7.1 states the condition and Section 7.2 the separation it produces. Section 7.3 and Section 7.4 describe the two forms. Section 7.5, Section 7.6 and Section 7.7 state how the forms differ in their alienation, in the properties they make valuable, and in what impairs them. Section 7.8 states a testable prediction and Section 7.9 records a consequence deferred to a later project.

7.1 Occupation of the Equivalent Position

The condition can now be stated in the vocabulary of Section 3.2.

Alienation on the reconstruction adopted here is a relation of relationlessness: not the absence of a relation but a deficient one, consisting in a failure to appropriate oneself or one's world [34]. Identifying such a relation requires exhibiting its structure and nothing about human essence.

Claim 7.1 (Alienation by occupation of the equivalent position)**.** A party who stood in a relation, and whose standing comes to serve as the measure by which accounts of such relations are made comparable, stands in a deficient relation to what that relation generated. They remain a party to it and are, in the order of circulation, placed opposite the set of which their own experience is a member. What the order requires of them is a quantity; what they hold is a position on a relation; and the arrangement is indifferent to the second.

Three features of Claim 7.1 distinguish it from a complaint about being used.

The condition consists in something other than the party being treated badly. They are ordinarily treated very well: their signature is sought, their time is solicited, and their standing grows by the transaction. The deficiency is in the relation between what they hold and what is taken from them.

The condition arises without choice and survives any intention to escape it. A party may resolve to write only what they observed, at whatever length the observation supports; the order will still read the account for what the signature is worth. Occupation of the position is effected by the order rather than by the occupant.

And the condition attaches to the position rather than to the person. Whoever comes to occupy it acquires its properties, which is the content of the observation in Section 6.4 that the equivalent acquires the properties of the position by being placed in it.

7.2 Separation of the Signature from the Observation

The occupation described in Section 7.1 produces a separation, which is the separation stated as a premise in Section 2.3.

The instrument carries two things: an account of what a relation contained, and the standing of the party who signs it. Under Claim 7.1 the order is interested in the second, since the second is what supplies the measure. The account is retained, is often read, and is often written with care; but its function is to justify the movement rather than to constitute it.

The competing account treats such instruments as signals whose informational content is what they carry [70], and the present claim is incompatible with it in one respect: on a signalling account an instrument with no content conveys nothing. The evidence that the two are separable was established in the preceding papers and is restated here as a premise: instruments of this kind function where no relation underlies them at all, and where they do, nothing in the document records the fact. That is possible only where the force of the instrument resides somewhere other than its content.

7.3 The Standing as General Equivalent

The alienated standing takes two forms, distinguished here because they have opposite properties and are damaged by opposite behaviours. Section 7.7 states the consequence of the difference.

In the first form the standing functions as a general equivalent. It measures: an account signed by this party is worth so much relative to an account signed by that one. It circulates: the party's name moves between institutions, fields, and countries, and is recognised in each. It is spent in the present: the transaction is completed when the account is accepted, and nothing further is owed. And it is *indifferent to what it purchases*, which is the property Section 9 takes up, since a measure that discriminated among the things it measured would fail as a measure.

Two features of practice follow directly.

The collapse of a set of accounts onto the one signed by the most eminent name is what an order operating on a general equivalent should be expected to do, since that name is the most widely recognised term and therefore the most liquid.

And accounts inflate. Where the standing is what is being read, nothing presses the content to discriminate, and the register that costs the signatory least is the favourable one. The corpus evidence records the result: of nearly seven thousand reference ratings, ninety-six per cent above average and fewer than one per cent below [1].

7.4 The Standing as Underwriting

In the second form the standing functions as an undertaking. The party who signs assumes an exposure to the future conduct of a person they will not control: if the candidate fails, the signatory's judgment is available to be recalled, and the recalling is done by parties whose regard constitutes the standing.

Three features distinguish this form from the first.

It is future-directed. The standing is pledged rather than spent, and the transaction is not completed when the account is accepted.

It is particular. What is at stake is this signatory's exposure and not the worth of signatures generally.

And it is the form that the formal literature on vouching describes. Trust without formal enforcement has been modelled with network connections serving as collateral, the value of the relationship securing performance, with the recommendation network among the model's named applications [36]. The difference stated in Section 3.4 holds: that model secures the undertaking with the tie between the parties, and the present claim is that the undertaking is secured by the signatory's position in a wider order.

Two features of practice follow, and they are the ones the first form does not explain.

Parties decline to write. Those in a position to refer sometimes withhold assistance in order to protect their standing with the institution they would refer to [69], which is intelligible as an exposure being avoided and obscure as a currency being withheld.

And parties hedge. An account that commits to less exposes its signatory to less, which is a rational response to an undertaking and an idle one in a currency.

7.5 Exclusion and Encumbrance as Distinct Alienations

The two forms alienate differently, and naming the difference is the section's central result.

Claim 7.2 (Exclusion and encumbrance)**.** As a general equivalent, the standing alienates by *exclusion*: the party is removed from the set of parties to the co-experience and installed opposite it as its measure. As an underwriting, the standing alienates by *encumbrance*: the party's future is bound to the conduct of another person over whom they have no control. The first takes a position away; the second attaches a liability.

Claim 7.2 matters because the two conditions require different descriptions and admit different responses. A party excluded from a set is thereby displaced without being burdened, and a party encumbered is burdened without being displaced. A given signatory may be both, and ordinarily is.

7.6 Liquidity and Solvency as Distinct Properties

The two forms make different properties of a signatory valuable, and the distinction resolves an observation that has been recorded in this series without explanation.

Under the first form what matters is *liquidity*: how widely the name is recognised, and therefore how readily an account bearing it is accepted anywhere. Eminence is liquidity.

The distinction is close to one already drawn in careers research, between guidance offered to a person and advocacy exercised on their behalf, only the second of which is associated with advancement [33]. Under the second form what matters is *solvency*: how much exposure the signatory can absorb, and therefore how much their undertaking is worth to a party who may need

to recall it. Solvency depends on the signatory's continuing relation with the receiving institution, since it is that institution which would do the recalling.

The observation these explain is that a moderately eminent party who deals with an institution repeatedly may count for more with that institution than a famous stranger. Under the first form this is anomalous, since the stranger's name is more liquid. Under the second it is expected, since the repeat player is more solvent: their exposure is real and the institution can act on it.

7.7 Debasement through Over-Issuance and Impairment through Default

The two forms are damaged by opposite behaviours, and this is the section's most useful result because it explains conduct that otherwise looks inconsistent.

A general equivalent is debased by *over-issuance*. Where every signatory writes favourably, a favourable account conveys nothing, and the loss falls on every holder of the currency: each signature is worth less because all signatures are given freely. The cost of any signatory's generosity falls elsewhere, and each has reason to be generous.

An undertaking is impaired by *default*. Where a signatory's candidate fails conspicuously, the loss falls on that signatory and on no one else. Each therefore has reason to limit exposure by declining, hedging, or writing without commitment.

Claim 7.3 (Opposite pressures on the same party)**.** The same party has reason to issue freely and reason to withhold, because the two reasons attach to different forms of the same standing. Over-issuance is rational under the equivalent form, where its cost is borne collectively, and irrational under the underwriting form, where its cost is borne individually. The observed combination of uniformly favourable accounts and widespread reluctance to write is therefore the joint operation of two forms rather than inconsistent conduct.

Claim 7.3 accounts for a pattern that the preceding papers in this series recorded from both sides without joining them: the register of accounts is inflated almost without exception, and parties nonetheless decline to write, hedge, and withdraw from disclosure where exposure is made explicit.

7.8 Conditions under Which Each Form Predominates

The distinction yields a prediction, and the paper states it as testable rather than as established.

Claim 7.4 (Predominance)**.** The equivalent form predominates where the signatory does not expect to be called back: where the receiving institution is one they will not deal with again, where the outcome will not be observable to them, or where the attribution of a later failure to their account is impractical. The underwriting form predominates where signatory and institution are repeat players who will meet again and where outcomes are observable.

Claim 7.4 predicts that the same party behaves differently toward different receiving institutions: freely toward those they will not encounter again, cautiously toward those with whom they have a continuing relation. The prediction is testable on existing corpora and is not tested here; Section 18 records this among the paper's untested claims.

7.9 Invisibility of the Relational Labour That Produced the Standing

One further consequence of the occupation belongs here, and it connects the section to the criteria of Section 5.4.

A signatory's standing was accumulated. It was produced in relations with colleagues, students, collaborators and institutions, over time, through work that other parties co-produced. Under

Section 5.3 what is generated jointly should return to those who generated it, and those who generate it hold a claim over the conditions of its production [18].

What the order of circulation registers is the standing as a quantity. It leaves unrecorded how the quantity was accumulated and with whom, and the parties in whose relations it was generated appear nowhere in the transaction. The name becomes liquid in the same movement by which the relations that produced it become invisible.

This paper records the point and does not develop it. How such standing accumulates, what it is exchanged against at scale, and what returns to whom are the subject of the political-economy project in this series.

8 Injustice under Ideal Transmission

The role of this section is to state the first of the two levels distinguished in Section 4.2: the injustice that remains where the instrument is used as its defenders describe. It assesses the arrangement against the criteria fixed in Section 5.4 and draws on the epistemic-injustice material conceded in Section 3.7. Its result pairs with that of Section 9, the two together closing the remedies of improved conduct and of prohibition.

It is arranged in five parts. Section 8.1 specifies the case. Section 8.2, Section 8.3 and Section 8.4 identify three injustices remaining in it. Section 8.5 argues that what remains arises independently of conduct, and states the qualifications that bound the claim.

8.1 Specification of the Ideal Case

The ideal case is specified here without qualification, so that Section 8.5 may be assessed against it.

The party who writes stood in a genuine working relation to the person judged and observed what they report. The account is accurate: what it says occurred, occurred. It is within scope: nothing is asserted that the relation did not afford, and the conditions of access are stated. The account is written without regard to what the writer might gain, and is neither inflated nor withheld. The receiving party reads it carefully, establishes its scope before relying on it, and preserves what a later revision would require.

This is the instrument operating as its defenders describe it. The claim of this section is that injustice remains under those conditions, and that no improvement in the conduct of any party removes it; Section 8.5 states the two qualifications that bound the claim.

8.2 Unequal Distribution of Positions of Observation

An account can be written only by someone who was placed to observe, and positions of observation are not equally available.

A candidate who worked in a well-staffed setting, on collaborative projects, under several supervisors, alongside junior colleagues and external partners, was observed from many positions. A candidate who worked alone, or under a single supervisor who has since become unavailable, or in a setting where no one held a position from which the work was visible, was observed from few or none. The difference concerns what their relations afforded rather than what those relations generated.

The distribution compounds rather than holding constant. Recognition accrues disproportionately to those already recognised [49, 50], small initial differences compound across a career [13], and social ties are homophilous, so that access to those positioned to observe tracks position already held [46].

Under the first criterion of Section 5.4 an order that transmits accounts of relations is answerable for the availability of the relations it transmits accounts of. In the ideal case it is not answerable for anything any party did.

8.3 Legibility of an Account and the Register It Requires

An account must be written in a form the receiving institution can read, and the requirement is distributed as unevenly as the rest.

The genre has conventions: what counts as praise, what degree of enthusiasm is ordinary, which reservations are read as fatal and which as candour. A writer inside the convention produces an account that is read as intended. A writer outside it produces an account that is read as something else: reserve as coldness, precision as faint praise, unfamiliar emphasis as omission.

The relevant analysis is of hermeneutical injustice: a gap in the collective resources for interpretation may leave someone unable to render an area of their experience intelligible, and its structural precondition is unequal participation in generating the shared meanings by which experience is understood [26]. What is at issue here is the second, and it operates on the writer as well as on the person judged: a party whose professional culture did not form the convention is marginalised in the production of the terms in which their observations must be expressed.

The refusal of those inside a convention to draw on the interpretive resources of those outside it has been analysed as actively maintained rather than merely passive [60]. Section 8.3 requires only the weaker condition, since the ideal case specified in Section 8.1 supposes no such refusal.

8.4 Absence of the Co-Producer from the Transmission

The person judged is one of two parties to the relation being reported, holds a position on it that no other party occupies, and contributes nothing.

Under the second criterion of Section 5.4 an order that collects from one party and not the other transmits a part while representing a whole. Under the third, and under the second limb of the account of generative justice from which that criterion is partly inherited, those who generate value hold a claim over the conditions under which it is produced [18]. The person judged has no say over who writes, when, in what form, at what length, under what confidentiality, or against what questions.

The consequence in the ideal case is specific. The defect lies elsewhere than in accuracy, which is stipulated. It is that an interpretation of a co-produced past is fixed and given institutional force by one of its two authors, and that the arrangement contains no place for the other. Accuracy leaves the account no less unilateral.

Credibility operates here as well, and comparatively. An excess accorded to some entails a deficit suffered by others [47], so that where the account of the party with standing is credited as a matter of course, the account the other party would have given, were it collected, would be credited less.

8.5 Irreducibility of the Residue to Conduct

The findings of Section 8.2 through Section 8.4 support the following.

Claim 8.1 (Irreducibility)**.** The injustice remaining under ideal transmission arises independently of the conduct of any party and survives improvements to it. The distribution of positions of observation is settled before any account is written; the register in which accounts must be composed is a property of a professional culture and not of a writer; and the absence of the co-producer is a feature of the procedure rather than an omission by anyone within it.

Claim 8.1 is what makes the first level a level rather than a list. It states that a whole family of remedies is misaddressed: training, codes, guidance, exhortation, and the duties developed in the preceding paper in this series all bear on conduct, and conduct is not what produces this.

Two qualifications bound the claim.

Conduct remains relevant. Bad conduct adds injustice to what is described here, and the preceding paper's duties remain worth discharging. The claim is that discharging them fully leaves this residue.

And the residue admits of remedy. What follows is that its remedy lies in the order of circulation rather than in the parties to it, which is what makes the responsibility question of Section 16 the form the paper's normative conclusion takes.

9 Forms of Exchange Permitted by the Equivalent

The role of this section is to state the second of the two levels distinguished in Section 4.2: the uses of the instrument other than transmission, and their relation to the form of the standing. It depends on Claim 6.1 and Claim 6.2 from Section 6, and on the two forms distinguished in Section 7. Its result pairs with Claim 8.1 of Section 8.

It is arranged in six parts. Section 9.1 states the position to be displaced. Section 9.2, Section 9.3 and Section 9.4 describe three non-transmissive uses. Section 9.5 states the property that permits them, and Section 9.6 sorts the pathologies by the form of the standing to which each attaches.

9.1 Transmission of Co-Experience as One Form among Several

The instrument is ordinarily described as having a function, transmission, and a set of abuses. The description is natural and this section argues that it misdescribes.

What the order of circulation requires from the party who signs is a quantity: their standing, expressed in the acceptance of an account. What the party supplies alongside it may be an account of a relation they observed. It may also be something else. The order registers the quantity in each case, because the quantity is what the position was created to supply.

Section 9.5 states this as the operative property. Section 9.2 through Section 9.4 describe three forms that supply takes.

9.2 Exchange for Future Cooperation and Access

An account may be given on terms. The terms are ordinarily unstated and sometimes stated: that the person will collaborate once established, will bring the signatory into work conducted from the new position, will supply access to resources acquired there, or will remain associated in ways that continue to benefit the signatory.

Two features of the exchange are recorded here.

The exchange proceeds within the instrument's ordinary operation. The signatory supplies the quantity the order requires; the order registers it; the transaction completes. Every step of the procedure is completed.

And the consideration received is something other than an account. It is a future relation. What has been exchanged is standing against access, which is an exchange the order's form permits.

The circulation and accumulation this describes belong to the political-economy project in this series and are not analysed here. Section 9.5 requires only that such exchanges are possible.

9.3 Discharge of an Obligation Owed Elsewhere

An account may be given through the person it concerns rather than to them.

A signatory may write because the candidate's supervisor is owed a favour, because a colleague asked, because an institution expects it, or because a debt incurred years earlier is now being called. In each case the account moves in settlement of a relation to which the person judged is not a party.

The person judged benefits, and their benefit is incidental. What is being settled is an obligation between others, and the candidate is the instrument of its settlement rather than its subject.

This form is invisible in the document, as the others are: an account written from observation reads identically to one written in settlement, and the receiving institution registers the same quantity in both cases.

9.4 Issuance without an Underlying Relation

The limiting case has been examined in the preceding paper in this series and is restated here for what it shows about the equivalent form.

A candidate is told to draft the account and the signatory will sign it, or to supply a record from which it will be written. The document reports no relation. The instrument functions as any other: it is accepted, weighed, and produces the same effect.

Under the account of this paper the case is expected rather than anomalous. The order requires a quantity and the signatory supplies it. The account is the justification offered for the movement, and a justification may be thin, formulaic, or supplied by the party it concerns while the movement proceeds.

9.5 Indifference of the Equivalent to What It Purchases

The three preceding subsections have a single explanation.

Claim 9.1 (Indifference)**.** A general equivalent treats alike the things it is exchanged against; a measure that discriminated among what it measured would not serve as a measure. The uses of the instrument other than transmission are therefore permitted by the form the standing takes, and are not corruptions of a transmissive function.

Claim 9.1 has a consequence for remedy that parallels Claim 8.1 and completes the paper's pair.

Prohibition addresses instances. A rule against writing in exchange for future cooperation forbids one use; it leaves untouched the property that makes such uses available, which is that the order registers a quantity and is indifferent to what accompanied it. What would alter the property is a change in what the order registers, which is a change in the order rather than in the conduct of those within it.

Two qualifications belong with the claim.

Permissibility is a separate question. The preceding paper in this series argues that issuing without observation is a wrong on independent grounds, and nothing here disturbs that. The claim concerns what produces the availability of the use, not its permissibility.

And the uses fall unequally in their effects, which is the subject of the next subsection.

9.6 Pathologies Attaching to Each Form of the Standing

The two forms distinguished in Section 7 generate different pathologies, and sorting them is what the distinction is for.

Pathologies of the equivalent form. The transactional uses described in Section 9.2 and Section 9.3, the issuance without a relation of Section 9.4, the inflation of the register, and the collapse of a set of accounts onto its most liquid member all belong here. Each follows from the standing operating as a measure that circulates and is indifferent to what it purchases.

Pathologies of the underwriting form. Declining to write, hedging, writing without commitment, and withdrawing from disclosure where exposure has been made explicit belong here. Each follows from the standing operating as an exposure that can be called.

Distributive consequence of the sorting. The two families fall differently on those affected. The pathologies of the equivalent form advantage candidates who can obtain a liquid signature and disadvantage those who cannot, which is a distribution by access to standing. The pathologies of the underwriting form disadvantage candidates about whom a signatory would have to say something qualified, since a qualified account exposes the signatory more than silence does, and Section 14 finds silence to be invisible.

A remedy directed at one family therefore leaves the other in place, and a remedy suppressing both would suppress the instrument.

10 Failure of Unravelling and the Persistence of Uninformative Accounts

The role of this section is to explain an anomaly that the paper's own account resolves and that the economic literature leaves open: voluntary disclosure of verifiable information is predicted to cascade toward candour, and accounts of persons conspicuously fail to. It depends on the separability premise stated in Section 2.3 and on the account of the equivalent form in Section 7.3. Its conclusion supplies the premise of Section 11.

It is arranged in four parts. Section 10.1 states the prediction and the observed departure from it. Section 10.2 sets out three established conditions under which the cascade fails. Section 10.3 argues that those conditions explain the compression of content and leave the persistence of the instrument unexplained, and states what supplies the remainder. Section 10.4 names the end state of the compression.

10.1 The Unravelling Prediction for Verifiable Disclosure

The prediction is established and its mechanism is simple. Where a party holds verifiable information about quality, and disclosure is costless, a party with good information discloses in order to distinguish itself from the rest. The best of those remaining then faces the same incentive, and so on: the process cascades, non-disclosure comes to be read as evidence of the worst, and in equilibrium everything is disclosed [28, 53]. The general statement of the result and its range is available in review [52, 16].

The prediction bears on this paper's object because the practice looks like its domain. Parties hold information about candidates that receiving institutions want; the information is solicited; disclosure is cheap. Unravelling predicts that accounts should discriminate, since a party with a strong candidate has reason to say so in terms that separate that candidate from others, and the party with the next strongest has the same reason.

What is observed is the opposite. Of nearly seven thousand reference ratings, ninety-six per cent rated candidates above average and fewer than one per cent below [1], which is a signal issued at nearly full strength for almost everyone. The prediction fails, and the failure requires explanation.

10.2 Conditions under Which Unravelling Fails

The literature has established several conditions under which the cascade does not occur, and each is worth stating because the paper must say which one operates here.

Uncertainty about whether the party is informed. Where the receiving party cannot tell whether a discloser possesses information at all, silence ceases to be read as concealment of bad news, since it may indicate the absence of news. The cascade then halts and partial disclosure is sustained in equilibrium [17, 35].

Costly disclosure. Where disclosure imposes a cost on the discloser, parties with information only moderately favourable will withhold rather than pay the cost, and the same logic sustains partial disclosure [35]. The robustness of the unravelling result to conditions of this kind has been examined directly [21].

Unverifiability. Where the information resists verification, what occurs is an unverifiable message rather than disclosure in the relevant sense, which is analysed as cheap talk. In such settings the informative content that can be sustained in equilibrium is limited by the divergence of interest between the parties [12].

Each of these applies here to some degree. Receiving institutions can rarely tell whether a referee has information; writing costs time; and the content of an account is not verifiable. The cheap-talk analysis in particular predicts compression of the signal, and to that extent the observed uniformity is already explained.

10.3 Separability of Force from Content as the Operative Condition

The explanations recorded in Section 10.2 are insufficient, and the reason for their insufficiency is what this section adds.

If accounts were cheap talk and nothing more, the arrangement should progressively cease to matter. A message that carries no information in equilibrium is one that receiving institutions have reason to stop soliciting. What is observed instead is an instrument that carries almost no discriminating content and is nonetheless required, weighed, and consequential. A cheap-talk equilibrium explains the compression and leaves the persistence unexplained.

Claim 10.1 (Compression with persistence)**.** The content of accounts compresses toward uniformity while the instrument retains its force, because the force is separable from the content. What unravelling and cheap-talk analyses govern is the content, which behaves as those analyses predict. What carries the instrument is the standing of the signatory, which is unaffected by the compression of what the signatory writes.

Claim 10.1 joins the two halves of the paper. Under Section 6 the order registers a quantity, and the account is the justification offered for the movement. Under Section 7.3 the standing operating as a general equivalent is under no pressure to make its accompanying content discriminating. The content therefore compresses, exactly as the disclosure literature predicts of unverifiable messages

under aligned incentives, while the market in signatures thickens, which the disclosure literature leaves aside because it falls outside disclosure altogether.

Two consequences are recorded.

The compression leaves the instrument functioning on its own terms. An instrument whose force resides in a signature is functioning when the signature is recognised, whatever the accompanying text says.

And proposals to restore informativeness by improving the content address the half that is already behaving as theory predicts. What would alter the outcome is a change in what the order registers.

10.4 Compression of the Signal and the Loss of Diagnosticity

The end state of the compression is worth naming, since Section 11 takes it as its premise.

An account that says of nearly every candidate what it says of this one does not discriminate among candidates. It may be accurate, careful, and written in good faith, and still carry nothing that distinguishes. The parallel in educational assessment is documented: where the distribution of grades compresses toward the top, the grade ceases to separate, and the proportion of top grades has risen substantially over decades [64].

The consequence for a decision is that something else must do the separating. Section 11 argues that what does it is the quantity the order was already registering.

11 Displacement of Decision Weight onto the Standing of the Issuer

The role of this section is to state what follows for a decision when the content of accounts ceases to discriminate. It depends on Section 10.4, which establishes the compression, and on Claim 5.2 and Section 6.4, which identify what the decision falls back on. Its result is the premise of Section 12, which examines the distribution of that quantity.

It is arranged in three parts. Section 11.1 states the displacement. Section 11.2 describes it in the vocabulary of epistemic injustice conceded in Section 3.7. Section 11.3 states the distributive consequence and the two qualifications that bound it.

11.1 Uniform Signals and the Residual Basis of Decision

A decision must be made. Where the content of the accounts does not separate the candidates, the separation is accomplished by whatever else varies across the accounts, and what varies is who signed them.

The displacement requires no bad faith and constitutes no lapse. An evaluator confronted with several favourable accounts, needing to choose, and finding nothing in the content that distinguishes, will use what does distinguish. Under Section 6.4 that is the standing of the signatories, which is the term the order installed as its measure precisely because it varies and is comparable.

The displacement therefore substitutes nothing worse for anything better. It is the order operating as its structure provides, with the content having ceased to add anything.

11.2 Credibility Excess and Its Comparative Character

The displacement can be described in the vocabulary of epistemic injustice, and the description matters because it identifies a wrong where the ordinary analysis finds none.

On the foundational account, testimonial injustice consists in a credibility deficit inflicted by prejudice, and an excess of credibility counts as no injustice in itself [26]. On the developed account, credibility is comparative and positional: an excess accorded to some entails a deficit suffered by others, so that credibility excess is a form of epistemic injustice rather than a benign error [47, 48].

The second is what this paper's case requires. Where weight falls onto the standing of signatories, the accounts of well-placed signatories are credited beyond what their content supports, and the accounts of others are credited below. The transaction identifies no prejudiced hearer, and on the foundational account no injustice need be found. On the comparative account the excess is the injustice, and it is produced by the structure of the order rather than by anyone's attitude.

11.3 Distributive Consequence of the Displacement

Joining the displacement of Section 11.1 to the distribution examined in Section 12 supports the following.

Claim 11.1 (Harm of a uniform signal)**.** A uniform signal does more than fail to inform. Where content ceases to discriminate, decision weight falls onto the standing of the signatory, which is distributed cumulatively and unequally. A compressed signal therefore transfers the basis of decision from a quantity that is at least in principle related to the candidate to one that is related to the candidate's access to well-placed parties.

Claim 11.1 states why the compression documented in Section 10 is a distributive matter and not only an informational one. The literature on the compression of assessment signals treats the loss of information as the harm. On the present account the harm is what the loss of information causes: not a decision made on less, but a decision made on something else, and that something else is the quantity whose distribution Section 12 examines.

Two qualifications bound the claim.

Standing bears on quality in many cases. Standing is acquired, often through work, and a party of high standing may be an acute observer. The claim concerns what the displacement does distributively rather than whether standing is deserved.

And a discriminating signal would carry distributive consequences of its own. Section 13 argues that improving the signal has distributive consequences of its own, and that they run in the same direction as this one for a different reason.

12 Populations without Access to an Issuer

The role of this section is to examine the distribution of the quantity that Section 11 identified as bearing the decision, and to identify a condition at the limit of that distribution. It depends on the cumulative-advantage material conceded in Section 3.5 and on Section 6.3, which explains why an account whose author cannot be placed admits of no comparison. Its findings supply the distribution to which Section 13 applies its result.

It is arranged in three parts. Section 12.1 states four conditions under which observation becomes available. Section 12.2 states the cumulative character of access. Section 12.3 identifies the population with access to no recognised issuer, and reports the evidence available for one setting.

12.1 Conditions under Which Observation Becomes Available

An account of a person can be written only by someone who was placed to observe them, and being so placed is itself an outcome of arrangements the person did not choose.

Four conditions bear on whether a relation affording observation exists. (1) **Someone must be positioned to see the work**, which depends on how the work is organised: collaborative settings generate observers and solitary ones do not. (2) **The observation must persist long enough to support an account**, which depends on the stability of the arrangement. (3) **The observer must remain available**, since an account cannot be obtained from someone who has died, retired beyond reach, or become estranged. And (4) **the observer must hold standing in a field the receiving institution recognises**, since under Section 11 that is what will be weighed.

The fourth condition matters most and is noticed least often. A person may have been observed closely, over years, by someone who holds no standing in the receiving institution's field. What they have is an account without a measure attached, and under Section 6.3 an account whose author cannot be placed is either discounted entirely or accepted entirely.

12.2 Cumulative Character of Access to Issuers

Access to those who hold standing is not distributed once and then held. It accumulates.

Recognition accrues disproportionately to the already recognised, in collaboration and in independent discovery alike [49], and the mechanism by which small initial differences compound over a career is documented in general form [50, 13]. Social ties are homophilous, so that access to those positioned to observe and to vouch tracks position already held [46]. And selection on the receiving side compounds it, since employers have been found to weigh cultural similarity heavily and at times above productivity [63].

The credential literature supplies the wider frame, on which qualifications operate as licences for entry to positions rather than as measures of the productivity they are taken to certify [10]. The compounding operates through the mechanism derived in Section 6. A person admitted on the strength of a signature enters relations in which they are observed by parties holding standing; those parties can vouch; and the person's next application carries more. A person not admitted enters no such relations and their next application carries what the first did.

12.3 Absence of Any Available Issuer

At the limit of the distribution is a condition the literature documents in its parts and does not name.

Some people have access to no party who can issue relational credit that a receiving institution will recognise. Among them are those who worked alone or in settings that generated no observers; those whose former institutions have ceased to exist; those estranged from the parties who observed them; those returning after long absence, displacement, or confinement; those who changed field and whose observers hold standing in a field the receiving institution does not read; and those whose observers, however close, hold no standing anywhere.

Claim 12.1 (Absence of an issuer)**.** For a person with access to no recognised issuer, the arrangement returns nothing rather than returning a poor result. The instrument assesses them in no way at all, accurately or otherwise. Since under Section 11 the operative quantity is the standing of a signatory, a candidate who can obtain no signature supplies no quantity, and the order has no term in which to express what they are worth.

Claim 12.1 distinguishes this condition from the one examined in the rest of the paper. Elsewhere the argument concerns people who are assessed by an instrument that assesses badly. Here it concerns people the instrument does not reach, and the two require different remedies: the first is a question about how the instrument works, the second about what happens to those outside it.

Two observations bound the claim.

The components of the condition are documented. Referral networks are unequally available and their absence has measurable labour-market consequences [27, 23, 46], and those in a position to refer sometimes decline in order to protect their own standing [69], which removes an issuer who nominally exists.

One population has been studied directly and supplies the section's empirical anchor. In hiring after a criminal conviction, employers face an information gap that references might be expected to fill, and a review of the evidence reports that most employers supply nothing beyond dates of employment and job titles, a practice attributed to the fear of defamation claims [32]. The same work reports that what employers most want to know is whether a candidate has a consistent work history and verifiable positive employment references, in preference to knowing whether the person observes company rules [32]. And first-hand information about performance in work or training has been found more predictive of low risk of re-offending than most other factors an employer could consider [7].

Three features of that case generalise. What employers most want is precisely what this population cannot supply. Where an issuer nominally exists, the account supplied carries no content, so the condition of Section 12.1 is met in form and defeated in substance. And the information that would be most predictive is the first-hand kind, which is the kind a relation affording observation would have generated.

What the literature does not do is treat the population defined by the absence of any issuer as a single object across the settings in which it arises.

And the paper names the condition without measuring it. How many people are in it, and how the population is composed, are empirical questions this paper leaves open; Section 18 records this among its unsupported claims.

13 Improvement of the Instrument and the Distribution of Its Benefit

The role of this section is to state what improving the instrument does to the distribution of its outcomes, and to state it in the form the evidence supports rather than in the strongest form available. It depends on the statistical-discrimination result conceded in Section 3.6 and on the distribution examined in Section 12. It bears directly on the duties argued for in the preceding project of this series, whose distributive cost Section 17.4 records.

It is arranged in four parts. Section 13.1 lists the corrections available. Section 13.2 states the established result on unequal signal quality. Section 13.3 states the paper's claim in the weak form and declines the strong one. Section 13.4 states the direction of correction that survives.

13.1 Corrections That Improve Reconstruction

The corrections available to this instrument are known and several have been argued for in the preceding papers of this series. Accounts may be required to state the position from which they are given and the conditions under which the conduct reported occurred. Sources may be required to be independent in position rather than merely plural. Divergence among accounts may be preserved rather than resolved. Receiving parties may be required to establish the scope of an account before relying on it, and to treat an account whose conditions are unstated as one whose scope cannot be established.

Each of these improves what the instrument recovers about a person, and each is worth having. This section asks what each does to the distribution of outcomes, and the answer differs from the one under which the corrections are usually offered.

13.2 Unequal Signal Quality as a Source of Disparity

The relevant result is established in economics and the paper concedes it as the owner of what follows.

Two groups with identical underlying distributions of the quality being assessed receive systematically different treatment where the assessor has better information about one than the other [59]. The formal development shows that where signals are noisy but unbiased, a decision-maker responding rationally treats applicants of equal expected quality alike while treating applicants of equal actual quality differently, the difference tracking the precision of the signal available for each [3]. The result holds without prejudice, ill will, or error on the part of the decision-maker. A related formal result bears on the evaluation of any such instrument: outcomes are observed only for the cases a decision-maker passed through, so a candidate rule cannot be assessed against the cases it would have treated differently [39].

Applied here, the signal is the reconstruction of a person from accounts of their relations, and its precision is a function of how many independent positions of observation were available. Under Section 12 that number is unequally and cumulatively distributed. The result then applies directly: candidates of equal actual quality receive systematically different treatment according to how well their relations can be reconstructed.

13.3 Scope of the Claim and Its Strong Form

The claim must now be stated carefully, because a stronger version is available and false.

Claim 13.1 (Distribution of an improvement)**.** A correction that improves reconstruction where positions of observation are already numerous, while honestly reporting that reconstruction is unavailable where they are few, improves the accuracy of the instrument and worsens the distribution of its outcomes. The improvement is real and it is unequally available, and an instrument that reports its own limits faithfully makes the inequality operative rather than concealing it.

The stronger claim, that any improvement in accuracy worsens distribution, is false and the paper declines it. Where precision is improved specifically for those about whom information is poorest, disparities narrow rather than widen, and this is established in the same literature. The modern characterisation further locates the operative property in the failure to identify signals from underlying qualities rather than in informativeness as such, so the gloss on which one group's signal is simply noisier should not be pressed [8].

The paper also declines a neighbouring result that is often assimilated to this one. Formal work in algorithmic fairness establishes that calibration and equality of error rates cannot in general be satisfied together where base rates differ [37, 9]. Those are incompatibilities among fairness criteria rather than demonstrations that accuracy improvements worsen distribution, and the paper cites them as evidence that tensions of this family are real rather than as its own result.

What remains is Claim 13.1, and its force lies in the second sentence. The corrections of Section 13.1 are honest: they require that the conditions of an account be stated, and that an account whose conditions are unstated be treated accordingly. Honesty of that kind converts a hidden inequality into an operative one. A candidate whose thin set of positions was previously indistinguishable from a rich one now presents a set that is legibly thin.

13.4 Corrections That Improve Observation Where Positions Are Poor

The result has a direction that survives it, and the section closes with it so that the finding is not read as an argument against improvement.

If the disparity arises from unequal precision of the signal, then the correction that does not produce it is the one that improves precision where it is lowest. Applied here, that is a change in what generates accounts rather than a correction to the instrument's reading of them: arrangements under which people who would otherwise be observed by nobody come to be observed by somebody whose standing is recognised.

Three implications are recorded and none is developed.

The remedy lies upstream of the instrument. What is required is a wider distribution of relations that generate accounts, rather than a better reading of them.

Measures that supply observation to those lacking it are therefore distinct in kind from measures that improve the instrument, and the two are often proposed together as though they were the same reform.

And under Section 12.3 the population with no issuer at all is not reached even by this, since improving the precision of a signal requires that a signal exist. For that population the question concerns the availability of an alternative to assessment rather than its precision, which Section 18 records as beyond what this paper supplies.

14 Suppression of Grievance and the Absence of a Record

The role of this section is to establish that the arrangement generates almost no record of its own failures, and that the absence is produced by the arrangement rather than incidental to it. It depends on the account of refusal in Section 7.4 and on the grievance literature conceded in Section 3.8. It compounds Section 13.2, which records that outcomes are observed only for those admitted, and it supplies part of the ground for Section 16.

It is arranged in four parts. Section 14.1 states the cost of contesting an account and Section 14.2 the invisibility of a refusal. Section 14.3 applies the established account of how injuries become disputes. Section 14.4 states the resulting circularity.

14.1 Cost of Contesting an Account

A person who believes an account of them to be wrong faces a distinctive obstacle: the relation that would supply the standing to contest it is the relation whose account is being contested.

The obstacle has three parts. The account is ordinarily confidential, so the person does not know what it says and cannot identify what to contest. Where they do learn, contesting it is visible to its author, and the author is a party on whose continued regard the person's future accounts depend. And the exposure is asymmetric: an author whose account is contested loses little, while a person who contests may lose the relation, the accounts it would have produced, and the standing within a field that the relation conferred.

Adjacent evidence supports the shape of the exposure without settling its magnitude here. Those who voice resistance to mistreatment face both work and social retaliation, in forms that depend on the relative positions of the parties, and the same work reports health costs attaching to silence [11]. The setting differs from the present one and the finding is reported as adjacent rather than as evidence about candidates and referees.

14.2 Invisibility of a Refusal

Under Section 7.4 a party who anticipates exposure may decline to write, and those in a position to refer are documented as withholding assistance in order to protect their own standing [69].

A refusal leaves nothing behind: no document, no stated reasons, and no witness except the person refused. A receiving institution that requires three accounts and receives two observes an incomplete application rather than a refusal, and the party who declined stays out of the record entirely.

The consequence for this section is that the most common adverse event in the arrangement is the one least likely to be recorded anywhere.

14.3 Transformation of Injury into Grievance and Its Failure

The general form of what follows is established.

An injurious experience becomes a dispute only by passing through three transformations: it must be perceived as injurious, blame must be attributed to someone, and a claim must be made to the party held responsible. Few experiences complete the sequence, so that the disputes an institution sees are a small fraction of the events that might have become disputes [22].

Each transformation is obstructed here. Perception is obstructed by confidentiality, since an account that has not been seen supplies little on which a perception of injury could rest. Attribution is obstructed by the structure of the arrangement, in which an unfavourable outcome has many contributing parties and an author nobody can name. And claiming is obstructed by the cost described in Section 14.1, and by the absence of any forum in which a claim could be brought, which the preceding paper in this series recorded as the largest gap in its own account.

14.4 Absence of Complaint Read as Absence of Failure

The obstacles set out in Section 14.1 through Section 14.3 support the following.

Where concerns are withheld, a climate of silence forms and management reads the absence of complaints as the absence of problems [55, 54]. Where exit is available and voice is costly, voice atrophies [29]. And where complaints are made, institutional processing absorbs, delays and outlasts them, and keeping the process closed prevents a record of resistance from forming [2]. Where such measures are made public, a further effect intervenes: parties alter their conduct in response to being measured, so that the measure changes what it reports [19]. The records examined here are confidential, which removes that effect and removes with it the occasion on which the measure might be contested.

Claim 14.1 (Self-confirming evidence)**.** An arrangement that suppresses the formation of grievances generates evidence of its own success. The absence of complaint is produced by the arrangement and is then available as evidence that the arrangement works, and the circularity obtains whether or not any party intends it.

Claim 14.1 compounds a result already established. Section 13 noted that outcomes are observed only for those admitted, so that the instrument cannot be evaluated against those it excluded. The present claim adds that the excluded do not report either. The arrangement therefore lacks evidence of its failures from both directions: outcomes for those it rejected go unobserved, and complaints from them go unmade.

15 Evidence That Removing Information Worsens Distribution

The role of this section is to state the strongest evidence against the direction of the paper's argument and to say what the paper concedes to it. It is given a section of its own because the evidence is real, because it concerns the kind of intervention this paper's diagnosis invites, and because meeting it requires the distinction derived in Section 6. Its conclusion constrains Section 18.3, in which the paper declines to propose a remedy.

It is arranged in four parts. Section 15.1 describes the trial and Section 15.2 its finding. Section 15.3 records the qualifications its authors state and those the wider record supplies. Section 15.4 states the paper's reply and the constraint the evidence imposes on it.

15.1 The Anonymised-Shortlisting Trial

A randomised trial in public-sector recruitment examined whether removing identifying information from applications would improve outcomes for under-represented candidates. Over two thousand one hundred public servants from fourteen agencies completed a shortlisting exercise on sixteen constructed applications, presented either in standard form or with identifying details removed [30].

15.2 Positive Discrimination Suppressed by Blinding

The result ran against the expectation that motivated the trial.

De-identification left the intended diversity of shortlisting unimproved. Participants were more likely to shortlist female candidates and less likely to shortlist male applicants when applications were identifiable; minority candidates of both sexes were more likely to be shortlisted when identifiable; and the effect was largest for Indigenous female candidates, who were substantially more likely to be shortlisted when identifiable than when de-identified [30]. The mechanism the report identifies is that participants were engaged in positive discrimination which de-identification removed.

15.3 Contested Status of the Evidence

The evidence is reported here with the qualifications its authors state and with the qualifications the wider record supplies.

The report itself records that the exercise was hypothetical rather than a live recruitment, that participation was voluntary and may have attracted participants disposed toward diversity, and that behaviour varied across agencies [30]. And the direction of the finding varies across trials of de-identification, some of which have reported benefits for candidates from less advantaged backgrounds. The evidence base is genuinely mixed and the paper treats this trial as one datum rather than as settling the question.

15.4 Reply from the Distinction between Content and Force

The reply the paper offers is its own central distinction and is stated as a distinction rather than a rebuttal.

What the trial removed was identifying information about the *candidate*: name, sex, origin, and the markers by which a reader might place them. What this paper analyses is the standing of the *signatory*, which is a different object and stands in a different relation to the decision. Under Section 6 the signatory's standing is the measure in which accounts are expressed; the candidate's demographic markers occupy no such position.

Two consequences follow and the second is a constraint on the paper.

The trial leaves the paper's proposition untested, since removing candidate markers leaves the equivalent untouched. An order that concealed candidates' identities while continuing to weigh signatures would exhibit everything this paper describes.

And the trial supplies a finding the paper accepts, which is that removing information from a selection process has distributive effects that run beyond what the intention behind the removal predicts. Any proposal arising from this paper's diagnosis, including proposals to reduce the weight given to signatories' standing, is subject to the same caution. The paper accordingly proposes no such intervention, and Section 18 records that its diagnosis arrives without a tested remedy.

16 Responsibility for an Injustice without a Culprit

The role of this section is to state who is answerable for an arrangement in which many parties act reasonably and the outcome is unjust. It depends on Claim 8.1 and Claim 9.1, which between them exclude remedies addressed to conduct and to instances, and on the account of structural injustice conceded in Section 3.9. It adopts an existing model rather than constructing one.

It is arranged in three parts. Section 16.1 states why no wrongdoer is identifiable and names the model adopted. Section 16.2 answers the standing objection to models of that kind by specifying three assignable duties. Section 16.3 states why the paper's conclusion is expressed in a relational register.

16.1 Absence of an Identifiable Wrongdoer

The parties to the arrangement are, on the analysis given, doing what their positions provide for.

The signatory writes an account of what they observed, or declines where their exposure would be real. The receiving institution weighs the accounts it receives, using the term that distinguishes them. The person judged solicits accounts from those best placed to help them. Each of these is permissible, and Section 8 argued that the injustice persists when each is performed well.

The account of responsibility this requires is one in which structural injustice results from many agents acting within accepted rules and norms in ways that jointly place some people at a disadvantage, so that its authorship can be assigned to no single agent; on which responsibility is therefore forward-looking, shared, and political, discharged by acting to change the structure rather than by assigning blame for having produced it [74, 75].

The concession is made plainly: the model belongs to others and the paper adopts it. What the paper contributes is a specification of the structure in question, which is what a forward-looking responsibility requires in order to have an object.

16.2 The Objection That Such Responsibility Assigns No Duties

The standing objection to models of this kind is that a responsibility which is shared, forward-looking and political fails to tell anyone what to do, and it has been pressed directly [76].

The objection has force and this paper is better placed to answer it than a general treatment would be, because the structure it describes has identified positions and the preceding paper in this series has already derived duties attaching to two of them.

Three assignable duties follow from the analysis and each attaches to a position rather than to a person.

(1) **The receiving institution is answerable for what it registers.** Under Section 6 the order's measure is what it treats as comparable, and the receiving party determines that. A

duty attaches to it that does not attach to signatories, for whom writing differently leaves what is registered unchanged.

(2) **The receiving institution is answerable for the record it keeps.** Under Section 14 the arrangement generates no evidence of its own failures, and the party holding the file is the only party positioned to preserve what a later revision would require.

(3) **Those who hold standing are answerable for the conditions under which observation becomes available.** Under Section 13.4 the remedy for unequal signal quality lies upstream, in the distribution of relations that generate accounts, and those who hold standing are positioned to create such relations.

16.3 The Relational Character of the Wrong

The normative position closest to this paper holds that the point of equality is the elimination of oppression and the establishment of relations in which people stand as equals, so that distributions matter for the relations they sustain rather than in themselves [5], developed as an ideal of social and political relationship rather than of distributive pattern [65].

That is the register in which this paper's conclusion is stated, and the reason is structural rather than a matter of preference. The wrong identified in Section 7 is that a party is displaced from a relation and installed opposite it, rather than that a quantity is distributed badly. The wrong identified in Section 8.4 is that the person judged is absent from the interpretation of something they co-produced, rather than that they receive too little. Both are relational wrongs, and a purely distributive statement of them would leave out what makes them wrongs.

The ideal the arrangement defeats is nonetheless distributive in its classical statement: that those of equal talent and equal willingness to use it should have equal prospects irrespective of social origin [62]. The present analysis explains one mechanism by which that ideal fails without anyone opposing it.

17 Implications for the Generative Relational Framework

The role of this section is to state what the analysis returns to the wider framework in which the paper works. It draws on results established in Section 6, Section 7 and Section 13, and two of the four results correct positions the framework has held.

It is arranged in four parts. Section 17.1 identifies a problem the framework has not posed. Section 17.2 states a correction to its treatment of alienation and Section 17.3 a distinction it should carry beyond this case. Section 17.4 records a distributive cost attaching to a requirement the preceding project in this series imposed.

17.1 Circulation as a Problem the Framework Has Not Posed

The framework has treated what a relation generates as held positionally and transmitted with loss. It has left aside what happens when such things must circulate at scale among parties who share no relation.

Section 6 answers that they cannot, without a term installed as their measure. The general form of the result reaches beyond accounts of persons: wherever positionally held products of relations must be exchanged across a large number of parties, the same insufficiency arises and the same repair is available. Identifying the class is what the framework should carry forward, and the final project in this series takes conversion between heterogeneous value systems as its subject.

17.2 Alienation as a Structural Position Rather Than a Condition of a Party

The framework's vocabulary of alienation has been applied to what happens to parties within relations. This paper applies it to a position in an order of circulation, and the difference is worth carrying forward.

Under Claim 7.1 the condition attaches to whoever occupies the equivalent position and is acquired by occupying it. It is a structural position rather than a state of mind, arises without choice, and survives any conduct. A framework that treats alienation as something done to a party by another party will miss conditions of this kind, in which the position does the work and no party acts on anyone.

The reconstruction the paper borrows supplies the corresponding constraint. Overcoming alienation is itself a relation, a relation of appropriation, rather than a return to an undifferentiated condition [34]. The framework should therefore expect that the remedy for a structural alienation is a different relation to the structure rather than its dissolution, and Section 18 records that this paper leaves one to be supplied.

17.3 Distinct Forms of a Single Alienated Quantity

The distinction developed in Section 7 is general in form and the framework should carry it beyond this case.

Where a party's standing is put to work by an order of circulation, it may function as a measure that circulates or as an undertaking that binds, and the two are alienating in different ways, valued for different properties, and impaired by opposite behaviours. Claim 7.3 showed that this resolves conduct which looks inconsistent when only one form is recognised.

The general caution follows. Where the framework finds a party behaving in two ways whose joint rationality is doubtful, it should consider whether two forms of one quantity are in operation before concluding that the party is confused.

17.4 Honest Reporting as a Distributive Act

The fourth result is a correction and it bears on the preceding paper in this series.

That paper argued that a party issuing a judgment should state the conditions of their access, and that a receiving party should treat an account whose conditions are unstated as one whose scope cannot be established. Those duties are sound and this paper leaves them standing.

Claim 13.1 adds that discharging them has a distributive effect. An account that honestly reports the thinness of its author's access makes that thinness operative in a decision, where previously it was concealed. Honesty about the conditions of a judgment therefore carries distributive consequences, and a framework that requires such honesty owes an account of what it does to those whose conditions are poor. This paper identifies the effect and leaves it unresolved.

18 Limits of the Account

The role of this section is to record what the paper has established, what it has argued without establishing, what it declines to supply, and what remains to be done. It reports the status of the six conditions stated in Section 4.3 and the consequences of the constraints recorded in Section 15.4.

It is arranged in five parts. Section 18.1 reports the status of each disconfirmation condition. Section 18.2 identifies four claims resting on argument alone. Section 18.3 states why the paper proposes no remedy. Section 18.4 records the literatures represented thinly, and Section 18.5 identifies four extensions.

18.1 Conditions of Falsification

Section 4.3 stated six conditions and their status is as follows.

Whether accounts of co-experience can circulate at scale without a measure is not tested. The derivation of Section 6 argues that they cannot, and small-scale orders in which each account is weighed on its own terms exist and are described in Section 6.3 as the limiting case the derivation is about.

Whether weight tracks standing rather than access is treated as established by the preceding papers in this series and awaits independent demonstration here.

Whether the two forms of Section 7 predict different behaviour is untested. Claim 7.4 states a testable prediction and leaves the test to further work.

Whether the residue of Section 8 survives improvements in conduct is argued rather than demonstrated. The argument is that its three components are settled before any party acts, and a demonstration would require observing an arrangement in which conduct was uniformly excellent.

Whether the uses of Section 9 would disappear under prohibition is untested, and the paper's claim concerns what makes them available rather than what would follow from forbidding them.

And whether improving accuracy can improve distribution is answered affirmatively under a condition the literature specifies, which is why Claim 13.1 is stated in the weak form. This is the condition the paper meets most carefully and the one where a stronger claim was available and declined.

18.2 Claims Advanced Without Support

Four claims rest on argument alone.

Claim 6.1, that a general equivalent is compelled in this order of circulation, is a transposition of a derivation from another domain. Its premises are argued in Section 6 and its departures from the original are stated in Section 6.6. The paper offers no empirical demonstration that alternative repairs are unavailable.

Claim 7.1, that occupying the equivalent position constitutes a deficient relation, is a philosophical claim assessed by whether it exhibits the structure the reconstruction it relies on requires.

Claim 12.1, concerning the population with access to no recognised issuer, is supported for one setting and asserted for the rest. Section 12.3 supplies direct evidence from hiring after a criminal conviction [32, 7]; the generalisation across the other settings named there rests on argument. How many people are in the condition overall, and how it is composed, are empirical questions this paper leaves open.

And Claim 14.1 is inferred from established results about the formation of grievances rather than measured in this setting.

18.3 Absence of a Proposed Remedy

The paper diagnoses rather than prescribing, and the reason should be stated plainly rather than left to be inferred.

Two of its results bear on what a remedy would have to overcome. Claim 8.1 holds that the injustice under ideal transmission is not produced by conduct, so remedies addressed to conduct fall short of it. Claim 9.1 holds that the non-transmissive uses are permitted by the form the standing takes, so prohibitions addressed to instances fall short of the property that produces them.

A third result bears on what a remedy might cost. The evidence in Section 15 establishes that removing information from a selection process has distributive effects not predictable from

the intention behind the removal, and any proposal arising from this diagnosis is subject to that caution.

The direction that survives is stated in Section 13.4: the remedy lies upstream of the instrument, in the distribution of relations that generate accounts rather than in the reading of accounts. The paper leaves such arrangements undesigned, their cost unestimated, and their effectiveness unestablished. And under Section 12.3 even they fall short of the population with no issuer at all.

18.4 Sources Not Yet Verified

This draft cites only sources verified against a publisher, journal, index, or institutional page before the section using them was written, and several literatures are consequently represented thinly.

The legal and anthropological literature on suretyship and guarantee is absent from Section 3.4, where it would supply the institutional history of vouching as an undertaking.

The empirical literature on populations without access to referees is represented by one setting, hiring after a criminal conviction [32, 7]. Work on displacement, on institutional care, and on those whose former institutions have ceased to exist is absent from Section 12.3, so the generalisation across settings rests on a single documented case.

Work on the gift and the obligation it creates is absent from Section 9.3, which describes the discharge of an obligation owed elsewhere while lacking the apparatus that would analyse it.

And treatments of symbolic capital and its convertibility are absent from Section 3.3, where they would connect the paper's account to an established sociological vocabulary.

18.5 Extensions

Four extensions are identified and none is attempted.

A test of Claim 7.4 on existing corpora would establish whether the same party writes differently for institutions they will meet again than for those they will not, and is the cheapest test of the paper's central distinction.

A measurement of the population identified in Section 12.3 across settings other than the one documented would convert a named condition into a described one, and the instrument developed for the documented setting suggests how it might be approached.

A treatment of the circulation economy, including how standing accumulates and what returns to whom, is the subject of the political-economy project in this series and is required for the account of Section 7.9 to be more than a statement.

And an account of who holds authority to interpret a shared experience is required by Section 8.4 and by Section 14.3, both of which describe a party with a claim and no forum. That is the subject of the jurisprudence project in this series.

19 Conclusion

An institution about to decide something about a person asks somebody else to vouch for them. This paper has asked what circulates when it does.

What is asked for is neither a good nor a capacity but co-experience: what a relation generated between two parties, held by neither alone, available from each position within it as something different. Accounts of it are therefore heterogeneous in a strict sense, and the terms of their comparison come from outside them. An order in which each account is weighed on its own terms cannot generalise, because an account whose author cannot be placed admits of no comparison at all.

The repair is the one the critique of political economy describes for an analogous insufficiency. One term is withdrawn from the set and installed as the measure of the rest, and it acquires the properties of the position by being placed in it rather than by any merit of its own. Access cannot serve as that term, because access is particular to a relation and not comparable across relations, which is the very incommensurability the measure was needed to repair. The standing of those who vouch can serve, because it is already a quantity held in a field and already comparable within it.

That is the sense in which the paper speaks of alienation. A party who stood in the relation is, in the order of circulation, placed opposite the set of which their own experience is a member; what the order requires of them is a quantity, what they hold is a position on a relation, and the arrangement is indifferent to the second. The account they write is retained as the justification offered for a movement rather than as the thing that moves, and the relational labour by which their standing was accumulated becomes invisible in the same movement that makes the name liquid. The paper takes this argument from a tradition built for commodities and states what does not transpose: no labour time is embodied here, nothing is produced for exchange, and nothing is alienable by its producer in the way a product is.

The alienated standing takes two forms. As a measure it circulates, is spent in the present, and is indifferent to what it purchases; as an undertaking it binds the signatory's future to conduct they will not control. The first excludes and the second encumbers. The first is debased by over-issuance, with the loss falling on every holder, and the second impaired by default, with the loss falling on the signatory alone. This is why the same party writes uniformly favourable accounts and declines to write, which is the joint operation of two forms rather than inconsistency.

Four consequences were developed. Voluntary disclosure of verifiable information is predicted to unravel toward candour and here does not; the cheap-talk analysis explains the compression of the content and leaves unexplained why an instrument carrying almost no discriminating content remains required and consequential, which the separability of force from content supplies. Where content ceases to discriminate, decision weight falls onto the standing of the signatory, and since credibility is comparative, the excess accorded to the well-placed is a deficit suffered by others. Positions of observation are unequally and cumulatively distributed, and at the limit of the distribution are people for whom the arrangement returns nothing rather than a poor result. And improving the instrument does not correct this: a correction that reconstructs well where positions are numerous, while honestly reporting that it cannot reconstruct where they are few, improves accuracy and worsens distribution, because honesty about the conditions of a judgment converts a concealed inequality into an operative one.

The paper's two levels resist different remedies, which is why its title speaks of pathologies. Under ideal transmission, where every account is accurate, scoped and honestly given, injustice remains and is not produced by conduct, so improving conduct leaves it standing. And transmission is one use of the instrument among several, since a measure that discriminated among what it measured would not be a measure, so the transactional uses are permitted by the form rather than corrupting it, and prohibiting instances leaves the property that produces them untouched.

What follows is a diagnosis without a prescription, and the paper says so. Its own findings indicate that remedies addressed to conduct and remedies addressed to instances both miss, and the evidence it reports establishes that removing information from a selection process has effects beyond what its intention predicts. The direction that survives lies upstream of the instrument, in the distribution of relations that generate accounts rather than in the reading of them, and even that falls short of those for whom no account can be generated at all. Responsibility for an arrangement of this kind is forward-looking and shared, and the paper's contribution to it is a specification of the structure that such a responsibility would have to act on.

The order of circulation described here presents candidates as competing on equal terms, and

does so by means of an equivalent that is not equally available to them.

Acknowledgments

The present definitions, constructions, arguments, conclusions, and errors remain the author's responsibility. The derivation transposed in Section 6 and the reconstruction relied on in Section 7 are identified where they are used, together with what the transposition abandons. The interest arising from the author's own position with respect to the arrangements examined is declared in the front matter.

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