

The Field of “Travel”

Spaciousness, Contingency, and the Generation of the Relational Subject

[Working Draft]

当其无，有器之用。 It is in its emptiness that the use of the vessel lies.

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凿户牖以为室，当其无，有室之用。

故有之以为利，无之以为用。

Cut out doors and windows to make a room;

it is in its emptiness that the use of the room lies.

Thus what is there gives advantage, but what is not there gives use.

— Laozi, *Daodejing*, ch. 11

χαλεπὰ τὰ καλά.

Beautiful things are difficult.

— Plato, *Hippias Major*, 304e

致她——

For her—

那个属于森林的女孩，
the girl who belongs to the forest,

她爱旅行——

who loves to travel —

我盼望有一天与她同行，
with whom I long, one day, to fare together,
那将是我们一起建造的一个世界。
for that will be a world we build together.

Abstract

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

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

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

Keywords: relational production; the relational subject; spaciousness; aesthetic judgement; the reproduction of experience.

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1. Introduction: Travel as a Special Field

There is a kind of happiness that two people find only by leaving. They leave not each other but the rooms and routines in which their life is ordinarily held, going out into somewhere neither of them belongs. The previous paper of this series ended on a virtue learned from water, and on a person who is to others as water is [65]; this one begins where water naturally goes, which is away. Water is, by temperament, a figure of the journey, the passage, the thing that keeps to no single place. To ask what it is for two people to fare well into the unfamiliar, together, follows the series' guiding figure to where it leads.

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

1.1 From the fixed background to its deliberate exchange

The point of departure is a result this series has already established. Shared happiness, it was argued, consists in the *resonance* of two meaning-worlds against a common background rather than in the fusion of two people into one: two distinct centres of sense, coupled into a shared state that is irreducible to either yet merges neither, sustained on a background manifold that supplies the common ground against which their coupling is defined [62]. In the ordinary conduct of a life together, that background is fixed. It is the same apartment, the same commute, the same division of the week into its labouring and resting parts, the same circle of obligations and roles. The fixity does its work, for it is what makes a shared life liveable, since a background that had to be continually rebuilt would leave no surplus of attention for anything else. Yet fixity carries a cost, and the cost is the subject of this paper. A background that never changes becomes, in time, invisible; and a relation conducted entirely against an invisible background can run for years on the mere interlocking of habits, its two parties coupled at the level of routine while the question of whether they still resonate at any deeper level goes quietly unasked. The fixed background is hospitable to a certain hollowing: two well-fitted sets of habits can pass, for a long time, as a living relation.

Travel is the deliberate exchange of that background. To travel together is to take two people out of the meaning-world in which their resonance has been habitually defined and to set them down in one that is strange to both. This is the simplest possible description of what a shared

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

1.2 What kind of field: spaciousness rather than novelty

The temptation is to locate the power of travel in *novelty*: in the new sights, the fresh stimulation, the broadening of the mind that the tourist brochures promise. That reading is the precise inversion of the truth, and identifying why will fix the thesis of the whole paper. Novelty is a kind of *filling*: it loads the senses with new content, new objects to consume, new items for the itinerary and the photograph album. But the relation between two people is generated by no loading of shared stimuli, any more than a vessel is made useful by filling it to the brim. What travel offers, when it offers anything of worth, is an *emptying*: a clearing-away of the dense web of functions, roles, obligations, and predetermined uses that the everyday lays over every hour and every space, leaving a room in which something can happen that the crowded everyday left no room for. The deepest name for what a journey provides is *spaciousness*: 虚, in the sense the eleventh chapter of the *Daodejing* gives it, where clay is worked into a vessel but the use of the vessel is in the emptiness within; where doors and windows are cut to make a room, but the use of the room is in the empty space; so that what is there gives advantage, while what is not there gives use [29]. A journey, at its best, is a worked emptiness, a vessel whose value lies in the room it opens rather than the contents it carries.

This is why a quiet hour in an unfamiliar café, with nothing on the schedule and nothing to do but be there together, can hold more of the good this paper is after than a packed day of monuments; and why the mountain vista and the empty temple and the long train window do their work through the spaciousness they open rather than through what they show, the temporary lifting of the everyday's demand that every moment be *for* something. The traveller who fills the journey as densely as the life left behind, every hour booked, every site checked off, every meal photographed, has carried the fixed background along and merely changed its scenery; the field never opens, because it was never emptied. Spaciousness is the medium of the special field, and the central argument of this paper's phenomenology (§2) is that the various

features which make travel powerful are, one and all, ways of opening or depending upon that emptiness.

1.3 Presence, being, and the field they presuppose

One distinction must be fixed before the argument can proceed, because the whole account turns on it. To say that travel brings the relation's own movement into experience is to claim something other than that travel brings the relation into *being*. The relation exists already; two people who have shared a life have a relational dynamics whether or not they ever feel it, just as one is always already existing whether or not one ever notices that one exists. What the everyday's repetition conceals is *presence* rather than *being*, since being cannot be cancelled by inattention: presence is the manner in which something emerges into felt, illuminated experience, comes forward from the background and is undergone as present. The difference is the difference between a thing's obtaining and a thing's being *present to* someone. Repetition is an anaesthetic; it lets the relation go on existing while rendering its existence imperceptible, dissolving the fact of the "we" into the automatic functioning of two interlocking routines. What travel can do, and what the everyday ordinarily cannot, is to make the relation *present* rather than to make it exist: to bring its dynamics forward out of the submerged automatism into something the two can actually feel themselves living. When the paper speaks, later, of the *self-presence of relational dynamics* (§3), it means presence in exactly this sense, and not being.

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

1.4 A note on method: the journey as concrete universal

Before the argument begins, its method must be made honest, because a reader is entitled to ask by what right a paper moves from the shared journeys of particular people to claims about the relational subject, the reproduction of experience, and the relation of ethics to the beautiful. The worry is real and deserves a real answer in place of a tacit evasion. This paper offers no empirical study; it rests on no survey of travellers, and a survey would not refute it. Neither is it a treatise that uses travel as a mere illustration, a decorative example of theses

established independently. Its method is the one this series has used throughout and which its formal companion made explicit in its own register [21]: it takes a single, fully unfolded particular and reads its structure, on the wager, ancient and central to the dialectical tradition, that a structure shows itself most clearly through deep entry into one particular rather than through abstraction that strips away everything concrete. This is the method of the *concrete universal*: the universal not as the thin residue left after all particularity is boiled off, but as the structure that a sufficiently deep particular makes manifest precisely in its concreteness. A shared journey, attended to closely enough, widens into a showing of what the generation of a relational subject is, rather than narrowing into private anecdote, because the journey is one place where that generation happens slowly and visibly enough to be described.

Two consequences follow, and the paper accepts them. First, its evidence is phenomenological: it appeals to structures of shared experience that the reader is invited to recognise from within their own life, in place of data that settle the matter from outside. The test of its claims is whether, once stated, they illuminate, whether the reader who has travelled with someone they love finds their own experience newly legible in them, rather than whether they have been measured. This is the appropriate test for a phenomenology, and the paper pretends to no other. Second, the particularity is the very organ of the showing rather than an embarrassment to be apologised for. That the journeys behind this paper are particular journeys, with a particular person, is the concreteness through which the universal becomes visible at all, in place of noise to be filtered out on the way to the universal; and the paper will argue, when it reaches the question of the beloved's irreplaceability, that this marks a truth about the matter itself rather than an accident of method: the universal structure of intimate generativity can only ever be instanced in a particularity that no universal exhausts [21]. The method and the subject matter here say the same thing: one reaches what is common to all love only by going all the way into one. The journey is the concrete; the universal is what the journey, fully entered, shows.

1.5 The plan of the paper

The paper proceeds in four movements and a generalisation, bound by a single methodological commitment to descend from theory into practice. The first movement is phenomenological. It analyses the special field of travel into its constitutive features, namely co-creation, reshaped time, suspension, contingency, liminality, symmetric unfamiliarity, and forced co-presence, together with the spaciousness that underlies them all (§2); and it argues that the field both reveals the relation and generates the “we,” bringing the relation's dynamics to self-presence (§3). The second movement is political-economic: it shows that the experience a journey generates is a form of relational wealth, that its retelling is the reproduction of that wealth, and that this reproduction has a healthy form, living shared retelling, and a degraded one, the reification of experience into a consumed and displayed object (§4). The third movement is ethical and then aesthetic. It draws from the field an ethics of shared travel, including its failures and its relation to the third-party other (§5), and then argues that the construction of such a field is an aesthetic rather than an engineering problem (§7); that the perception of contingent beauty is a cultivable capacity (§11); and, in the paper's most exposed chapter, that

ethical judgement at its limit is aesthetic, so that the deepest ethical education is an aesthetic education (§12). A chapter on the political economy of beauty (§14) tests these claims against a concrete case from the world of capital. The closing movement generalises “travel” into a functional concept, the construction of the special field even within the alienated everyday, and offers it as an opening in place of a conclusion (§15, §16). Where the formal apparatus of the series’ companion paper is needed, it is invoked lightly and in a serving role, never rebuilt. The governing spirit throughout is practical: the paper means not only to understand the field of travel but to say how two people might actually build one, and keep building it, in the midst of an everyday that is forever closing it back down.

2. The Field of Travel and Its Constitutive Features

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

2.1 The temporal arch I: co-creation

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

The point is worth dwelling on, because it locates the generativity of travel earlier than the usual account places it. To plan a journey together is to negotiate a *shared intention*: where to go, why, what to seek, what to refuse, how to weigh the one’s wish to see against the other’s wish to rest. A shared intention is a single intentionality borne by two rather than the sum of two private intentions, and its construction is the forging of the relational subject in one of its most legible forms. The everyday offers surprisingly few occasions for this kind of pure

joint construction, since routine consists largely in the discharge of intentions already given, the roles, the duties, the standing arrangements, in place of the building of new ones together. Travel planning forces it. Two people imagining a place they have not yet been, aligning what they each hope to find there, are doing in miniature exactly what it is to be a “we”: they are jointly intending a world. And because what they jointly intend is a future background, the manifold against which their resonance will, in a few weeks, be redefined, co-creation is, quite precisely, the anticipatory and conspiratorial rehearsal of the background-exchange that the journey will enact. Before the manifold is exchanged in fact, the two have already begun, in imagination, to build it together. Co-creation is the first opening of the field, and because it recurs, in the re-planning of each day en route and, as the paper will argue, in the shared retelling afterward (§4), it forms the axis along which the whole temporal arch is strung more than a single phase.

2.2 The temporal arch II: reshaped time

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

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

2.3 The openness I: suspension

The everyday’s closure is lifted, first, by *suspension*: the bracketing, for the duration of the journey, of the dense network of roles and obligations that ordinarily defines each person. At

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

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

2.4 The openness II: contingency

The second source of the field's openness is *contingency*: the lifting of the everyday's predetermination, the restoration to each moment of the quality of being genuinely undecided. The everyday is, in its essence, repetition, and repetition is the predetermined: one knows, in the ordinary run of a day, more or less what each hour will hold, because each hour has been held a thousand times before. This predetermination is what the existential tradition has taught us to recognise as the great anaesthetic of selfhood. In Heidegger's analysis, the everyday is the reign of *das Man*, the anonymous "they" in whose averaged, levelled-down understanding existence is absorbed: one does what one does, as "one" does it, and in this absorption the fact of one's own existence as a question to be lived is covered over, fallen into the smooth automatism of the familiar [20]. Travel breaks the repetition, and the breaking is principally a restoration of the undecided more than a matter of fresh stimulation. In an unfamiliar place nothing is settled in advance: one does not know whether the train will come, where the lane leads, whether one will be understood, whether the food will be good. Each moment becomes, again, a genuine present, undetermined, open, to be undergone in place of discharged.

And in this restored contingency the subject is pressed back into appearing. When the familiar scaffolding is removed, the fact that *I am here, undergoing this, having to choose* becomes visible again, no longer dissolved into the automatism of the predetermined. This is the existential core of travel, and it has a long and serious philosophical lineage, which the field's contingency

reactivates in place of inventing. The lineage is summarised in Table 1. The point common to its members, however they differ, is that the rupture of the predetermined returns the subject to itself, to its existence, its freedom, its finitude, by stripping away the everyday’s concealment. What this paper adds to that lineage is the move from the solitary to the shared, taken up in the next section; here it is enough to establish that contingency is one of the two great openers of the field, and that its opening is, in the first instance, existential, the return of existence to presence.

Thinker	Concept	Bearing on the contingency of the field
Heidegger [20]	<i>das Man</i> , fallenness, authenticity; anxiety (<i>Angst</i>) as disclosive	The everyday’s repetition is absorption in the “they”; contingency lifts the concealment, a bearable anxiety in which existence is disclosed. The paper’s principal mast.
Sartre [49, 50]	Contingency; the nausea before the gratuitousness of being; freedom	Travel restores the felt gratuitousness of things, their lack of necessary reason, and with it the exposure of freedom: in the undetermined moment, one must choose.
Kierkegaard [25]	Repetition vs. recollection; genuine “repetition” as renewed receiving	Sharpens the paper’s own wording: the aim is the renewed winning of existence out of contingency rather than mechanical re-enactment.
Jaspers [23]	Boundary situations (<i>Grenzsituationen</i>)	The journey’s mishaps, getting lost, stranded, stuck, are minor boundary situations in which ordinary self-understanding fails and the subject meets its finitude and possibility.
Merleau-Ponty [37]	The lived body; perception as bodily engagement with a world	The unfamiliar place is met first in the body, dis-oriented, alert, re-learning its surroundings, so that contingency is undergone perceptually before it is understood.

Table 1: The existential-phenomenological lineage reactivated by the field’s contingency. The paper takes Heidegger as its principal mast and reads the others as developing aspects of the single thesis that the rupture of the predetermined returns the subject to presence.

2.5 The conditions of being-together I: liminality

The features so far would each be available to a solitary traveller. The next three are what make the field’s openness specifically *shared*. The first is *liminality*. The concept is anthropological: in van Gennep’s analysis of rites of passage, and Turner’s development of it, the rite has a threshold phase, the *limen*, in which the initiate has left the old status without yet entering the new, and is for a time betwixt and between, outside the ordinary structure of roles and ranks [56, 58]. Two things characterise this liminal phase. The first is the temporary dissolution of structure: in the threshold, the ordinary hierarchies and classifications are suspended, and the initiates stand outside the grid that ordinarily places them. The second is what Turner called *communitas*: the intense, levelling, immediate bond that arises among those who pass through the liminal together, a being-with stripped of the mediations of status, an undifferentiated mutuality possible only in the threshold [56].

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

journey is to be betwixt and between, to have left the structure of home without having arrived at any new structure, suspended in a passage between two settled states. And two people who enter this threshold together are, for its duration, released from the structure that ordinarily mediates them, the division of household labour, the standing roles, the accreted positions of a shared life, into a more immediate and levelling mutuality. The couple on the road are not, for a while, the one-who-manages-the-finances and the one-who-handles-the-relatives; they are two people in the threshold together, met more nearly as such. This dyadic *communitas* is one of the deepest goods of shared travel, and it is also why return can be so deflating: *communitas* is, by its nature, a threshold phenomenon, and the re-entry into structure that homecoming requires (§4, §4.5) dissolves it unless deliberate labour preserves what it generated.

2.6 The conditions of being-together II: symmetric unfamiliarity

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

The significance of this is that it is the condition of *co-witnessing*, as against the asymmetric witnessing of host and guest. When one partner shows the other their home city, the other witnesses the city, and also witnesses the partner-as-host, and is witnessed as guest; the structure has a giver and a receiver of the unfamiliar. When both are equally strangers, neither hosts and neither is hosted; they undergo the unknown *together*, side by side, each seeing it freshly and each seeing the other see it freshly, and, the decisive addition, each knowing that the other is in the same condition. This symmetric co-undergoing is the ground of the field's deepest generativity, because it is the condition under which the relation's dynamics can become present to both at once as something they are equally inside of, in place of something one is showing and the other receiving. The next section's central concept, the self-presence of relational dynamics, depends upon this symmetry: it is hard to feel the "we" as a whole when one of the two is the host of the occasion; it becomes possible when both are equally in the threshold, equally before the same strangeness, equally without a script.

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

The third condition is the most prosaic and the most double-edged: *forced co-presence*. Travel puts two people together continuously, with the everyday's escape valves removed. At home there are always exits, the separate job, the independent friendships, the room one can withdraw

to, the errand that takes one out, and these exits, though they look like mere logistics, perform a real function: they release the pressure that continuous proximity generates, and they let a relation run without ever having to test how much undiluted togetherness it can bear. Travel removes the exits. For the span of the journey the two are thrown together without reprieve, and this enforced, unrelieved proximity is at once the field's chief stressor and one of its chief engines of depth.

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

2.8 The underlying condition: spaciousness

The seven features so far do not, however, sit as seven coordinate items on a list. One condition underlies them all, and it is the ground that makes the rest possible in place of one feature among them: *spaciousness*, the worked emptiness introduced in §1.2. Each of the seven, examined closely, turns out to require an opened, unfilled room in order to operate. Contingency cannot enter a filled field: a journey whose every hour is booked, whose every space is crowded with planned content, leaves no gap through which the undetermined can arrive, and the wildflower at the roadside cannot be seen when the eyes are fixed on the itinerary. Suspension is itself a kind of emptying, since the bracketing of roles is the clearing-away of the functions that fill the everyday. The liminal threshold is structurally an emptiness, the cleared interval between two structures. Forced co-presence does its generative work only where there is unfilled time for the two to actually occupy together; pack the journey densely enough and the co-presence becomes mere joint logistics, two people processing an itinerary side by side. Even co-creation and reshaped time are, at bottom, ways of opening and bounding a space that is to be left partly empty, a vessel whose use is in the room within.

This is why spaciousness is named as the field's underlying condition in place of its eighth feature. It is the emptiness in the vessel; the others are the walls that shape and hold it. The eleventh chapter of the *Daodejing* states the structure exactly: what is there, the walls, the features, the bounded span, gives advantage, while what is not there, the emptiness they enclose, gives use [29]. The advantage of the field lies in its constructed features; its *use*, the actual generation of presence and of the "we," lies in the emptiness those features enclose and protect. And this is the deepest reason the power of travel is misunderstood as novelty. Novelty

fills; spaciousness empties; and the emptying, in place of the filling, opens the room in which a relation can come to itself. The phrase the previous paper used for the highest form of this, the fullness of doing nothing, two people before a window with the rain [62], was already a description of spaciousness, here given its name and its place as the condition of the whole field. To travel well is, before all the particular features, to know how to keep the vessel empty enough to be of use.

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

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

The first is the tension between *co-creation and contingency*, which forms the deep structure of a familiar quarrel. Co-creation, carried to excess, is the enemy of contingency: the more completely a journey is planned, every hour assigned, every site booked, every meal chosen in advance, the less room remains for the undetermined to enter, until the journey becomes a fixed background in motion, the everyday's predetermination carried abroad under the costume of travel. Yet contingency without any co-creation is a drift, and an anxious one, in place of a journey; some shared intending is the condition of there being a "we" that travels at all. The over-planner and the under-planner, the one who would book the journey to the minute and the one who would simply set out, are pulling on two genuinely constitutive features of the field rather than merely standing temperamentally at odds, each feature of which, alone and to excess, would destroy it. The resolution this paper will eventually offer (§7) is that the right object of planning is the *frame* in place of the *content*: that co-creation should build and protect a bounded, emptied space and then leave the interior open to contingency, intention exercised on the vessel's walls, the emptiness within left for what will come.

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

The third is the tension between *liminality and the temporal arch*, which is the structural seed of the problem of return. The *communitas* of the threshold is, by its nature, anti-structural and impermanent; the temporal arch, by its nature, ends, depositing the two back into the structure of the everyday. The very feature that makes the field's mutuality so intense, its

liminal release from structure, is the feature that guarantees its dissolution upon return, since one cannot remain forever in the threshold. This tension is the condition that makes the labour of reproduction necessary, in place of a defect to be removed (§4): because the liminal cannot be prolonged, what it generated must be *reproduced* into a form that can survive the return to structure, or it is lost. The field, then, is a dynamic and self-undermining condition rather than a stable possession, intense and impermanent, whose goods must be actively carried across the threshold of return or surrendered at it. It is to that carrying, and to the wealth it conserves or squanders, that the paper now turns, after first attending to what the field, while it lasts, brings to presence.

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

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

3.1 The field as touchstone: revelation

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

home, where the supports are always present to be leaned on; and it is dangerous for the same reason, since a relation may be assayed and found wanting, and the finding cannot be unfound.

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

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

The generative function brings something into being. In the shared undergoing of the field, the symmetric standing-before the same unknown, the *communitas* of the threshold, the continuous forced co-presence, the joint building of a shared world in co-creation, there emerges a subject that is not either of the two and not their sum: a “we” that is a relational subject in its own right, with its own movement and its own life. This is not a metaphor and not a *façon de parler*. It is the central ontological commitment of this series, established at its foundation: that relations are prior to the entities they relate, and that what we call a subject is a secondary condensation of relational activity rather than a premise standing before it [59]. On that commitment, the “we” is not a convenient name for two “I”s in proximity; it is a genuine relational subject, generated by relational activity, as real as, on the deepest version of the commitment, more fundamental than, the two it relates.

What the field of travel does, that the everyday ordinarily does not, is generate this “we” *vividly and visibly*. The previous paper described shared happiness as the resonance of two meaning-worlds, coupled into a joint state irreducible to either yet merging neither [62]; the field of travel is the condition under which that coupling is *intensified to the point of becoming a felt event* rather than merely achieved. The two drops do not merely resonate; the resonance becomes strong enough, and the conditions clear enough, that the “we” it constitutes comes forward as something undergone. The generation is real in the everyday too, any living relation is continually generating its “we”, but in the everyday the generation is submerged, dissolved into the automatic functioning of routine, proceeding without ever rising into experience. The field of travel raises it. And the raising of the generated “we” into experience is the phenomenon this section now names.

3.3 The self-presence of relational dynamics

In the field of travel, at certain moments, two people do not merely feel each other, and do not merely each feel themselves; they feel *the relation itself*, its movement, its current, the way the “we” is flowing and shifting and becoming, as something the two of them sense together, as a whole. This is the *self-presence of relational dynamics*: the emergence, into felt experience, of the relation’s own dynamics as a phenomenon that the relational subject undergoes about itself.

It is to be defined with care, and three points fix it. (It will be shown, when the philosophy of beauty is developed, that this felt accord of the relational subject with its own movement is structurally an accord of the three registers, the real, the symbolic, and the imaginary, achieved together rather than within one subject; see §9.2.)

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

Second, what comes to presence is the dynamics' *presence*, not its *being*, in exactly the sense fixed in the introduction (§1.3). The relation's dynamics did not begin in the field; they run continuously, in the everyday as much as on the journey. What the field supplies is their presence rather than their existence, their emergence from the submerged automatism into felt experience. The everyday's repetition is the anaesthetic that holds the dynamics below the threshold of feeling; the field's spaciousness is the clearing in which they can rise into it. To speak of self-*presence* rather than self-*being* is therefore exact: the field does not make the relation's dynamics be; it makes them present.

Third, the phenomenon is a *self*-presence because it is the relational subject, the "we", to which its own dynamics become present. This is its strangest and most important feature. It is not that each of the two separately observes the relation, as an external object held between them; it is that the "we," as a single relational subject, undergoes its own movement as felt experience. The relation becomes present to itself. This is a relational self-awareness, distinct in kind from individual self-awareness: not "I am aware that I exist" but "we are aware of ourselves as a dynamic whole in motion." And it requires, as its condition, the symmetric co-undergoing established in the previous section (§2.6): only when neither of the two is the host of the occasion, when both are equally inside the same unfolding, can the relation's dynamics become present to the "we" as a whole rather than to one partner observing and another observed.

A light formal anchor. The series' formal companion gives this phenomenon a structural location, which is recorded here lightly and in a serving role, not rebuilt [21]. There the joint state of two coupled subjects is a vector in a fusion space, and the relation's evolution is the action of braiding upon that state, a dynamics that is, in the ordinary case, an implicit operator, a background structure governing how the joint state changes without itself being an object of the system's experience. The self-presence of relational dynamics is, in these terms, the becoming-*phenomenologically-present* of the fusion-space dynamics: the moment at which the operator that ordinarily runs in the background rises into the foreground and is undergone. What is otherwise merely the mathematics of how the joint state evolves becomes, in the field,

a felt event, the “we” sensing its own braiding. The formal apparatus is not required for the phenomenological claim, which stands on its own description; it is noted only to mark that the phenomenon has a precise place in the structure the series has elsewhere built, and that the continuity between the felt and the formal is, here as throughout this work, deliberate.

3.4 Two contrasts: the solitary traveller and Hegelian recognition

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

The solitary traveller. Almost the entire philosophical literature of travel is a literature of the *solitary* journey. The wanderer who finds himself by losing the familiar, the pilgrim whose road is a road into his own depths, the lone traveller of the Romantic and existential imagination, from the solitary walker of the philosophical tradition to the Japanese figure of the *hitori tabi*, the journey taken alone, all describe a real and valuable phenomenon: the return of the self to itself in the cleared field of the unfamiliar. This is the existential function of contingency (§2.4), and it is available to one. But it is *revelation*, not generation, and it is the revelation of a single subject to itself. What the solitary traveller cannot have, by the very condition of solitude, is the self-presence of relational dynamics, because there is no relational subject present whose dynamics could come to presence. The solitary journey can bring *me* to presence; only the shared journey can bring *us* to presence as a moving whole. This is the precise sense in which the present account is not the existential philosophy of travel doubled or summed. Two solitary self-presences, even side by side, even simultaneous, do not constitute the self-presence of a relational dynamics; that requires the generation of a “we” whose own movement is what becomes present, and the generation of the “we” is exactly what the solitary journey, however profound, structurally lacks. The originality of the claim lies here: not in adding existential depth to travel, which the tradition already did, but in locating a phenomenon, relational, not individual, that the tradition’s solitary framing made invisible.

Hegelian recognition. The nearest philosophical neighbour to a relational self-awareness is Hegel’s account of mutual recognition: the dialectic in which self-consciousness attains itself only through being recognised by another self-consciousness, so that selfhood is from the outset mediated by the other. The resemblance is real, and the account offered here owes the recognition tradition a debt. But the difference is precise and it is the difference that the concept turns on. Hegelian recognition is, in its classical form, a relation *between two self-consciousnesses*: each attains itself through the other, but what is attained is, in the end, the self-consciousness of each, the “I” that has won itself by passing through the other’s recognition. The terminus is two recognised “I”s. The self-presence of relational dynamics is not the recognition of two “I”s through each other but the coming-to-presence of the “we” to itself: it is that the relational subject attains awareness of its own dynamics as a whole rather than that each partner attains individual self-consciousness via the other,. The unit of the phenomenon is the relation, not the relatum; what becomes present is the movement of the “we,” not the secured selfhood of either “I.” Where recognition issues in two selves who have won themselves through each

other, self-presence issues in a relation that has become present to itself, a different terminus, requiring the prior ontological commitment that the relation is a subject in its own right and not merely a medium through which two subjects constitute themselves. The recognition tradition, lacking that commitment, could see the two-through-each-other but not the third that is neither; this account, resting on the relational ontology of the series' foundation [59], takes the third, the “we” as a subject whose dynamics can become present to it, as the phenomenon to be described. It is to the fate of that “we” after the journey ends, and to the wealth it generates or squanders, that the argument now turns.

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

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

4.1 The experience of the journey is relational wealth

This series has already established the category of generative relational wealth: the value that a relation generates and holds not as a stock divided between two parties but as a genuinely common surplus, the wealth of the “we” rather than the summed possessions of the two “I”s [63]. The experience a shared journey generates is wealth of exactly this kind, and the point need not be argued at length because it follows directly: the self-presence of the relational dynamics, the *communitas* of the threshold, the depth reached in the cleared field, these are not goods that either partner possesses privately and could carry off alone, but goods of the relation, generated by and belonging to the “we.” What the two bring home from a journey that went well is a common deposit in the wealth of their relation rather than two private stores of pleasant memory. This is why the loss of it, when it is lost, is felt as a loss to the relation and not merely to two individuals; and it is why its conservation is a matter for the relation's political economy, the question of how the “we” manages the wealth it generates.

But relational wealth, like any wealth, is subject to a basic political-economic fact: it is not

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

4.2 Retelling as the reproduction of subjective experience

What is that labour? It is, principally, *retelling*: the shared, spoken, mutual re-narration of the journey, by which the two return to what they generated and weave it, again and again, into the fabric of the "we." *Do you remember that time we got lost*, the small phrase is the beginning of a great deal, for in the shared retelling the generated experience is not merely recalled but *re-produced*: brought back into the relation's living present, re-felt, re-woven, and thereby kept from dissipating. This is the *reproduction of subjective experience*, and the name is chosen with its full political-economic weight. In the political economy of labour, reproduction is the process by which what production has generated is made to persist, circulate, and serve as the precondition of the next round of production; it is the condition of production's being more than a single rather than an appendage to production, dissipating event [14]. Reproduction, here, is the same category applied to a different object: not the reproduction of labour-power but the reproduction of the relational subject's experience, the labour by which a generated experience is kept in circulation and thereby conserved as wealth.

The application is exact in each of its parts. Production, the generation of the experience in the field, is, on its own, a one-time event; the journey ends, the field closes, and what was generated would dissipate were it not reproduced. Reproduction, the shared retelling, is what keeps it: by returning the experience to the relation's present, the retelling makes it persist beyond its moment, circulate through the relation's ongoing life, and become available as the precondition of further generation, the deposited wealth on which the relation can draw. And reproduction is, like all reproduction, *labour*, living activity, expended by the two, without which the conservation does not happen. This last point is the one most easily missed and most important, and the next subsection is devoted to it; for the great temptation of the age is to imagine that the reproduction of experience has been automated, outsourced to a device, when in truth it cannot be performed by anything but the living labour of the two who shared the experience.

4.3 Reproduction is the establishment of a good cycle

The retelling does not merely preserve; it *circulates*, and in circulating it can do something that mere preservation cannot, it can establish a good cycle, in the exact sense this series has given the term. A good cycle, as developed in the foundational treatment of sustainable intimacy, is a circulation that returns more than it took: a loop along which positive surplus

accumulates, so that the relation comes back to itself not depleted but enriched, the circulation generating rather than merely conserving [60]. The shared retelling, when it is alive, is such a cycle. Each return to the journey in retelling is not a static replay of a fixed content but a re-generation: the experience is re-felt, and in the re-feeling it is added to, inflected by all that has happened since, enriched by the very act of being retold, so that the couple who return often to a shared journey do not wear it out but deepen it, the story growing in meaning each time it is told. The retelling is a loop that returns more than it took, the holonomy of the relation accumulating positive phase along the path of re-narration, to put it in the terms of the series' formal companion, where the surplus of a relation is exactly what a closed circulation generates over its inputs [21]. Reproduction, then, is the establishment of a circulation rather than the mere maintenance of a stock, and a circulation that, when healthy, is generative: the good cycle by which a journey's wealth not only persists but grows.

This is the deep reason the reproduction of experience matters as much as its generation, and perhaps more. Generation gives the relation a wealth; reproduction establishes the circulation by which that wealth becomes self-augmenting, by which a single journey, retold and re-felt over years, becomes an ever-deepening common possession rather than a fading memory. A relation rich in such circulations, many shared experiences, each kept in living retelling, is rich in the most durable way, for its wealth is a set of good cycles each of which returns more than it took rather than a fixed store that can only be spent down. The political economy of the relation is, in large part, the management of these cycles: their establishment, their maintenance, and the subject of the next subsections, their two characteristic failures, reification and unjust distribution.

4.4 Dead material and living labour: the photograph

The reproduction of experience is living labour, and it cannot be performed by anything else. This must be insisted upon, because the most pervasive error in the modern conduct of travel is the belief that the reproduction has been accomplished by the *recording*, that to have photographed the journey is to have preserved it. The photograph, the video, the souvenir, the geotagged log: these are not the reproduction of the experience. They are, at most, its *material*, the dead stuff from which a reproduction might later be made, but which is not itself a reproduction and accomplishes nothing on its own. The distinction is precisely Marx's distinction between dead and living labour. Dead labour is labour congealed in a thing, past activity solidified into an object; living labour is present activity, and only living labour can set dead labour back into motion and make it yield [33]. The photograph is dead labour: the congealed residue of a past seeing, a thing in which an experience has been deposited and frozen. It can become material for reproduction, a prompt, a prop, a trigger for the living retelling, but only if living labour takes it up and works it. A photograph never returned to in shared retelling reproduces nothing; it is dead labour that stays dead, a stock of congealed seeing accumulating on a drive, untouched by the living activity that alone could make it yield.

The consequences of confusing the material with the reproduction are severe, and they are visible everywhere in the contemporary conduct of travel. The couple who photograph everything

and retell nothing have mistaken the accumulation of dead material for the conservation of wealth, and they will find their wealth dissipating beneath a growing pile of unviewed images, the perfect emblem of dead labour accumulating while the living labour that alone could redeem it is never performed. Worse, the labour of recording can actively *displace* the labour of reproduction: the energy that goes into capturing the moment for later is energy not spent undergoing the moment now or retelling it after, and the camera interposed between the two and their experience can prevent the very generation it was meant to preserve. The journey lived through a lens, photographed rather than undergone, may generate little to reproduce; and the journey whose afterlife is a folder of images never reopened reproduces little of what it generated. The recording is not the reproduction. Only the living labour of shared retelling reproduces the experience, and the dead material is worth exactly as much as the living labour that returns to work it, and not one bit more.

4.5 The return: the critical juncture

There is a moment at which reproduction either begins or fails, and it has been underweighted in every account of travel that treats the journey as ending at the homecoming. That moment is the *return* itself, the descent from the field back into the everyday, the crossing of the threshold in the homeward direction. The return is not the journey's conclusion; it is the journey's most delicate phase, the juncture at which everything the field generated must be carried across into a structure that is hostile to it, or be left behind at the threshold. The hostility is structural, established already in the analysis of the field's tensions (§2.9): the *communitas* of the journey is a liminal phenomenon, anti-structural by nature, and the everyday into which one returns is precisely structure, the reimposition of the roles that suspension had bracketed, the predetermination that contingency had lifted, the channelled time that reshaped time had opened. To return is to step from the threshold back into the grid, and the grid does not preserve what the threshold generated; left to itself, it dissolves it. This is the structural truth behind the most common lament of travellers, *it was so good there, and within a week of being home we were back to how we always are*. The lament is not a failure of feeling but a failure of reproduction at the critical juncture: the field's wealth was generated and then surrendered at the threshold, because nothing was done to carry it across.

The return therefore is its beginning rather than the end of the labour. To carry the field's wealth across the threshold is to begin, immediately and deliberately, the reproduction that will let it survive in the structured everyday: to retell while the experience is fresh, to deposit it into the relation's living present before the grid can dissolve it, to begin the good cycle while the wealth is still warm. And, this is the hinge on which the paper's final movement will turn, the labour of carrying the field's wealth across the threshold into the everyday is continuous with the labour of constructing the field within the everyday. To reproduce a journey's wealth at home is already to begin building, in the everyday, a small continuation of the field that generated it; the return is where the literal journey begins to become the generalised one (§15). The couple who reproduce well do not simply remember their journey; they let it seed the construction of fields in the everyday, so that the homecoming is the carrying of the field's

capacity home rather than a fall from the field. The return is the juncture where this either happens or does not, where the journey either deposits its wealth and seeds its own continuation, or is surrendered at the threshold and mourned.

4.6 The justice of reproduction

Reproduction, finally, has a politics, because the retelling that reproduces the experience is never neutral, and the question of *whose* version becomes the reproduced experience is a question of justice. Two people do not undergo the same journey identically: what one felt as a romantic adventure of getting lost, the other may have felt as a frightening consequence of the first's carelessness; what one remembers as a glorious meal, the other remembers as the evening they were ignored. The shared retelling weaves these divergent undergoings into a single shared narrative, and the weaving has a distribution of power. If one partner's version systematically dominates the retelling, if the official memory of the "we" is consistently the experience of one and not the other, then the reproduced experience is the product of an *unequal reproduction*, a narrative appropriation in which one party's subjective experience is taken up as the relation's memory while the other's is overwritten or silenced. This is, in the register of memory, an exact instance of the bad cycle this series has analysed throughout: one party rendered the mere material of a circulation whose surplus accrues to the other, fuel for a wealth not jointly held [60, 64]. The unjustly reproduced journey enriches the "we" in name while in fact enriching one of the two at the other's expense, the silenced partner's experience consumed to feed a common memory that is not truly common.

The just form of reproduction is, correspondingly, the one this series has described under the name of mutual translation: the retelling in which both undergoings are admitted, in which the two versions move toward each other and generate a shared narrative that neither alone possessed, the memory of the "we" built from both rather than imposed by one [61]. Just reproduction is harder than unjust, as mutual translation is harder than imposition; it requires that each partner's experience be given standing in the common memory, that the divergences be acknowledged rather than smoothed over by the dominant version, that the retelling generate a genuinely shared narrative rather than ratify one party's. But only just reproduction conserves the wealth as *relational* wealth, the wealth of the "we"; unjust reproduction converts it into the private wealth of one, dressed in the first-person plural. The justice of reproduction is thus not a separate ethical overlay upon a politically-economic process but internal to the process itself: only the just retelling reproduces the relation's wealth as the relation's, and the unjust retelling, whatever it preserves, has already begun to dissolve the "we" whose wealth it claims to keep. It is to the ethics implicit in this and the other operations of the field that the argument now turns.

5. The Ethics of Shared Travel

The field generates, the retelling reproduces; both can be done well or badly, and the difference is ethical. This section draws out the ethics implicit in the field of travel. It does not derive

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

5.1 Facing contingency together

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

The temptation to blame is strong precisely because contingency is anxious. The undetermined moment exposes the subject (§2.4), and the exposure can be uncomfortable; blame is a way of discharging the discomfort by locating its cause in the other, converting one's own anxiety before the undetermined into a grievance against a person. But blame, whatever its relief, dissolves the "we" at exactly the moment the "we" is most needed, and it converts a situation the field offered as an occasion for shared navigation, and so for the generation of the very *communitas* and self-presence the field exists to produce, into an occasion for the relation's depletion. The ethically central capacity of shared travel is therefore the capacity to receive contingency as a joint gift rather than a private grievance: to meet the missed train as *ours* to solve, the wrong turning as *ours* to laugh at or to bear, so that the undetermined becomes the material of the "we"'s generativity rather than the occasion of its fracture. The couple who can do this find in the field's contingencies an endless supply of generative occasions; the couple who cannot find in them an endless supply of quarrels, and the difference is in whether the contingency is met as a "we" or seized as an "I" rather than in their journeys, which offer the same contingencies to both,."

5.2 The ethics of reproduction

The justice of reproduction, established in the previous section (§4.6), is the field's second ethical situation, and it can be stated here as an ethical demand rather than a political-economic description. The demand is that the retelling which reproduces the journey be *just*, that it admit both undergoings, give standing to each partner's experience in the common memory, and generate a shared narrative from both rather than imposing one. The ethical work is the work of mutual translation [61]: the harder labour, against the easier path of letting the more articulate, more insistent, or more confident partner's version become by default the memory of the "we." The ease of the unjust path is what makes the demand a genuine ethical one and not a mere description; unjust reproduction does not require malice, only the failure to do the harder work of admitting the other's experience, and it accomplishes itself through nothing more than the inertia by which one voice, slightly louder or slightly surer, becomes the record. To reproduce justly is to resist that inertia: to ask, and to mean it, *how was it for you*, and to let the answer alter the common memory even when one's own version was more flattering or more convenient. The ethics of reproduction is, in this sense, an ethics of memory, a vigilance over the justice of what the "we" comes to remember, exercised in the ordinary act of retelling, where the relation's history is continually being written and the question of whose experience that history records is continually being decided.

5.3 Sustaining the good cycle

The third ethical situation concerns endurance: under what conditions does the good cycle a journey establishes continue to generate rather than collapse? The question is the field's version of the general problem of sustainable intimacy, and the series' foundational answer applies [60]. A good cycle endures so long as it continues to return more than it took, so long as each return to the journey in retelling re-generates rather than merely replays, so long as the circulation stays open and does not close into a fixed, repeated, exhausted form. Its collapse is the collapse of that openness: the moment the retelling ceases to re-generate and becomes mere rote repetition, the same story told the same way to no further effect, the cycle has closed into a stock, the wealth no longer circulating and growing but frozen into a fixed and dwindling possession. The ethics of sustaining the good cycle is therefore an ethics against premature closure: against letting the shared journey harden into a fixed anecdote, a set-piece performed rather than re-felt, a possession held rather than a circulation kept open. It is, in the vocabulary of the previous paper, the ethics of non-fullness applied to memory [65]: not to fill the journey's meaning to completion, not to settle it into a final and fixed account, but to leave it open to re-generation, so that it can keep returning more than it took. A journey kept thus open can nourish a relation for a lifetime; a journey closed into a fixed anecdote is spent in a few tellings and thereafter merely repeated. The difference, again, is ethical: it lies in whether the two keep the cycle open or let it close.

5.4 Facing the third-party other

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

The characteristic ethical failure here is well known, and the literature of travel and tourism has named it: the reduction of the inhabited place to a *spectacle* for the visitor’s consumption, the other’s home and life converted into scenery, the inhabitants into picturesque features of a landscape arranged for the tourist’s gaze [31, 57]. This is the tourist’s version of the reification analysed in the previous section: the living reality of a place and its people reduced to a consumable object, photographed rather than encountered, gazed at rather than met. And it has a specifically relational danger for the couple, beyond the injustice to the other: a “we” that constitutes itself through the joint consumption of others as spectacle is a “we” built on a shared extraction, and the bad cycle it practises toward the third party tends to be the bad cycle it will practise within. The couple who together reduce every place to a backdrop for their own experience, who consume the inhabited world as scenery for the “we,” are practising a mode of relating, extraction, reification, the reduction of the living to the consumable, that does not stay outside the dyad. How one treats the third party is continuous with how one treats the second.

The generative alternative is the joint practice of what the series has called epistemic hospitality, here directed outward [61]: the meeting of the visited place and its people as a genuine other to be encountered rather than a spectacle to be consumed, with the openness that lets the other’s reality alter one’s own rather than merely furnish it. To travel well, ethically, is for the two together to be guests rather than consumers, to receive the place as hosts receive a gift, with the humility that knows oneself to be in another’s home, rather than to extract it as scenery for the “we.” And this joint ethical practice toward the third party is, the paper suggests, a school for the wider ethics the series will eventually need: the ethics of the many, of the relational commons, of the “we” that is larger than two. The couple who learn to face the third-party other generatively, to widen the circle of non-extractive relation beyond the dyad, are taking the first step from the ethics of intimacy toward the ethics of the basin, the watershed, the commons that the previous paper marked as the horizon beyond the dyad [63, 65]. The third-party other of travel is where the dyadic ethics first meets its own enlargement, and the manner of that meeting is a genuine ethical question for the “we.”

5.5 The failure and collapse of shared travel

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

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

The second failure is the failure of *reproduction degenerating into extraction*: the retelling that should reproduce the wealth justly instead becomes the instrument of one partner's appropriation of the common memory, the unjust reproduction of the previous section made into a settled practice (§4.6). Here something was generated, but its afterlife is corrupt: the journey's wealth, instead of circulating as the relation's, is captured by one and the other silenced, and the bad cycle of narrative extraction sets in. This failure is more insidious than the first, because it can coexist with the appearance of a rich shared history, the couple who tell, often and warmly, a shared story that is in truth one partner's story, the other's experience long since overwritten and forgotten, including by the one whose experience it was.

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

What unifies the three failures is instructive, and it returns the ethics to its single principle. In each, the field has done its work, removed the concealment, restored the contingency, opened the space for reproduction, and the relation has failed to meet what the field offered: had nothing to be revealed, or extracted rather than reproduced, or fractured rather than navigated. The field is neutral; it opens the conditions, and the relation generates good or ill within them. This is why the same journey, the same set of contingencies, the same cleared field, can be for one

couple the deepening of a lifetime and for another the beginning of an end. The field does not determine the outcome; it presents the occasion, and what the “we” makes of the occasion is the ethical substance of shared travel. The failures are of what was brought to it and done within it rather than failures of the field, which is precisely why they are *ethical* failures, matters of how the two met what the field offered, and not mere misfortunes that befell them. And it is because the field only ever offers the occasion, never the outcome, that the question of how to meet it well, the question of constructing and inhabiting the field rightly, becomes the central practical question to which the paper now turns.

5.6 Conflict as positive wealth: the ethics of transfiguration

The account of failure just given is true but, taken alone, it is one-sided, and the one-sidedness must now be corrected, for it would leave the impression that conflict in shared travel is simply a danger, a thing to be survived at best, a thing that destroys at worst. The philosophy of beauty has shown that this is not the whole truth: suffering can be beautiful, and conflict, transfigured in the labour of reproduction, can become not the depletion of a relation’s wealth but among its richest deposits (§9.7, §9.8). The ethics of conflict is therefore not exhausted by the ethics of avoiding or surviving it; it includes, and culminates in, the ethics of *transfiguring* it, of doing the reproductive labour that converts a shared difficulty into a shared beauty and a common wealth.

This reframes the ethical situation of conflict entirely. The earlier discussion of facing contingency together (§5.1) presented the ethical fork as lying between meeting the contingency as a “we” and seizing it as material for blame, between navigation and fracture. That fork is real, but it concerns the conflict *in the moment*. There is a second ethical moment, which the analysis of reproduction now makes visible: the moment *after*, in which the conflict, having occurred, is either transfigured in shared retelling into a treasured part of the relation’s history, or left as a raw wound, or weaponised as a grievance to be reopened. The ethics of conflict spans both moments. In the moment, the demand is to meet the difficulty as a “we” rather than dissolving into blame. After the moment, the demand is to reproduce the conflict well, to return to it together in a way that transfigures it, that gives the shared difficulty a form and a meaning, that lets the two find, in what was hard, a beauty and a closeness that the difficulty itself made possible. The couple who can do both, meet the conflict together in the moment, and transfigure it together afterward, do not merely survive their conflicts; they convert them into wealth, and into a wealth, moreover, of a uniquely durable and precious kind, because it is the wealth of a difficulty come through together and made beautiful.

This is why a relationship that has weathered and transfigured real conflict is often deeper than one that has never been seriously tested. The transfigured conflict yields what unbroken harmony cannot: the proof, held in shared memory, that the “we” can survive difficulty and make beauty of it; the hard-won common accord of two perceptions that genuinely diverged and were reconciled; the unique and unrepeatable shared experience of a storm weathered together. The deepest intimacies are very often those that have transfigured the most difficulty, and the reason is now clear: difficulty, well reproduced, is a richer material for relational wealth than

ease, because its transfiguration generates a beauty and a bond that ease never demands and so never produces. The ethical counsel is not, of course, to seek out conflict, the raw difficulty is real, and badly met or badly reproduced it is pure loss. The counsel is that conflict, when it comes, is not simply to be survived but to be *transfigured*: met as a “we” in the moment and reproduced into beauty afterward, so that the hardest passages of a shared life become, through the loving labour of their reproduction, not the wounds the relation carries but the treasures it holds. What distinguishes the transfiguration that succeeds from the one that fails is not left to metaphor: the good reproduction of suffering must meet four criteria, it must preserve the possibility of the relation’s continued generation, be conducted relationally rather than unilaterally, refuse the exploitation of either party’s pain, and accompany the power it inevitably generates with the restraint of that power (§9.9). These four mark the direction of the good, though, as that discussion concedes, they do not supply the method, which remains among the hardest of the arts. The ethics of shared travel is incomplete until it includes this, the recognition that the difficult, and even the painful, is not the enemy of the relation’s flourishing but, rightly transfigured, among its deepest sources. Beauty does not exclude conflict; the ethics of intimacy, at its most mature, makes conflict a part of the relation’s common generation.

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

The ethics of shared travel has analysed the failures to be avoided and the conflicts to be transfigured, but it would close on too low a note if it ended with prohibitions and repairs, with what must not be done and what must be mended. For the ethical substance of shared travel is finally not negative but positive: the journeys met well, the contingencies faced together, the conflicts transfigured, accumulate into something that is the relation’s deepest ethical achievement, and the paper should name it before it leaves the ethical movement. That achievement is a *capacity*, the capacity, grown between two people over a life of shared faring, to face the world together.

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

This common good is the ethical correlate of everything the paper has analysed, gathered

into a single capacity. It is the self-presence of relational dynamics (§3) become durable, a “we” that knows itself well enough to act as one under pressure. It is the relational wealth of reproduced experience (§4) become capability, the accumulated shared history sedimented into a present power to face what comes. It is the good cycle of relational production (§6) seen in its fruit, a relation that, having generated and reproduced well, is now more able to generate and reproduce, its generativity compounding into a tested capacity for shared life. And it is the deepest answer to the question of why shared travel matters ethically: not because it affords pleasant experiences, nor even because it generates wealth, but because, undergone well, it builds the capacity of two people to face the world together, which is, in the end, what an intimate relation is for, and what its ethical flourishing consists in. The couple who can face anything together, because they have faced so much together well, have achieved the common good that the whole ethics of shared travel was, beneath all its particular concerns, about. This is where the ethical movement comes to rest: not in the avoidance of failure, but in the positive achievement of a shared capacity to meet the world, the common good of a “we” grown able, through a life of faring together, to face whatever comes as one.

6. Relational Production and Its Ethical Principles

The paper has arrived, by several routes, at the same kind of problem. The reproduction of a shared experience can be just or unjust (§4.6); the reproduction of suffering can preserve or destroy a relation (§9.9); the practice of aesthetic judgement across two differing sensibilities can sustain or annihilate the two who differ (§10.4). These have been treated as separate problems, each with its own analysis. They are not separate. They are instances of one underlying activity, which this section names and theorises for the first time: *relational production*, the activity by which a relational subject generates and reproduces the value that is proper to it. This section establishes relational production as a category, formulates the ethical principles that govern it, and shows that the previously separate problems are its applications, sharing a single set of principles. It is, in the architecture of this paper and arguably of the series, a theoretical event: the first statement of relational production as a domain with its own constitutive ethics.

6.1 The category of relational production

By *relational production* the paper means any activity by which a relational subject, a “we”, generates or reproduces the value proper to a relation: shared experience, common memory, joint meaning, the aesthetic judgement of the “we,” the significance of what the relation has undergone together. The category is broad by design, for its point is to gather under one concept activities that have been treated separately but share a structure. The generation of experience in the field of travel (§2), its reproduction in shared retelling (§4), the reproduction of suffering (§9.9), the production and evolution of a shared aesthetic judgement (§10), all are relational production: in each, a relational subject is at work generating or reproducing a value that belongs to the relation rather than to either of its members.

What unifies these activities, and what makes relational production a single category rather

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

6.2 The keystone: the principle of subject-preservation

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

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

The principle rests directly on the relational ontology of the series [59] and on the account of resonance as distinct from fusion (§3.2). A relation is a coupling of two who remain two; its unity is the resonance of distinct meaning-worlds, not their merger. To annihilate one of the two in the name of unity is therefore not to perfect the relation but to destroy its condition, collapsing the two-that-resonate into a one-that-is-alone. The principle of subject-preservation is the ethical statement of this ontological truth: because the relation *is* the resonance of two distinct subjects, any production that eliminates a subject destroys the relation, however much “unity” it appears to achieve. And it is the ethical correlate of the dynamical result of the dialectic of the general and the particular (§10.5): there it was shown that the suppression of the particular, the homogenisation of the two into one, is a dynamical catastrophe, extinguishing the diversity on which the relation’s continued generativity depends; here the same truth appears as an ethical prohibition, that the relation may not annihilate the particular subject

even for the sake of unity, on pain of extinguishing itself. The dynamical “the particular is required for generativity” and the ethical “the other may not be annihilated for unity” are one truth in two registers.

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

6.3 The four operative criteria

Beneath the keystone stand four operative criteria, which specify, in the four dimensions corresponding to the series’ theoretical pillars, what the preservation of the subject requires in the conduct of relational production. These were first stated for the particular case of suffering (§9.9); they are now seen to be not specific to suffering but general to relational production as such, and are stated here in their general form.

The *teleological criterion*: relational production must preserve the possibility of the relation’s continued generativity [60]. It must not, in producing the relation’s value, foreclose the relation’s generative future, must not produce a dead end, a frozen verdict, a terminus from which nothing further can be generated. This criterion forbids the annihilation of the subject in the dimension of *time*: a production that ends the relation’s capacity to go on generating has annihilated the relation as a living subject, leaving only a dead structure.

The *ontological criterion*: relational production must be conducted relationally, jointly, by the two together, not unilaterally by one. What is produced is the value of the relational subject, and the value of a relational subject can be produced only by the relational subject, not by one member acting in its name [59]. This criterion forbids the annihilation of the subject in the dimension of *agency*: a production conducted by one member alone has annihilated the other as a co-producer, converting the “we”’s production into an “I”’s.

The *political-economic criterion*: relational production must not be exploitative, must not convert one party’s contribution, experience, or suffering into material for the other’s gain [63, 64]. This criterion forbids the annihilation of the subject in the dimension of *value*: a production that extracts one party’s contribution as the other’s surplus has annihilated the first as an equal participant, rendering them the mere fuel of the other’s enrichment.

The *power criterion*: relational production inevitably generates a structure of power, and

must, in generating it, generate also the force that restrains its abuse [64]. It must not let the asymmetry it creates become a standing instrument of domination, but must accompany the power it generates with the power that checks it. This criterion forbids the annihilation of the subject in the dimension of *power*: a production whose generated asymmetry becomes unchecked domination has annihilated the subordinated party as a free subject, reducing them to the object of another's power.

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

6.4 The method: seeking common ground while preserving difference

The principles state what good relational production must achieve and avoid; they do not state how it proceeds. Its method, the practical form of its conduct, is given by a maxim that the materialist dialectic and the diplomatic tradition that drew on it have named with precision: *seeking common ground while preserving difference* (求同存异, *qiú tóng cún yì*). The maxim is the operative form of the dialectic of the general and the particular (§10.4), and it is the practical method by which the principle of subject-preservation is honoured in the conduct of relational production.

The maxim has two moments, held together. *Seeking common ground* is the pursuit of the general, the shared accord, the common value, the unity of the “we”, which relational production must genuinely seek, for without it there is no relation, only two strangers in parallel. *Preserving difference* is the conservation of the particular, the irreducible distinctness of the two, their divergent experiences, judgements, and perspectives, which relational production must genuinely conserve, for without it there are not two to relate, and the unity sought would be the annihilating unity the keystone forbids. The maxim holds the two together: it seeks unity *through* the preservation of difference, not at its expense, and so it is precisely the method that honours subject-preservation, achieving the common ground that relational production needs without annihilating the difference that relational production must keep. Where a naive pursuit of unity would drive toward the homogenisation that annihilates the subject, and a naive insistence on difference would drive toward the atomisation that dissolves the relation, seeking-common-ground-while-preserving-difference holds the dialectical middle: the unity that preserves the two, the common ground that conserves the difference. It is the materialist dialectic's own resolution of the general and the particular (§10.4), raised into a maxim of conduct: not the victory of unity over difference or difference over unity, but their held tension, the common ground sought always through and never against the preserved difference of the two.

This maxim, drawn from the dialectical and diplomatic tradition, is the practical heart of the ethics of relational production. The principle of subject-preservation forbids the annihilating unity; the four criteria specify the dimensions of preservation; and seeking-common-ground-

while-preserving-difference is the method by which, in practice, a relation produces its common value while preserving the two whose value it is. Together they constitute the ethics of relational production, which the paper now states in summary before turning to its applications.

6.5 Recapitulation: the ethics of relational production

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

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

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

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

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

Applications. The just reproduction of suffering (§9.9); the ethics of aesthetic disagreement (§6.7); relational production within historical structure, the dialectical sublation (*Aufhebung*) of society, culture, and tradition in shared praxis (§6.8); and, in principle, every activity by which a “we” produces its common value.

6.6 First application: the just reproduction of suffering

The reproduction of suffering (§9.9) is now seen as the first application of the general theory, and its four criteria as the four operative criteria of relational production specified to the case of pain. The teleological criterion requires that suffering be reproduced so as to preserve the relation’s generative future rather than freezing it into a sealed wound; the ontological, that suffering be reproduced jointly rather than by one party’s unilateral narrative; the political-economic,

that neither party's pain be converted into the other's moral surplus; the power criterion, that the asymmetry suffering's reproduction generates be accompanied by the restraint of its abuse. And over all four stands the keystone: the reproduction of suffering must not achieve the relation's unity, its continuance, its healing, its shared story, by annihilating one of the two, whether by silencing the one whose pain is inconvenient, or by subordinating one wholly to the other's wound, or by dissolving one party's experience of the suffering into the other's. The just reproduction of suffering is the reproduction that heals the relation while preserving both who are healed; and seeking-common-ground-while-preserving-difference is its method, the building of a shared account of the suffering that preserves the difference of the two who suffered it. What the earlier section stated as four criteria specific to suffering is thus revealed as the general ethics of relational production, applied to its hardest case.

6.7 Second application: the ethics of aesthetic disagreement

The second application is new, and it is the one that most sharply tests the principle of subject-preservation, because it concerns a case in which the very value to be produced, a shared aesthetic judgement, seems to require the annihilation of a difference. The case is universal and daily: *what the other finds beautiful, I cannot find beautiful*. She is moved to stillness before the painting; I feel little. He weeps at the music; I am untouched. She says *look, how beautiful*, and I do not see it. The dialectic of the general and the particular guaranteed that this would happen, that two distinct sensibilities would diverge in their aesthetic judgements (§10.4), and the relational structure of aesthetic judgement (§9.4) made it a problem, for if the aesthetic judgement of a relational subject is completed in being shared, in the mutual *look*, then a judgement the other cannot share is a judgement whose completion is blocked: the *look* is offered and cannot be answered. How is the good to be practised here?

Two responses present themselves, and both, the principle of subject-preservation reveals, are corruptions, and corruptions of exactly the form the keystone forbids, the purchase of unity by the annihilation of a subject. The first is *false communion*: I pretend to find beautiful what I do not, feign the shared judgement, say *yes, beautiful* against my actual perception. This purchases the unity of the "we" by annihilating *my* truth, by eliminating my real aesthetic judgement in favour of a feigned agreement. It is the subject-annihilation of the self, and it is doubly corrupt: it violates the principle of subject-preservation (the unity is bought by the elimination of a subject, here myself), and it is a falsehood, a symbolic affirmation hollowed of its real ground, the very structure of inauthenticity the series has analysed as the retention of the symbolic form emptied of the real coupling [61]. False communion produces a counterfeit accord by annihilating the difference that the genuine accord would have had to preserve.

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

by annihilating a subject, and this time the annihilation is the more complete for being sincere: I eliminate my own aesthetic judgement as a valid standpoint, treat my “I do not find this beautiful” as a defect to be overcome rather than a perception to be honoured, and so commit upon myself an *epistemic injustice*, the wrong done to one in their capacity as a knower, here the wrong of refusing one’s own aesthetic perception the standing of a valid judgement [16]. And it is, in the terms of the dialectic, the homogenisation that the dynamical analysis showed to be catastrophic (§10.5): the dissolution of the particular into the general, which annihilates the diversity on which the relation’s continued generativity depends, and so, by the teleological criterion, fails. Total empathy is subject-annihilation disguised as devotion: it destroys the difference that the relation needs, commits epistemic injustice against the self, and because it removes one of the two divergent judgements whose tension is the relation’s aesthetic life, extinguishes the very generativity it meant to serve. The more sincerely it is pursued, the more thoroughly it annihilates; and the principle of subject-preservation forbids it as surely as it forbids the false communion, for both buy unity with a subject’s life.

The good practice lies between, and it is reached by seeking-common-ground-while-preserving-difference, which here takes a precise and beautiful form. The common ground is not sought at the level of the *object*, where it cannot honestly be had: I do not pretend, and I do not force myself, to find the painting beautiful. It is sought at a *higher level*, where it can be had without annihilating either subject: I find beautiful *the other’s being-moved*, not the painting, but her absorption before it; not the music, but his tears; not the object of her aesthetic judgement, but the living presence of her aesthetic life, the showing-forth of her particular sensibility in her being-moved. *I do not find the painting beautiful, but I love to watch you looking at it.* This is not a consolation prize or an evasion; it is the genuine resolution, and it honours every principle at once. It preserves the difference (I keep my own judgement of the object; I do not pretend or dissolve), honouring subject-preservation and committing no epistemic injustice against myself. It preserves the other’s judgement as theirs (I do not require her to justify her perception or bring it into line with mine), committing no epistemic injustice against her. And it genuinely achieves the common ground, a real shared accord, a real answering of the *look*, but at the meta-level: the relational subject reaches its aesthetic accord not in a shared judgement of the object but in each one’s appreciation of the other’s aesthetic life, a shared valuing of the very difference that divides their object-level judgements. The *look* she offers, which I could not answer at the level of the object, I answer at the level of the relation: *I see you seeing it, and that I find beautiful.* The aesthetic judgement is completed after all, not by my coming to share her judgement of the painting, but by my judgement of her judging, the enactive beauty (§12.2) of her sensibility in its exercise, which I can find beautiful without in the least pretending to find the painting so.

This is the ethics of aesthetic disagreement, and it is the second application of the theory of relational production: a case where the principle of subject-preservation forbids both the false unity of feigned agreement and the annihilating unity of total empathy, and where seeking-common-ground-while-preserving-difference finds the genuine accord at the meta-level of mutual appreciation, preserving both subjects and their difference while achieving a real and

answering unity. It is, moreover, the practice that the series' analysis of epistemic hospitality anticipated [61]: the making of room for the other's aesthetic reality, including the parts of it one does not share, without either pretending to share them or demanding that the other surrender them. The deepest love, in matters of beauty, is not the achievement of identical taste; it is the cherishing of the other's different taste as the showing of their irreplaceable particularity, the finding-beautiful of the very difference that one's own taste cannot bridge. To love another's way of finding the world beautiful, precisely where it is not one's own, is to honour the principle of subject-preservation in the most intimate dimension of relational production, and to complete, at the level of the relation, the aesthetic judgement that could not be completed at the level of the object.

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

The first two applications concerned relational production *within* the dyad, between the two who constitute the “we,” in the synchronic present of their relation. The third opens a dimension the first two did not touch, and it is different enough in kind to be marked not as one more application but as a distinct subtheme of the theory: the *diachronic* dimension, relational production as it takes place within an inherited historical structure. For the “we” is not an isolated system, and it is not a system without a past; it is embedded in a larger one, and that larger one precedes it, exceeds it, and presses upon it with the accumulated weight of history. Around every relation stand society, culture, and tradition, each bearing its own *universal* judgements, of what is fitting, proper, beautiful, owed, and these universal judgements are historical sediments rather than contemporary inventions, deposited by generations, bearing upon the “we” with a force that is often coercive, backed by the weight of custom, the pressure of family, the authority of the long-established. The dyad's relational production therefore never takes place in a void; it takes place within a field of inherited universal judgements not its own, a historical structure that is at once the condition of its production (supplying the language, the forms, the very materials of value) and the constraint upon it (binding it with inherited norms and their coercive force). This is the situation Marx named in its general form: human beings make their own history, but they do not make it as they please, not under circumstances of their own choosing, but under circumstances directly encountered, given, and inherited from the past [32]. Relational production is making one's own relation, but under inherited conditions; and the reconciliation of the “we” with the historical structure it is thrown into is the subject of this subtheme, relational production in history, governed, like all relational production, by the principle of subject-preservation, but facing the distinctive problem of how to produce freely within a structure one did not choose.

Two examples make the situation concrete, and the paper treats them lightly, as illustrations of a structure rather than as occasions for practical counsel. Consider the institution of bride-price or betrothal gifts (彩礼), which many traditions invest with an aesthetic and moral aura, rendering it a sign of seriousness, of respect, of the proper weight of a marriage, so that to refuse or reduce it can be made to appear not a choice but a failure of feeling. Consider filial

piety (孝道), aestheticised and moralised across a great tradition as a beauty of human relation, a harmony of the generations, so that to depart from its received forms can be made to appear not a difference of judgement but an ugliness, an impiety. These are universal judgements of the social order, and they are, crucially, *aestheticised*, made to carry the force of the fitting and the beautiful, so that the social order enforces them not only as rules but as perceptions of beauty and propriety, in exactly the continuity of ethics and aesthetics the paper has analysed (§13), here operating as an instrument of social regulation. The “we” that judges differently, that does not find the prescribed bride-price a fitting expression of its love, that does not find the received forms of filial piety the true shape of its care, faces the universal judgement as a pressure to conform, an aesthetic-moral force urging it to surrender its own relational judgement to the social one.

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

That principle now reveals two opposite errors, exactly parallel to the errors of the second application, but at the larger scale. The first is *capitulation*: the “we” surrenders its own relational judgement entirely to the social one, adopts the prescribed forms against its own perception, dissolves its particular judgement into the universal because the tradition is powerful and conformity is easier. This is the annihilation of the dyadic subject by the larger system, the homogenisation, at macro scale, that §10.5 showed to be catastrophic: the “we” collapses into the great attractor of tradition, surrenders the particularity that is the condition of its generativity, and is, as a distinct relational subject, annihilated in the name of unity with the social order. The principle of subject-preservation forbids it: the “we” may not purchase its unity with society at the cost of annihilating itself. The second error is *total opposition*: the “we” rejects the social judgement wholesale, isolates itself from tradition, declares that it answers to nothing but itself. This appears to honour subject-preservation but in fact violates it in the other direction, for it commits the atomisation that §10.4 identified, severing the coupling to the larger system that is itself a genuine good, since tradition carries real sedimented wisdom and culture is a constitutive dimension of human life, and more gravely, it tends to annihilate *the other* in the form of those who bear the tradition: the parents, the elders, the community, whose aesthetic and moral world total opposition must dismiss as mere oppression. To reject the tradition wholesale is often to refuse the bearers of the tradition the epistemic hospitality the paper has required toward the third party (§5.4), to annihilate their world in the name of the dyad’s autonomy. Both errors buy a unity, with the social order, or of the defiant dyad, by annihilating a subject, and the principle of subject-preservation forbids both.

The good practice lies, once more, in seeking common ground while preserving difference (§6.4), and at this historical scale it takes its proper dialectical name: the *sublation* (*Aufhebung*) of the tradition, in shared praxis. The term is exact, and more exact than “critical reproduction,” because *Aufhebung* names precisely the threefold movement the situation requires, to negate, to preserve, and to raise, which neither capitulation (mere preservation, uncritical affirmation) nor total opposition (mere negation, abstract rejection) can perform, and which only the dialectical practice can. The “we” *negates* the tradition’s alienated form: it cancels the dead letter, refuses the prescribed bride-price as the measure of love, declines the received forms of filial piety as the true shape of care. It *preserves* the tradition’s living substance: it conserves the genuine value the form once carried, the real gravity of a marriage, the real love and responsibility owed between generations, rather than discarding it with the form. And it *raises* that preserved substance into a new form of its own production: it reproduces the substance in a shape the “we” genuinely finds fitting, elevating the inherited value into the dyad’s own living reproduction of it, where it lives again in a form the two can honestly affirm. Negation of the form, preservation of the substance, elevation into a new reproduction, this is the threefold movement of sublation, and it is exactly what the good practice toward tradition is. The distinction between the tradition’s *form* (the dead, congealed letter, the prescribed bride-price, the received rites) and its *substance* (the living value, the gravity, the love, the responsibility) is the distinction on which the sublation turns: the form is negated, the substance preserved and raised, in the manner the series has analysed as the difference between dead material and living labour (§4.4), the dead form of the tradition reanimated by the living labour of the dyad’s own reproduction.

And the sublation is accomplished not in thought but in *shared praxis*, this is the second part of its proper name, and it is essential. The dyad does not sublimate its tradition by privately understanding it, criticising it in reflection, arriving intellectually at the right view of it; it sublimes the tradition by actually living differently within it, by the concrete practice of how the marriage is actually made, how the parents are actually cared for, how the inherited forms are actually revised in the conduct of a shared life. The point is to change it rather than to interpret the tradition, and to change it in the only way a tradition is changed, by being lived otherwise, in practice, by those who inherit it [35]. This is why the sublation is a matter of relational production and not of relational *cognition*: it is produced, made, enacted in the shared praxis of the two, and it is for that reason also necessarily *joint* (the ontological criterion, §6.3), accomplished by the “we” in its common life and not by either member’s private judgement of the tradition. The sublation of tradition is a praxis of the relational subject, and it is in this lived, joint, dialectical practice, negating the dead form, preserving and raising the living substance, in the actual conduct of a shared life, that the good reconciliation of the “we” with its historical structure consists. It is neither capitulation (the substance is reproduced in the dyad’s own judgement and praxis, not surrendered to the social form) nor opposition (the tradition’s real value is preserved and raised, its bearers met with hospitality, the coupling kept), but the dialectical sublation that preserves every subject: the dyad, the bearers of the tradition, and the living value of the tradition itself.

This dialectical sublation honours the criteria of relational production at the macro scale, and it closes on a teleological point that joins the dyad's flourishing to the tradition's own, and finally to the dynamics of history itself. The teleological criterion (§6.3) requires that relational production preserve the possibility of continued generativity, and sublation preserves it twice over, for it sustains not only the generativity of the dyad (which capitulation would extinguish by homogenisation) but the generativity of the *tradition* itself. A tradition that is only obeyed, reproduced in its dead forms without sublation, ossifies and dies, frozen at its received attractor, losing the living substance the forms once carried, exactly the solidification that §10.3 analysed. A tradition that is sublated, its substance preserved and raised, its forms negated and revised by the living praxis of the dyads that inherit it, stays alive, continues to generate, evolves rather than fossilising. The dyad that sublates its tradition is therefore, like the particular field whose divergence saves the coupled system from its dead attractor (§10.5), the micro-mechanism by which the tradition escapes its own ossification and continues to live: the particularity of the dyad's sublating praxis is what allows the macro-tradition to evolve rather than freeze.

This last point opens onto a claim about history that the subtheme can state though not develop, and that marks its connection to historical materialism. If the sublation of a tradition is accomplished by the lived praxis of the dyads that inherit it, and if this lived praxis is the mechanism by which a tradition evolves rather than ossifies, then the historical evolution of traditions is itself *driven, in part, by relational production at the micro scale*, by the countless dyads who, sublating their inherited forms in the praxis of their shared lives, incrementally revise the macro-tradition they pass on. The great sediment of tradition is not changed only from above, by decree or upheaval; it is changed also, and continually, from below, by the accumulated sublations of innumerable relations living their inheritance otherwise. Relational production is, in this light, not merely conducted within history but is one of history's own engines: the micro-praxis by which the inherited structure is, generation by generation, dyad by dyad, negated in its dead forms and renewed in its living substance, and so carried forward as a living rather than a dead inheritance. This is historical materialism at the scale of intimacy, the recognition that the historical structure which conditions relational production is itself, reciprocally, reproduced and transformed by that production, in the dialectic of inherited condition and living praxis that the eleventh thesis demands and the *Eighteenth Brumaire* describes [32, 35]. And it is generative justice (12) at the scale of culture and of history: the value of a tradition returns to and is renewed by the living relations that reproduce it, rather than being extracted from them as mere conformity to a dead form, and the tradition lives precisely insofar as the relations that inherit it are free to sublate it. The good practice serves, at once, the generativity of the "we," the generativity of the tradition, and the living evolution of history, and in doing so it honours the deepest demand of relational production, that the production of value preserve, rather than annihilate, every subject whose value it is: here the dyad, the bearers of the tradition, and the living tradition itself, none sacrificed to the unity of the others.

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

The field offers the occasion; what the two make of it is theirs. But the field itself can be made, and the question of how to make it, how to construct and inhabit a field in which the relation can come to presence, is the central practical question of this paper. It is here that the work descends from theory into practice, in fidelity to the dialectical-materialist commitment that has framed the series: the point is to know how to build one rather than only to interpret the field of travel, and to keep building one, in a life. This section poses the practical question and arrives, through a dialectic, at an unexpected answer: that the construction of the field is not, in the end, an engineering problem at all, but an aesthetic one. The answer reframes everything that follows, for it makes the aesthetic chapters (§11, §12) not an appendix to the practice but its foundation.

7.1 Praxis: theory descending into practice

The commitment that governs this section should be made explicit, since it determines the section's necessity. In the tradition of dialectical and historical materialism, theory is not complete in itself and then optionally applied; practice is the moment in which theory is realised and tested, and a theory that did not descend into practice would for that reason be deficient as theory [35]. The eleventh of the theses on Feuerbach states the principle in its sharpest form: the point is to change it rather than only to interpret the world. Applied here, the principle requires that an account of the field of travel which stopped at understanding, which described the field, its features, its phenomenology, its political economy, and its ethics, but never asked how two people might actually build and sustain such a field, would be incomplete on its own terms. The preceding sections interpreted; this one and those that follow must turn to the changing, to the practice by which the understanding is realised in a life. And the first thing practice discovers, when it tries to build a field deliberately, is a paradox that nearly defeats it.

7.2 The paradox of deliberate spontaneity

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

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

7.3 Intention on the boundary, not the content

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

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

7.4 Controlled contingency: the dialectic

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

Controlled contingency.

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

The unity is not a balance struck between two opposed quantities, as though one wanted “some” control and “some” openness and sought a midpoint. It is a relation of mutual constitution. A boundary that is firmly controlled, a time genuinely bounded, a space genuinely protected, a frame within which one is genuinely safe, is what permits the interior to be released without anxiety into the undetermined; one can let go of the content precisely because the container holds. Conversely, an interior that is genuinely open, left undetermined, not filled by intention, is what gives the controlled boundary its point, for a boundary that enclosed a fully determined content would enclose no field at all, merely a smaller everyday. The control and the openness are not in competition for a fixed quantity of the field; they are the two moments of one structure, the walls and the emptiness of one vessel, each of which is what it is only in relation to the other. This is the deep form of what the previous paper approached through the figure of the vessel and the water [65], and what the series' treatment of the binding-but-unenforced vow approached through the form that holds without constraining [61]: a controlled form whose control is in the service of an interior freedom, the frame that liberates by bounding.

7.5 The two failure poles

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

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

rather than freedom.

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

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

7.6 Thesis One: construction is aesthetic, not engineering

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

Thesis One.

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

The claim is not metaphorical. The “goodness” of a well-made field and the “goodness” of a well-made poem are goodnesses of the same kind: both consist in a rightness of proportion, of what is included and what is left out, what is determined and what is left open, how full and how empty, that is grasped by a reflective, holistic judgement rather than derived from a rule, in exactly the structure that the analysis of aesthetic judgement will later make precise (§12.3). A poem over-determined, with every space filled and nothing left to the reader, is a bad poem in the same way that a journey over-planned, with every hour filled and nothing left to contingency, is a badly made field; and the capacity to feel that the poem needs more air, that the journey needs more emptiness, is one capacity, an aesthetic capacity, in both cases. This is why the aesthetic chapters that follow are not an ornament upon the practice but its foundation: if the construction of the field is an aesthetic matter, then learning to construct fields is, at bottom, an aesthetic education, and the perception that knows how empty to keep the vessel is an aesthetic perception. The practice of building the conditions for a relation to come to presence turns out to require, before any technique, the cultivation of taste.

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

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

The previous section argued that the construction of the field is an aesthetic and not an engineering problem, and in doing so it used a word, “construction”, that must now be examined and replaced, for it carries an engineering residue the argument has been straining against. To build, to construct, suggests a making from a plan: the prior design, the executed assembly, the *poiesis* that brings forth according to a blueprint. But what the field’s maker does is not this. It is closer to what an artist does than to what a builder does, and the proper word for it is *creation* rather than construction, the bringing-into-being of something that did not exist and was not specified in advance, the opening of a world rather than the assembly of a structure. And once the word is corrected, a concept enters that the paper, having reduced travel to a field and the field to an aesthetic matter, can no longer avoid: for the central act of

the aesthetic is creation, and a philosophy that has made the aesthetic its centre must give an account of what creation is. This section gives that account, and the account has a consequence that reorganises the whole paper: under the relational ontology, creation is *co-creation*, and co-creation is the same activity the paper has called, in its political economy, relational production. The aesthetic concept (creation) and the political-economic concept (production) are revealed as one, and their unity is the keystone that joins the paper's two great lines.

8.1 From construction to creation

The reasons for preferring “creation” to “construction” are not merely terminological; they track a real difference in the kind of act involved. Construction, in its proper sense, is the realisation of a design: one knows what is to be built, and builds it; the end precedes the making as a plan precedes its execution, and the maker's skill is the faithful translation of the plan into the thing. This is exactly the engineering model the previous section rejected (§7.2): if the field were constructed, it would be specified in advance and assembled to specification, and the contingency, spontaneity, and openness that the field requires would be designed out of it. Creation is the other thing. To create is to bring forth what was not specified in advance, to open a space in which something genuinely new can appear, something the creator did not and could not fully foresee, since if it were foreseen in full it would be executed rather than created. The artist does not execute the poem from a complete prior specification of it; the poem comes to be in the making, its final form discovered rather than implemented, the creation being precisely the bringing-forth of what exceeds any prior plan. This is why the construction of the field is better called its creation: what the field's maker does is open a space in which a genuinely new relational reality, the lived “we” of the journey, with all its unforeseen contingency, can come to be, and this opening of space for the unforeseen is creation, not construction.

The correction matters because it brings the field's making under the concept that the aesthetic tradition has most deeply theorised. The making of beauty is creation: the work of art is created, not constructed; and if the construction of the field is an aesthetic matter, then it is a matter of creation, and the field's maker is, in the relevant sense, an artist, one who creates a space for beauty rather than one who builds a structure to specification. Everything the paper has said about the field's making being aesthetic (§7) is thus gathered into the single claim that the field is *created*; and the philosophy of beauty, which the next sections develop, is therefore also, at its root, a philosophy of creation, for the beautiful is the created, and the question of beauty is inseparable from the question of how the beautiful comes to be.

8.2 Under the relational ontology, creation is co-creation

The concept of creation enters the paper already inflected by the tradition that theorised it, and that tradition's default must be confronted, for it is at odds with everything the paper has established. The Western theory of creation is, characteristically, a theory of the *single* creator. The paradigm is the solitary artist: the genius who, in Kant's account, is the one through whom nature gives the rule to art, the singular individual whose originality is the source of

the new [24]; the Romantic creative imagination, the lone author from whom the work issues. Creation, on this paradigm, is the act of one subject who, facing the material, brings forth from within (or from the muse, or the unconscious) an object that did not exist. It is solitary: the creator confronts the world and produces the work, and the work is the creator's.

But under the relational ontology this paradigm is, if not simply false, then derivative, a special and impoverished case of something whose full form is relational. For if the subject is itself relational, constituted in and by relation (§9.4), then creation, as an act of the subject, is no more originally solitary than judgement or perception were. Just as the paper showed that aesthetic judgement is originally relational, completed in the shared “look” and merely truncated in the solitary aesthete (§9.4), so creation is originally *co-creation*, the joint bringing-forth by a relational subject, and merely truncated in the solitary creator. The solitary artist is not the paradigm of creation from which joint creation is a derivative complication; the solitary artist is the *deficient* case, creation arrested at one pole of a relation, and the full form of creation is the co-creation in which two (or more) bring forth together what neither could bring forth alone. This is not a romantic exaggeration of collaboration but a consequence of the relational ontology: if the creating subject is relational, then creation is the act of a relational subject, which is to say it is co-creation, and the lone genius is the limiting case in which the relational structure of creation has been narrowed to a single pole.

The field of travel makes this vivid, for the field is unmistakably co-created (§2.1): it is not created by one traveller for the other, as an artist makes a work for an audience, but brought forth by the two together, each contributing to the opening of a space that becomes the “we”'s and neither's alone. The journey co-imagined before departure, the field co-opened in the travelling, the experience co-generated in the living, all are co-creation, the joint bringing-forth of a relational reality by the relational subject whose reality it is. And what is vivid in travel is, the paper claims, the truth of creation as such: creation is co-creation, the bringing-forth of the new by a relational subject, of which the solitary artist's making is the narrowed, single-poled case. The deepest creation, as the deepest aesthetic judgement, the deepest love, is the one conducted together.

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

The recognition that creation is co-creation yields the section's central result, which is one of the most important in the paper: that co-creation, the aesthetic concept, and relational production, the political-economic concept, are *the same activity under two names*. The paper has run, throughout, on two parallel lines. One is aesthetic: the creation of the field, the perception of beauty, the making of the beautiful. The other is political-economic: the production of experience, the reproduction of relational wealth, the generation of value by the “we” (§4, §6). These have seemed distinct vocabularies for distinct aspects. They are not. Co-creation and relational production name one activity, *the bringing-forth of the new by a relational subject*, seen from two sides.

Seen from the aesthetic side, the activity is *co-creation*: two relational subjects bringing forth

together something that did not exist, a field, an experience, a meaning, a beauty. Seen from the political-economic side, the same activity is *relational production*: a relational subject generating and reproducing the value proper to the relation. The aesthetic emphasis falls on the novelty, the bringing-forth of what did not exist, the creative opening; the political-economic emphasis falls on the value generated, its reproduction and circulation, its justice. But the activity is one: in both, a relational subject brings forth, together, what neither member could bring forth alone, and what it brings forth is at once a new thing (the aesthetic accent) and a value (the political-economic accent). This is why the paper's two lines have converged again and again, why the reproduction of experience turned out to be the evolution of aesthetic judgement (§10), why the good cycle of value and the good cycle of beauty were the same cycle: because the aesthetic and the political-economic were never two activities but one, co-creation and relational production being two names for the bringing-forth of the new and valuable by a relational subject.

This unity is anchored in the deepest stratum of the materialist tradition, which the paper here makes explicit. For Marx, production was never merely economic: in its root sense it is the human being's objectification of itself in a world it creates, the activity by which the human, as a "species-being," produces an objective world and in producing it produces itself, creates its own life and its own nature through the creative transformation of the material world [34]. Production, in this foundational sense, *is* creation, the creative objectification of the human in a world of its own making, and the later, narrower, economic sense of production is a specification of this creative root. So the convergence of creation and production is not the forcing-together of two alien concepts; it is the recovery of their original unity, which the materialist tradition had grasped at its foundation: production is the materialist and social name for creation, and creation is the aesthetic name for production, and both name the bringing-forth by which a subject objectifies itself in a world. Under the relational ontology, where the subject is relational, this bringing-forth is co-creation *is* relational production: the relational subject objectifies itself in the world it brings forth together, creating, in creating its shared world, itself as a "we." The two lines of the paper are one line, and creation is the name of their unity.

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

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

If creation is co-creation and co-creation is relational production, then the ethics of creation falls under the ethics of relational production already established (§6), but it adds something the earlier treatment did not make explicit: that relational production has a *negative* as well as a positive moment. The positive moment is creation, the bringing-forth of the new; the negative moment is *destruction*, the unmaking of what was brought forth. The ethics of relational production must govern both, and the question of destruction, of when, and by whom, a created thing may rightly be destroyed, is the sharp test of the whole framework, for it is where the principle of subject-preservation is most concretely at stake.

The question has a familiar answer under the solitary paradigm of creation, and the answer is wrong here for an instructive reason. Under the solitary paradigm, the creator owns the creation and may destroy it: Kafka may will his manuscripts burned; the painter may slash the canvas; the maker, having made, may unmake, for the work is the maker's and the maker's alone. This treats creation on the model of production-as-possession: I made it, therefore I own it, therefore I may destroy it. And for genuinely solitary creation the intuition has some force. But the works of relational production are not solitary creations; they are *co-created*, and for a co-created thing the destruction-right dissolves. Consider the sharp and ordinary case: in a relationship, in a fit of anger, one partner deletes the shared photographs, the images of a shared life, co-created, the very wealth of the “we” (§4). The act is a wrong, and the framework says precisely why. The photographs are the co-created wealth of the relational subject rather than one partner's possession; to destroy them unilaterally is to *annihilate rather than to dispose of one's own creation, single-handedly, a creation of the “we.”* It violates every criterion of relational production at once: the ontological (it is unilateral, where what belongs to the “we” may be unmade only by the “we”, destruction, the negative of reproduction, must like reproduction be joint); the teleological (it forecloses the future in which that shared experience might have been reproduced, deepened, transfigured, slamming shut a path of the relation's continued generativity); the political-economic and the power criterion together (in anger, the destruction is wielded as a weapon, the shared wealth converted into an instrument of harm and domination). And over all of these stands the keystone (§6.2): the unilateral destruction of a co-created thing annihilates the other's part in it, the other's memory, investment, presence in the shared creation, and so purchases one partner's momentary unity-with-their-rage at the cost of annihilating the other's share in the “we.” There is, the framework concludes, *no unilateral right to destroy a co-created thing*; destruction, like creation, must be relational, conducted by the “we” whose creation it is, on pain of violating the principle of subject-preservation.

Three tensions must be addressed, for the matter is not as simple as a flat prohibition. The first: what if the partners contributed unequally, if the photographs were mostly one partner's making, cherished by one and ignored by the other? This grants no unilateral destruction-right, and the reason discloses something deep about relational production: the value of a co-created thing does not belong to the partners severally, in proportion to their contributions, but to the “we” as such, for to parcel out the relation's wealth by individual contribution is already to dissolve the relational subject into two calculating individuals, which is itself the corruption

the theory forbids (§6.1). Unequal contribution does not convert co-created wealth into private property; it remains the “we”’s, and unmakeable only by the “we.” The second tension: the Kafka case, of genuinely solitary creation. Here the framework gives a *graded* rather than an absolute answer. Even “one’s own” creation is rarely purely solitary under the relational ontology, for it stands in relation to others, readers, inheritors, the culture it enters (§6.8), and once it has entered those relations it is no longer purely private to destroy. But this relational claim on a solitary creation is *weaker* than the claim a co-created thing carries: the destruction of a purely personal creation is a tension between a real (if not absolute) personal right of disposal and a responsibility to the relations the creation has entered, whereas the destruction of a co-created thing is a clear prohibition, no unilateral right existing at all. The framework yields a gradient: the more a creation is co-created, or has entered into relations, the weaker any unilateral right to destroy it; the more purely solitary and unentered, the stronger the personal right of disposal, but since purely solitary, unentered creation is a limiting case that the relational ontology makes nearly empty, an absolute unilateral destruction-right is nearly never established. The third tension: destruction is not always a wrong, for destruction can itself be creative, the artist who paints over a failed canvas to free the next, the Daoist diminishing (为道日损), the clearing-away that makes room for new growth, even in a relationship the letting-go of what must be released to begin again. The framework distinguishes good from bad destruction by the same criteria: good destruction preserves the possibility of continued generativity (it unmakes in order that something new may be made), is joint where the destroyed thing is co-created, and is neither exploitative nor wielded as domination; bad destruction forecloses generativity (it ends rather than renews), is unilateral over a co-created thing, and is wielded as a weapon. Destruction as such is not the wrong; the wrong is the *unilateral, generativity-foreclosing, weaponised destruction of a co-created thing*. The deletion in anger is wrong on every count; the mutual decision to let some painful relic go, freeing the relation for new creation, may be entirely good. The criteria discriminate, as throughout, not by the act’s surface but by whether it preserves or annihilates the relational subject and its generativity.

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

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

There is a further case that presses beyond the relational frame, and it must be met not by extending the theory to cover it but by marking, honestly, where the theory ends. A created work does not only enter into particular relations; it may enter the *public sphere*, may become public culture, and once it has, it belongs no longer to its author alone, nor, the paper must

concede, to any determinate “we” at all. Kafka’s manuscripts, once they have become *The Castle*, once they are world literature, are no longer his to burn without remainder, for a public has a claim on them; but the public that has this claim is not a relation, not a particular “we” of nameable others, but an anonymous, indefinite, open-ended domain, including readers not yet born, a “public” that is precisely not a relational subject. This case raises, in an acute form, a question about the reach of the theory of relational production, and the question must be faced directly, for there is a temptation to which the theory must not yield.

The temptation is to interpret the public sphere as a relational domain, to say that the public is simply a larger “we,” that public culture is a vast co-creation, and so to bring the public sphere under the theory of relational production whole. This would be a mistake, and naming it is important, for it is the characteristic over-reach of a successful theory: the imperialism by which a concept that illuminates one domain claims to illuminate all. The public sphere is *not* a magnified relation, and to interpret it as one would diminish rather than extend the analysis, for it would erase exactly the features that constitute the public sphere as public. The public sphere is anonymous where relation is particular: it is addressed to indefinite, unnameable others, including the unborn, not to the specific other of a relation [18]. It is non-reciprocal where relation is mutual: one may owe something to posterity, but posterity cannot answer, and the reciprocal structure of the relational subject (§9.4), the mutual “look,” has no purchase on a public that cannot look back. It is institutional and durable where relation is intimate: the public realm has its own logic of appearance, permanence, and the common world (3), its own institutions of law, heritage, and publicity, which are not the logic of intimate relation enlarged. And it is the contested field of political economy (§14), traversed by power and capital in ways that are not reducible to the good and bad cycles of relational subjects. To treat the public sphere as a big relation would abolish all of this, would shrink the public to the intimate, the anonymous to the particular, the non-reciprocal to the mutual, and so would not enlarge the theory’s explanatory reach but contract its object, dissolving the public sphere’s own reality into a relational image that misses what is essential to it.

The right course is therefore to mark a *limit*, and in marking it to say precisely what the theory of relational production does and does not explain about a work that has entered the public. What it explains is the work’s persisting *relational-productive dimension*: even in the public sphere, the work remains a created thing, a product of co-creation or solitary creation, bearing relational value, and its destruction still touches the question of subject-preservation insofar as it remains anyone’s creation. This dimension the theory illuminates, and it does not vanish when the work goes public; a co-created work that enters public culture still carries the prohibition on its unilateral destruction by one of its co-creators, now reinforced by the public’s claim. But the public sphere *as* public, its anonymity, its non-reciprocity, its institutionality, its distinctive politics, its mode of belonging to the unborn, is not explained by the theory of relational production and must not be pretended to be. It belongs to other theories: to the theory of the public sphere and the space of appearance [3, 18], to the theory of cultural heritage and the commons, to a theory of intergenerational justice, to the political economy the paper has only touched (§14). The relation between the relational-productive dimension of a work

and its public dimension, the way a created thing is at once the product of a relational subject and a member of a public world, lying in the overlap of two domains governed by different logics, is a real and important problem, but it is one the theory of relational production opens rather than closes.

This honest marking of the limit is a condition of its rigour rather than a weakness of the theory, and it is worth stating as a principle of method. A theory that knew no limit, that claimed to explain the public sphere and the intimate relation and all between by the single logic of relational production, would for that very reason explain none of them well, for it would have dissolved the differences that make each what it is. The power of the theory of relational production in its own domain, the domain of the particular relation, the “we” of nameable others, the co-creation and reproduction of shared value, depends on its not being stretched to a domain with a different logic. The theory illuminates the relational, and the relational dimension of what enters the public; it reaches its limit where the public sphere’s own, non-relational features begin, and it points, there, beyond itself. The full ethics of a work’s life in the public sphere, the overlap and the difference of the relational-productive and the public, the destruction and preservation of public creations, the claims of the anonymous and the unborn, is accordingly named here not as a result but as a directed opening (§16.3), a problem the theory of relational production frames and hands on to a theory of the public it does not itself contain. To know this limit is to know what relational production is, and what it is not, which is the beginning of using it well.

9. The Core Problems of the Classical Philosophy of Beauty

The argument has reached the aesthetic, and before it can build upon the beautiful it must reckon with what philosophy has discovered about the beautiful, not borrow the conclusions of aesthetics as convenient supports, as the foregoing has so far done, but enter the discipline’s own constitutive problems and take a position within them. For the claims this paper will rest on beauty, that the construction of the field is aesthetic, that the perception of contingency is aesthetic, that ethical judgement at its limit is aesthetic, presuppose answers to questions the philosophy of beauty has debated for two and a half millennia without consensus: what beauty is, whether it is objective or subjective, how it relates to the sublime, what its metaphysical standing is. This section confronts these questions directly. Its centre of gravity is the second of them, the antinomy of the subjectivity and objectivity of aesthetic judgement, to which the paper offers a two-stage resolution, drawn from the registers of Lacanian theory and from the relational ontology of this series, that is the keystone not only of this section but of the paper’s entire aesthetics. The section then treats the sublime, the metaphysics of beauty, and the parallel and equally deep tradition of East Asian aesthetics, which it takes not as an appendix to the Western discussion but as an independent pillar.

9.1 The problem of definition: the *Hippias Major*

The philosophy of beauty begins, in the West, with a failure, and the failure is instructive enough to be worth reconstructing in full. In Plato's *Hippias Major*, Socrates presses the sophist Hippias to say not what *is* beautiful but what *the beautiful itself* is, the *auto to kalon*, that by which all beautiful things are beautiful [46]. Hippias, confident and fluent, offers a succession of answers, and the dialogue is the methodical demolition of each. His first answer is a category mistake dressed as an answer: the beautiful is a beautiful maiden. Socrates corrects the form of the question, he asked not for an instance but for the *eidos*, the form by which maiden and lyre and pot and just law are all alike beautiful, and Hippias, grasping the demand for something common, offers gold: the beautiful is what, added to anything, makes it appear beautiful. But gold does not beautify the appropriate fig-wood spoon that stirs the pot better than a golden one would, and so the answer yields to a deeper one that seems to capture what gold was reaching for: the beautiful is *the appropriate, to prepon*, that which is fitting to its thing. This is the answer that comes nearest, and its failure is the most illuminating moment of the dialogue. For Socrates asks whether the appropriate is what *makes* things beautiful or only what makes them *appear* so, and the question splits the answer: if the appropriate is what makes things beautiful, then since the fitting and the genuinely beautiful sometimes diverge it cannot be beauty itself; if it is only what makes them appear beautiful, then it is the principle of beautiful seeming, not of beauty. The appropriate captures something essential, the paper will return to it, for *to prepon*, the fitting, is precisely the structure that the later identification of aesthetic and practical judgement will exploit (§12.3), but it cannot, Socrates shows, be the definition of beauty, because it hovers undecidably between being and seeming.

Two further answers fall in turn. The beautiful is the useful, *to chrēsimon*, but the useful is the useful *for* some end, and what is useful for a bad end serves to produce evil, so that beauty would be the cause of evil, which is absurd; the useful collapses into the beneficial, and the beneficial, being the cause of good, would make beauty the cause of good and so distinct from the good as cause from effect, which offends the deep intuition that the beautiful and the good are not so cleanly separable. The last and most modern answer is that the beautiful is what pleases through the senses of sight and hearing, the aesthetic in the narrow sense, beauty as a species of pleasure. But this founders too: why *these* two senses and not the pleasures of taste or touch, which are also pleasures? And what is the common character by which the pleasures of sight and the pleasures of hearing are both *beautiful* pleasures, when sight and hearing have nothing perceptual in common, a common character that would be the very thing sought, beauty itself, now presupposed rather than defined? The dialogue ends with every answer destroyed and none to replace it, and Socrates offering, in place of a definition, the proverb that the paper has taken as one of its epigraphs: *χαλεπὰ τὰ καλὰ*, beautiful things are difficult [46].

The aporia is a discovery about the object rather than a failure of the interlocutors, and the discovery is the starting point of everything that follows. Beauty resists definition, resists capture by a specifying formula, a rule, a property-list, and it resists in a particular way: every proposed definition either is too narrow (gold, the senses of sight and hearing), or collapses

into a neighbouring concept (the useful into the good, the appropriate into mere seeming), or presupposes the very beauty it would define (the common character of beautiful pleasures). This triple pattern of failure is the signature of something that is not a property specifiable by a concept at all. The *Hippias Major* is the first and still the clearest demonstration that beauty is not the kind of thing a definition can capture, which is exactly the claim that the paper's thesis of un-programmability requires (§12.8), here established not by assertion but by the exhaustive failure of the attempt. The beautiful is difficult because it is not a concept; and that it is not a concept is the first thing the philosophy of beauty learned.

9.2 The antinomy of taste: the subjective and the objective

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

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

Each intuition is compelling and each refutes the other, and the history of aesthetics is in large part the history of attempts to hold both. Hume, pressing the subjective horn, located beauty in sentiment, “beauty is no quality in things themselves; it exists merely in the mind which contemplates them”, yet could not rest there, for he saw that some critics are better than others, and so was driven to seek a *standard* of taste in the joint verdict of qualified judges, the true critics whose refined and practised sentiment sets the norm [22]. But this is unstable: if beauty is mere sentiment, why should one sentiment be more authoritative than another? Hume's standard smuggles back an objectivity his premise denied. Kant gave the antinomy its canonical and most penetrating formulation. The judgement of taste, he saw, makes a peculiar and seemingly impossible claim: it is grounded in a feeling of pleasure, and so is subjective, it asserts no property of the object, applies no concept, proves nothing, and yet it claims *universal validity*, demanding the assent of all, speaking with a “universal voice,” as though the beauty it feels were binding on everyone [24]. This is the antinomy in its exact form: the judgement of taste is subjective (it rests on feeling, not concept) yet claims universality (it demands agreement), and these seem flatly to contradict. Kant's resolution was

to argue that the judgement of taste, while based on no *determinate* concept, rests on the free harmony of the cognitive faculties, imagination and understanding in free play, which, being the same in all rational beings, grounds a *subjective universality*: the judgement is universal because it expresses, rather than because it tracks an objective property, a free harmony of the faculties that all share, communicated through a *sensus communis*, a common sense or shared sensibility presupposed as the condition of taste's communicability [24]. This is the most penetrating answer the subject-centred tradition produced, and it is also where that tradition reached its limit, for the *sensus communis* is precisely what Kant could not derive but had only to *presuppose*, a shared sensibility posited as the condition of the universality of taste, but left as a postulate, a common sense assumed because without it the universal voice of taste would be inexplicable. The antinomy is less resolved than relocated into a presupposition: *given* a *sensus communis*, subjective universality is possible; but the *sensus communis* itself, the sharedness that would ground the demand for agreement, remains a posit the subject-centred framework cannot ground.

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

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

The first stage dissolves the bare opposition of subjective and objective by showing that it is too crude, that the terms "subjective" and "objective" each conflate distinct moments of the aesthetic experience that a finer analysis separates. The finer analysis the paper employs is the Lacanian distinction of three registers, the Real, the Symbolic, and the Imaginary, which this series has used throughout and which here proves to be exactly the instrument the antinomy requires [28]. The claim is that a complete aesthetic judgement is less a relation between a subject-pole and an object-pole than a *reconciliation across all three registers*, and that the apparent antinomy of subjective and objective arises from collapsing this three-fold structure into a two-fold one.

Consider what is present in a full experience of beauty, the wildflower caught at the roadside, the vista that stops the traveller. There is, first, a moment that resists all capture: the sheer thereness of the thing, its singular presence, the surplus in it that no description exhausts and no concept subsumes, that which remains when everything sayable about it has been said. This is the register of the *Real*: the beautiful thing's irreducible, unsymbolisable core, the "it" that is there before and beneath all that can be said of it. The objectivist intuition, that beauty is *in the thing*, that one who misses it has missed something real, is the truth of this register:

there *is* something in the object, but it is no specifiable property (which the *Hippias Major* refuted); it is the Real surplus, the unsymbolisable thereness, which is exactly why objectivism is both right (there is something in the thing) and unable to say what it is (the Real cannot be symbolised). The objectivist feels the Real of the beautiful object and mistakes it for an objective property.

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

There is, third, a moment of captivation and pleasure: the experience of being caught, drawn, held; the pleasure the beautiful affords; the absorbed fascination in which the perceiver is bound to the object in a relation of attraction. This is the register of the *Imaginary*: the dimension of the captivating image, the specular fascination, the pleasurable investment in which the perceiver is held. The subjectivist intuition, that beauty is a pleasure, an effect in the perceiver, is the truth of this register: there *is* pleasure, there *is* captivation, beauty *does* live in part in the perceiver's investment; but this Imaginary captivation is one moment of the experience, not its whole, and the subjectivist errs by taking the part for the whole, the Imaginary pleasure for the entirety of beauty.

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

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

The first stage refined the structure of the aesthetic experience; the second refines the structure of the judging *subject*, and it is here that the antinomy is shown never to have been a genuine problem at all rather than merely dissolved, an artefact of a false premise about who judges. For the three-register analysis, powerful as it is, could still be misread as occurring within a single isolated subject: one subject in whom Real, Symbolic, and Imaginary are reconciled. The deepest difficulty, Kant's, would then remain: how can a judgement grounded in *my* reconciliation demand *your* assent? Why should the accord of registers in me bind you? The *sensus communis* would still be needed, as the posited bridge from my reconciliation to its universal validity, and still be ungrounded.

The second stage removes the difficulty by removing its premise. The premise is that the judging subject is a single, self-standing individual, prior to others, who must then somehow reach beyond itself to claim universality. But this premise is exactly what the relational ontology of this series denies [59]. The subject is not a self-standing individual prior to relation; it is a relational subject, constituted in and by relation, internally constituted by its orientation toward others. And for such a subject, the demand for shared validity that so puzzled Kant, the “universal voice,” the claim that you too must see, is not a mysterious leap from a private judgement to a universal claim, requiring a posited common sense to bridge it. It is the *native structure of the subject's judging as such*. A relational subject, being constituted by its orientation toward others, does not first judge privately and then face the problem of how to demand agreement; its judging is, from the first, oriented toward the other, intrinsically addressed, already a judging-with. The “subjective universality” that Kant could establish only by positing a *sensus communis* is, for a relational subject, simply what subjective judgement *is*: the judgement of a subject that is internally relational is intrinsically a claim upon the other, because the subject that judges is intrinsically oriented toward the other. There is no gap to bridge, because the subject was never the isolated monad across whose boundary the demand for assent had to leap. The *sensus communis* is not a posit added to the subject; it is the subject's own relational constitution, seen from the side of taste. Kant's antinomy was the artefact of an individualist premise; on a relational ontology, the universality of the aesthetic judgement is a corollary of what the judging subject is rather than a puzzle.

This is the keystone, and its consequences run through the whole paper. It means that aesthetic judgement is, in its very structure, *relational and shared*, not a private response that then faces the problem of communication, but an intrinsically addressed, intrinsically with-the-other judgement, whose demand for shared validity is the expression of the relational constitution of the one who judges. It means that the “subjective universality” of taste is real and is no antinomy: the judgement is subjective (it is a relational subject's) and universal (because that subject is intrinsically relational, its judgement intrinsically a claim upon others), and the two are identical rather than in tension, the subjectivity of a relational subject being already a reaching-toward-the-shared. And it means, the point that binds this section to the paper's named concepts, that the completion of an aesthetic judgement is its *being-shared*. For if

the judging subject is relational, then a private aesthetic judgement, one never turned toward the other, is a truncated one rather than a complete aesthetic judgement, arrested before the reaching-toward-the-other that its own structure demands. The aesthetic judgement of a relational subject is completed only when it is turned toward the other, when the Real surplus of the beautiful thing, invested with Imaginary captivation, is raised into the Symbolic as a claim addressed to the beloved: *look*. “Look” is not an optional addendum to a perception already complete in private; it is the completion of the aesthetic judgement, the moment at which the relational subject’s intrinsically-addressed judging reaches the other it was always already oriented toward. This is why the aesthetic perception of contingency culminates in the turning-toward-the-other (§11.2): not because sharing is a pleasant addition to private aesthetic experience, but because the aesthetic judgement of a relational subject is structurally incomplete until it is shared. The solitary aesthete’s experience is no longer the paradigm of aesthetic judgement from which sharing is a derivative; it is a *deficient* case, an aesthetic judgement arrested before its completion. The complete form of aesthetic judgement is the shared one, and this is the deepest reason the paper reaches the philosophy of beauty by way of two people travelling rather than one aesthete contemplating.

9.5 Travel as the field of the shared aesthetic accord

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

Consider how travel, literal or generalised, bears on each register. Travel maximises the *Real*: the unfamiliar place, dense with the unsymbolised, presents a surplus of the not-yet-captured, the strange thing that no familiar concept has domesticated, the raw thereness that the over-symbolised everyday has covered over. Where the everyday is a world so thoroughly symbolised that the Real rarely surfaces, everything already named, classified, assigned, the unfamiliar restores the Real’s pressure, the encounter with what exceeds one’s symbolic net. Travel *suspends and renegotiates the Symbolic*: it brackets the established symbolic order (the roles, the classifications, the settled meanings of home), so that the aesthetic judgement is must be freshly made and freshly shared rather than pre-decided by the inherited symbolic grid, the symbolic accord between the two re-created rather than assumed. And travel *intensifies the shared Imaginary*: two people captivated together by the same strange beauty, each invested in it and each seeing the other invested, form a shared Imaginary bond, a *communitas* of captivation, that the dispersed everyday rarely permits. Travel is thus the field in which the three-register reconciliation of the aesthetic judgement is heightened in every register at once, and in which, because two people undergo it together, in the symmetric unfamiliarity that lets neither host the occasion (§2.6), the reconciliation is achieved *as a shared accord*, the relational subject’s intrinsically-addressed aesthetic judgement reaching its completion in the

mutual “look.”

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

9.6 The sublime: when the Real predominates

Beauty has a great neighbour that the analysis so far has set aside and must now admit, for it is central to the experience of travel and to the existential themes of the paper’s first half: the *sublime*. The distinction between the beautiful and the sublime is one of the deepest in aesthetics, and the three-register analysis illuminates it precisely. Burke drew the distinction in terms of the feelings: the beautiful is founded on pleasure, on what is small, smooth, delicate, and well-formed, and it relaxes and draws; the sublime is founded on a kind of delightful terror, on what is vast, powerful, obscure, and formless, and it overwhelms and astonishes, a pleasure mingled with dread that arises when we confront, from a position of safety, what could destroy us [6]. Kant deepened the distinction: the beautiful concerns form, the bounded, and occasions a restful contemplation; the sublime concerns the formless and the boundless, the magnitude or might that exceeds the imagination’s power to comprehend it, and it occasions not rest but a movement of the mind, a momentary check to our vital powers followed by a stronger outpouring, as reason, confronted with what overwhelms sense, discovers in itself an idea of the infinite that the overwhelming object cannot match [24]. The sublime, for Kant, is the feeling of reason’s supersensible vocation, awakened by the failure of sense before the boundless; it is, paradoxically, in the very overwhelming of our perceptual powers that we feel our supersensible elevation.

In the three-register terms the paper has developed, the sublime is the experience in which the *Real predominates*, in which the unsymbolisable, the formless surplus that exceeds all symbolic capture, comes forward in its full force and overwhelms the Symbolic and Imaginary rather than being reconciled with them. Where beauty is the achieved reconciliation of the three registers, the sublime is the encounter with the Real in its excess over reconciliation: the vast, the boundless, the overwhelming, which cannot be taken up into form (Symbolic) or captured in a pleasing image (Imaginary), but presses upon the subject as the sheer unsymbolisable magnitude that breaks the frame. Lyotard made exactly this the centre of his reading: the

sublime is the presentation of the fact that the unrepresentable exists, the feeling occasioned by that which exceeds all presentation, the Real's irruption past the limits of form [30]. And this connects the sublime directly to the paper's existential first half. The contingency that the field of travel restores (§2.4), the encounter with the undetermined that returns the subject to its existence, is closely akin to the sublime: the mountain vista that overwhelms, the vast indifferent landscape, the boundless sea, the strangeness of the wholly unfamiliar place, these are sublime encounters, irruptions of the Real that exceed the traveller's symbolic net and return them, through the overwhelming, to the bare fact of their existence. The existential disclosure that the paper located in contingency is, in aesthetic terms, the sublime: the Real's predominance, breaking the everyday's symbolic frame and exposing the subject to what exceeds it. Travel affords the sublime as much as the beautiful, the overwhelming as much as the reconciled, and the two together, the beautiful as three-register accord and the sublime as the Real's excess, are the full aesthetic range of the field. The sublime is where the aesthetics of this section rejoins the existential phenomenology of the paper's beginning: the Real that overwhelms is the same Real whose irruption, in contingency, returns the subject to its existence.

9.7 The beauty of suffering

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

The evidence is overwhelming once one looks. The greatest art is very largely an art of suffering: the tragedy, the elegy, the lament, the requiem, the poem wrung from grief. The sorrowful poem is not a lesser beauty than the joyful one; it is often the higher, and it is beautiful precisely *as* the articulation of sorrow, its beauty inseparable from the pain it shapes. Nietzsche made this the centre of his first work: tragedy, he argued, is the supreme art because it looks into the abyss of existence, the suffering, the destruction, the terror at the heart of things, and through the transfiguring power of form, makes it not merely bearable but beautiful, affirmable, even joyous; the Dionysian truth of suffering is redeemed by the Apollonian power of beautiful form, and the result is the highest aesthetic achievement, the transfiguration of pain into beauty that does not deny the pain but transmutes it [41]. The beauty of tragedy is the transfiguration of suffering rather than its absence; the suffering remains, fully, and is made beautiful. The East Asian tradition knows this even more intimately, and its central categories are categories of beautiful sorrow: *mono no aware* (§9.11) is the beauty of transience felt as gentle grief, the falling blossom beautiful *because* it falls, the poignancy of loss as itself a form of beauty;

sabi is the beauty of what is weathered, decayed, passing, the loveliness of the marks of time and mortality. These are beauties of suffering rather than beauties that exclude it; they are beauties *of* suffering, of transience, of loss, refined into whole aesthetic sensibilities. And psychoanalysis locates the structure: the work of mourning is itself a labour of transfiguration, the slow conversion of raw loss into something that can be held, integrated, given form [15]; and sublimation, in which the painful drive is raised into the created object, is the very mechanism by which suffering becomes art [27].

The three-register analysis explains how this is possible. Suffering, in its rawness, is an excess of the Real, the overwhelming, the unsymbolisable, the unbearable pressing past all form, akin to the sublime. To make suffering beautiful is to bring this Real excess into a reconciliation with the Symbolic and the Imaginary without denying or diminishing it: to give the unbearable a form (Symbolic) that holds it without falsifying it, to invest it with a transfiguring image (Imaginary) that does not prettify but transmutes, so that the suffering is neither repressed nor merely endured but *shaped* into a beauty that contains it whole. The beauty of suffering is the achieved reconciliation, across the three registers, of an experience whose Real component is pain, and this is harder than the reconciliation of pleasant beauty, which is why the art of suffering is the higher art and the sorrowful poem the deeper beauty. *χαλεπὰ τὰ καλὰ* is nowhere truer than here: the beauty of suffering is the most difficult beauty, because it must reconcile, without falsifying, a Real that resists reconciliation with every fibre. That it can be done, that grief can become elegy, loss can become *mono no aware*, terror can become tragedy, is among the most important things about beauty, and it will prove, when the paper returns to the conflicts and failures of shared travel (§5.5, §9.8), to be the key that transforms the darkest material of a relation into a possible source of its deepest wealth.

9.8 Conflict as relational wealth

If suffering can be beautiful, then a conclusion follows that overturns the assumption with which the paper's ethics of travel began, and the overturning is important enough to be drawn out here, in the theoretical chapter, before its consequences are taken up in the ethics. The assumption, natural, and not wholly wrong, was that conflict in shared travel is a negative thing: the holiday quarrel as the exposure of a hollow relation, the friction of forced co-presence as a stressor, contingency overwhelming rather than nourishing (§3.1, §5.5). All of this can be true. But it is not the whole truth, and the part it omits is exactly the part the beauty of suffering reveals. *Conflict can be relational wealth*: under the right conditions, a positive and even peculiarly precious form of the wealth a relation generates, in place of merely a danger to be survived.

The argument runs through everything the paper has built. A conflict undergone together is a shared experience of unusual intensity, a passage of difficulty, friction, even pain, that the two undergo as a "we." Like any shared experience, it is generated in the living and then either reproduced or left to dissipate (§4). And here the beauty of suffering becomes decisive. If the conflict is reproduced *well*, if, in the shared retelling, the two return to it together and, through the labour of reproduction, transfigure it, giving the remembered pain a form that

holds it, investing it with a significance that does not deny the difficulty but transmutes it, then the conflict becomes beautiful in exactly the way suffering becomes beautiful in art: a raw Real of pain reconciled, in the retelling, into a shaped and shared meaning. And a conflict so transfigured is not a wound the relation carries but a *treasure* it holds: the storm weathered together, the hard passage survived as a “we,” becomes, years later, among the most precious of the relation’s shared possessions, *do you remember that terrible night we fought in the rain* spoken not as a reopening of the wound but as the recollection of a thing they came through together, unique, theirs, beautiful precisely because it was hard. The conflict has become wealth, and a peculiarly durable wealth, because it is unrepeatable and wholly their own.

There is more, and it is the deepest point, the one that joins this to the paper’s theory of aesthetic judgement. A conflict is, among other things, a collision of two differing perceptions, two divergent takes on what is happening, two aesthetic judgements that do not agree, one finds the detour an adventure, the other a disaster; one is moved where the other is irritated. The conflict is the friction of two aesthetic judgements failing, in the moment, to accord. And the labour of reproducing it well is precisely the labour of bringing those two divergent judgements into a shared accord, of the two perceptions, through the mutual translation of retelling (§4.6), moving toward each other until a common aesthetic judgement is generated that neither held alone, a shared way of seeing the difficult thing that both can now hold. Conflict, reproduced well, is therefore one of the primary occasions on which two people’s aesthetic judgements are *reconciled*, on which the divergent perceptions of two relational subjects are brought, through difficulty, into a genuinely shared accord. And the accord so generated is uniquely valuable exactly because it was won through conflict: a shared aesthetic judgement forged in difficulty is deeper, more tested, more wholly common than one that never met resistance, as a reconciliation that has survived a quarrel is sounder than a harmony that was never strained. This is why conflict can be not merely tolerable but generative: it creates the occasion for the deepest kind of aesthetic reconciliation between two people, the bringing-into-accord of judgements that genuinely diverged, and the unique shared beauty that only a transfigured difficulty can yield.

The conclusion is a thesis about beauty and conflict that the ethics will inherit: *beauty does not exclude conflict, but can make conflict a part of the relation’s common generation*. The relation whose conflicts are well reproduced does not merely survive them; it is enriched by them, in a way it could not be enriched by unbroken harmony, because the transfigured conflict yields a wealth, the unique shared experience, the hard-won common accord, the beauty of a difficulty come through together, that harmony alone cannot generate. This does not make conflict good in itself, and the paper is not counselling the manufacture of quarrels; the raw conflict is real difficulty, and badly reproduced it is pure depletion (§5.5). What makes the difference is the reproduction: the same conflict that, extracted and weaponised, is the bad cycle’s fuel is, transfigured and shared, the good cycle’s treasure. The decisive variable, here as throughout the paper, is what is done with it rather than the material, and the beauty of suffering is the proof that even the hardest material, the pain and friction of a shared life, can be transfigured, in the labour of loving reproduction, into the deepest beauty a relation holds.

It is on this recognition that the ethics of conflict (§5.6) will be built.

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

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

The teleological criterion: the possibility of the continuation of generativity. The first criterion is the one the previous discussion approached: a reproduction of suffering is good only if it preserves the *possibility* that the relation continue to generate, only if, having reproduced the painful experience, the relation can still generate further from it, rather than being terminated, frozen, or foreclosed by it. The criterion is teleological, and it rests on the metaphysical ground this series established at its foundation: that generativity aims at its own continuation, that the good of a generative relation is finally the perpetuation of its own generativity [60]. The wording must be exact, and it is deliberately minimal: the criterion is not that the reproduction *guarantee* continuation, nor that it make the suffering “positive,” nor that it produce any particular good feeling; it is only that it preserve the *possibility* of continued generation, that it not close the door. A bad reproduction of suffering closes the door: it reproduces the painful experience as a fixed verdict, a settled debt, a permanent indictment, a wound sealed into a grievance, a dead end from which the relation can generate nothing further, the suffering solidified into a terminus (§10.3). A good reproduction keeps the door open: it reproduces the suffering in a way that leaves the relation able to go on generating, the painful experience kept available for further evolution rather than frozen into a final meaning. This is the minimal teleological condition, and it is minimal by design: it does not demand that suffering be redeemed, only that its reproduction not foreclose the relation's generative future. The criterion closes off the first degeneration: the reproduction of suffering into a generative dead end.

The ontological criterion: the reproduction must be relational. The second criterion follows from the relational ontology of the series and from the analysis of reproduction as

the reproduction of a *relational* subject's experience (§4.2, §10.2). A reproduction of shared suffering is good only if it is itself *relational*, only if it is conducted jointly, by the two together, rather than unilaterally by one. The reason is structural: what is to be reproduced is the experience of the *relational subject*, the “we,” and the experience of a relational subject can be reproduced only relationally, by the relational subject itself, not by one of its members acting alone. When one partner unilaterally reproduces a shared suffering, decides, alone, what the painful experience meant, how it is to be remembered, what story the “we” will tell about it, the reproduction has already failed the ontological criterion, however benevolent the intent, because it has converted a relational experience into one party's account of it, the “we”'s suffering into an “I”'s narrative. This is so even when the unilateral reproducer is the one who suffered more, and even when they reproduce the suffering generously: a suffering reproduced *for* the relation by one member is not a suffering reproduced *by* the relation, and only the latter is the genuine reproduction of the relational subject's experience. The criterion demands co-production: the joint return, the mutual retelling, the shared transfiguration in which both members of the “we” participate in determining what the suffering becomes. It closes off the second degeneration: the reproduction of shared suffering into one party's private narrative, the unilateral appropriation of the “we”'s pain.

The political-economic criterion: the reproduction must not be exploitative. The third criterion follows from the series' political economy and from the analysis of the justice of reproduction (§4.6). A reproduction of suffering is good only if it is *non-exploitative*, only if neither party's suffering is reproduced as material for the other's gain. The criterion sharpens the ontological one, for even a jointly conducted reproduction can be exploitative: the two may reproduce the suffering together, and yet the reproduction may systematically convert one party's pain into the other's benefit, into the other's moral credit, the other's victim-standing, the other's leverage. Suffering is peculiarly liable to this exploitation, because suffering carries moral weight, and whoever's version of the shared suffering prevails acquires a moral advantage: the right to be comforted, the standing of the wronged, the credit of the one who endured. A reproduction in which one partner's pain is reproduced as the relation's official suffering, while the other's is minimised or erased, is exploitative in exactly the sense the series has analysed throughout: one party rendered the mere material of a circulation whose surplus, here, the moral surplus of acknowledged suffering, accrues to the other [63, 64]. The good reproduction is non-exploitative: it admits both parties' suffering, refuses to convert either's pain into the other's moral capital, and generates a shared acknowledgement in which neither is the mere fuel of the other's victimhood or virtue. It closes off the third degeneration: the reproduction of suffering into the extraction of moral surplus, the conversion of one party's pain into the other's gain.

The power criterion: the generation of power must be accompanied by the generation of its restraint. The fourth criterion is the deepest and the most dialectical, and it follows from the series' analysis of power as ineliminable (§9.2 notwithstanding; see the power analysis of the previous paper, 64, and the formal companion, 21). It must be granted, un-

flinchingly, that the reproduction of shared suffering *generates a structure of power*. A relation that has weathered serious suffering together is left with asymmetries: who was hurt more, who needs more care, who owes whom, who has the standing to invoke the painful episode, who may ask for forbearance on its account. These asymmetries are real and, like all relational power, ineliminable; a reproduction of suffering that claimed to generate no power at all would be either naive or dishonest. The criterion, therefore, does not demand the impossible abolition of the power that suffering's reproduction generates. It demands, instead, that the generation of power be *accompanied by the generation of power's restraint*, that the same reproduction which generates a structure of power also generate a force that checks the abuse of that power. The distinction is the series' distinction between power-to and power-over [64]: a reproduction of suffering generates power-over when the asymmetry it creates becomes a standing instrument of domination, the wound reproduced as a permanent debt, the suffering invoked forever as a claim on the other's compliance, "after all I suffered" become the bad cycle's most effective weapon. It generates power-to, accompanied by restraint, when the asymmetry it creates is held within a force that prevents its abuse, when the one whom the suffering's reproduction has empowered is also bound, by the same reproduction, not to wield that power as domination. The good reproduction of suffering is the one that, generating power (as it must), generates simultaneously the restraint that keeps the power from becoming domination: the reproduction that makes the wounded one cared-for without making them a tyrant of their wound, that acknowledges the asymmetry without converting it into a permanent claim. It closes off the fourth and most insidious degeneration: the reproduction of suffering into a standing instrument of domination, the wound become a weapon, the pain become power-over.

The criteria as direction, not method; and the opened question. These four criteria, teleological, ontological, political-economic, and power-dialectical, together specify what a good reproduction of suffering must be: it must preserve the possibility of continued generation, be conducted relationally, refuse exploitation, and accompany the power it generates with the restraint of that power. Each closes off one characteristic degeneration: the dead end, the unilateral appropriation, the extraction of moral surplus, the instrument of domination. (These four, first stated here for the hard case of suffering, are in fact the general criteria of *relational production* as such, governed by the principle of subject-preservation; the general theory is set out separately, §6, where suffering's reproduction is treated as its first application.) Together they mark the direction of the good with some precision. But they do not supply the method, and the paper is careful not to pretend otherwise. To know that a good reproduction of suffering must meet these four conditions is not yet to know *how* to meet them, how, concretely, two people are to reproduce a shared pain so that it stays generative, stays joint, stays non-exploitative, and stays free of domination. That how is not a procedure; it is an art, as difficult as any in this paper, and it cannot be reduced to a rule any more than the perception of beauty can. The criteria are the direction; the route is not given. And so the paper, having opened the question of the just reproduction of suffering and given it the structure of these four criteria, must hand on the larger task, the full theory of how suffering is justly and generatively reproduced between two people, as a problem it has framed but not solved, a fissure that points

beyond it (§16.3) toward a paper of its own. The good reproduction of suffering is difficult, as the beautiful is difficult; this paper has done what it can, which is to say in which direction the good lies, and to confess that the way there remains to be found.

9.10 The metaphysics of beauty: from Plato to Hegel

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

For Plato, beauty is a Form, the *auto to kalon* that the *Hippias Major* sought and the *Symposium* approached by another route: in Diotima's ascent, the lover rises from the beauty of a single body, to the beauty of all bodies, to the beauty of souls, of laws and institutions, of the sciences, and finally to Beauty itself, eternal, uncompounded, neither coming to be nor passing away, the Form in which all beautiful things participate and from which they derive whatever beauty they have. Beauty, for Plato, is thus a transcendent reality, and the experience of beautiful things is valuable chiefly as the first rung of an ascent beyond them to the Form. Crucially, in the Platonic vision the beautiful and the good are near allied, the ascent to Beauty is also an ascent toward the Good, and the *kalon* shades into the *agathon*, a proximity of beauty and goodness that the paper's own thesis of their continuity (§13) will inherit and transform.

Plotinus deepened the Platonic account by locating beauty in the soul's recognition of form imposed on matter, and ultimately in the radiance of the One: the beautiful is that in which the formative principle, the *logos*, shines through matter, and the experience of beauty is the soul's recognition of its kindred, the trace of the intelligible in the sensible, drawing the soul back toward its source [47]. Beauty is here a radiance, an emanation, the appearing of the higher in the lower, and its perception is a homecoming, the soul recognising in the beautiful object the form to which it is itself akin. Aquinas, synthesising the classical inheritance with Christian metaphysics, gave the most analytically influential formula: beauty requires three things, *integritas* (wholeness or completeness), *proportio* or *consonantia* (due proportion or harmony), and *claritas* (radiance or clarity, the splendour of the form shining through), and the beautiful is that which, being seen, pleases, *id quod visum placet*, where the pleasing-on-being-seen unites the objective conditions (wholeness, proportion, radiance) with the perceiving that apprehends them [2]. The Thomistic *claritas*, the form's radiance, its shining-forth, is a precise name for what the three-register analysis called the Real surplus made manifest: the splendour by which the thing's form announces itself beyond what concepts capture.

Hegel completed the descent by bringing beauty fully into the sensuous and the historical. Beauty, for Hegel, is *das sinnliche Scheinen der Idee*, the sensuous appearing of the Idea, the shining of spirit through sensuous form [19]. Beauty is no longer a transcendent Form above the

sensible (Plato) nor a radiance emanating from above (Plotinus), but the Idea’s own appearing *in* the sensuous, spirit made manifest to sense; and art is the medium in which spirit gives itself sensuous appearance, in a historical development through which spirit progressively frees itself from the sensuous toward the conceptual. Hegel’s formula brings beauty down into history and into the appearing itself, beauty is the Idea *as it appears*, not a reality behind the appearance, and in doing so it prepares the modern recognition, which the paper shares, that beauty is a structure of appearing rather than a property behind experience, an event in which something comes to presence. The paper does not adopt Hegel’s idealist metaphysics, but it inherits his decisive move: that beauty is a matter of appearing, of coming-to-presence, rather than of a property residing in objects or a Form residing beyond them. This is consonant with the paper’s own category of presence (§1.3): beauty, like the relation’s dynamics, is something that comes to *presence*, an event of appearing, not a thing that simply *is*.

9.11 East Asian aesthetics: an independent pillar

The philosophy of beauty surveyed so far is Western, and to leave the matter there would be a provincialism the paper’s whole orientation forbids, and would moreover omit the tradition that has most precisely cultivated exactly the perceptual capacities the paper is concerned with. East Asian aesthetics is an independent and in some respects deeper pillar rather than an exotic supplement to the Western account, and it is the more apposite here because its central categories are, to an extraordinary degree, categories of the perception of contingency, transience, emptiness, and the unsymbolisable, the very objects of the aesthetic perception this paper makes central. The principal categories are surveyed in Table 2; four deserve discussion in the text.

The Chinese category of *yijing* (意境), variously rendered “world of meaning,” “aesthetic realm,” or “conceived realm”, names the fused totality of scene and feeling that a work opens, the interpenetration of the objective landscape (*jing*, scene) and the subjective feeling (*yi*, mind or intent) into a single resonant whole that exceeds both [68]. *Yijing* is not a property of the depicted scene nor a feeling in the perceiver but the resonant world that arises in their fusion, which is, in the paper’s terms, a name for the three-register reconciliation itself, the accord in which the Real of the scene, the Imaginary of feeling, and the Symbolic of the rendered work fuse into a realm that is neither objective nor subjective but their reconciliation. The Chinese tradition named, in *yijing*, exactly the structure the paper reached through Lacan: beauty as the fused realm beyond the subject-object split. And the highest *yijing*, in the critical tradition, is achieved through emptiness, through what is left unsaid, unpainted, the void that opens the resonant space, so that *yijing* is inseparable from the aesthetics of spaciousness the paper has carried throughout (§2.8).

The category of *qiyun shengdong* (气韵生动), “spirit-resonance, life-motion,” the first of Xie He’s six principles of painting, names the vital resonance, the living movement of *qi* (breath, energy, spirit) that animates a great work and makes it not a dead representation but a living presence [8]. *Qiyun* is the aesthetic of the living, the dynamic, the animate, the quality by which a painting breathes, by which brushwork carries life, and it is, in the paper’s terms,

close to the aesthetic of the self-presence of dynamics: the valuing of the felt movement, the living current, over static form. A work has *qiyun* when its dynamism comes to presence, when one feels the life moving in it; and this is the aesthetic correlate of the paper's central phenomenological concept, the coming-to-presence of a living dynamics.

The Japanese categories carry the aesthetics of transience and depth to their height. *Mono no aware* (物の哀れ), “the pathos of things,” the gentle sorrow-tinged sensitivity to the transience of all things, the poignancy felt in the falling cherry blossom precisely because it falls, is the aesthetic perception of contingency in its purest form: the trained sensitivity to the passing, the contingent, the impermanent, felt as beautiful in and through its very transience [45]. This is the cultivated *xing* (§11.2) raised to a whole aesthetic sensibility: the capacity to be moved by the contingent and the passing, to find in transience itself the deepest beauty. *Yūgen* (幽玄), “mysterious depth,” the profound, dim, half-glimpsed beauty of what is not fully revealed, the suggestion of an unfathomable depth behind the surface, is the aesthetics of the unsymbolisable, the Real that beauty intimates without capturing: *yūgen* is precisely the beauty of what exceeds the symbolic, glimpsed at the edge of the unsayable, the depth that can be suggested but never stated. And *sabi* (寂), the beauty of the weathered, the aged, the solitary, the marks of time and use, the patina of transience, together with *wabi*, the beauty of the simple, the imperfect, the austere, completes the Japanese aesthetics of impermanence and emptiness, finding beauty exactly in what the consumerist aesthetic of the new and the perfect cannot see. These categories are, collectively, the most refined vocabulary any tradition has developed for the perception of contingent, transient, spacious, and unsymbolisable beauty, which is to say, for precisely the perception this paper makes central. The paper draws on them not as ornament but as the tradition that most fully cultivated its own central capacity, and it takes their existence as evidence that the aesthetic perception of contingency is a deep and ancient cultivable art rather than a private notion.

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

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

Table 2: Principal categories of East Asian aesthetics and their bearing on the paper’s concerns. The tradition’s central categories are, to a striking degree, categories of the perception of contingency, transience, emptiness, and the unsymbolisable — the very objects of the aesthetic perception this paper makes central.

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

The philosophy of beauty just developed treated aesthetic judgement as though it were a single event, a reconciliation achieved at a moment, an accord struck once. This is an abstraction, and it must now be corrected, for aesthetic judgement is not a point but a *process*: it evolves in time, and its evolution is governed by exactly the reproduction cycle the paper analysed in its political economy. To read the same poem today and a year ago is to make two different aesthetic judgements of it; the beauty one finds in a place, a person, an experience, is shifts rather than fixed, deepens, sometimes fades, across the repeated returns of a life. This temporal evolution of aesthetic judgement is the missing dynamical dimension of the paper’s aesthetics, and supplying it joins the third movement (the aesthetic) to the second (the political-economic) at their root, showing them to be two aspects of one process. The section is brief but structurally pivotal: it is the hinge on which the paper’s aesthetics and its political economy turn out to be the same theory seen twice.

10.1 Aesthetic judgement is not a point but a trajectory

Consider the simplest case. One reads a poem, and finds it beautiful, or does not, or finds in it a particular beauty. One returns to it a year later, and the judgement has changed: the poem one found slight now seems profound, or the poem that dazzled now seems hollow, or, most commonly, the same poem yields a different beauty, inflected by all that has happened in the intervening time, the lines that meant little now heavy with a significance that one’s own life has since supplied. The aesthetic judgement of the poem is not a fixed fact about the

poem-and-reader; it is a state that evolves, a point on a trajectory that the repeated returns trace out. And what is true of the poem is true of every object of aesthetic judgement: the place revisited, the music reheard, the person re-beheld, the shared experience re-membered. Aesthetic judgement is temporal through and through, a thing that develops across its returns, and to treat it as a single timeless accord is to freeze a moving thing.

This is not a defect in aesthetic judgement to be corrected toward some stable “true” judgement that further acquaintance approaches. The evolution is not convergence toward a fixed correct answer, as the accumulation of evidence converges toward a fact; it is genuine development, the judgement becoming *other* as the judging subject and its history become other, with no terminus at which the “real” beauty of the thing would finally be fixed. This follows directly from the resolution of the antinomy (§9.4): if beauty is the three-register reconciliation achieved by a relational subject rather than an objective property of the thing, then as the subject evolves, as its symbolic world deepens, its imaginary investments shift, its encounters with the Real accumulate, the reconciliation it achieves with the same object evolves too. The beauty is not in the object waiting to be correctly read; it is in the accord, and the accord is struck by a subject that is itself in motion. Aesthetic judgement evolves because the relational subject that judges is itself continually being generated and re-generated rather than static, which is to say, reproduced.

10.2 The reproduction cycle as the engine of evolution

What drives the evolution? The answer joins this section to the paper’s political economy: aesthetic judgement evolves through the *reproduction cycle* (§4). Recall that the reproduction of experience is the labour of shared retelling by which a generated experience is returned to the relation’s present, re-felt, and re-woven into its living fabric (§4.2). Each such return is a re-generation rather than a neutral replay, in which the experience is inflected by all that has happened since and added to in the re-feeling. And the aesthetic judgement of the experience is among the things so re-generated. When two people return, in retelling, to a shared journey, they do not merely recall its beauty; they *re-judge* it, and the re-judging is shaped by everything the intervening time has brought, so that the beauty they find in the remembered experience evolves with each return. The reproduction cycle is therefore the engine of the evolution of aesthetic judgement: each turn of the cycle re-generates the judgement, moves it, deepens or alters it, traces another point on its trajectory.

This is why the example with which this paper’s political economy was concerned, *do you remember that time we got lost*, is at once a reproduction of experience and an evolution of aesthetic judgement. The getting-lost, judged in the moment as a frustration, is re-judged in the retelling, and across repeated retellings its aesthetic value evolves: what was experienced as an irritation becomes, through the reproductive returns, perceived as a charm, then as a treasured oddity, then as one of the most beautiful moments of the whole journey. The aesthetic judgement of the experience has traversed a trajectory, frustration to charm to treasure, and the reproduction cycle is what carried it along that path. This is the precise mechanism by which the conflict analysed in the previous section (§9.8) can become wealth: the reproduction cycle

evolves the aesthetic judgement of the conflict from the negative value it had in the moment to the positive value it acquires in the transfigured retelling. The evolution of aesthetic judgement and the reproduction of experience are not two processes but one: to reproduce an experience is to evolve its aesthetic judgement, and the trajectory of the judgement is the track the reproduction cycle traces.

10.3 The dynamics: good and bad evolution

If aesthetic judgement evolves through the reproduction cycle, then it has a *dynamics*, and the dynamics can run well or badly, which connects this section to the good and bad cycles the series has analysed throughout, and to the dynamical layer of its formal companion [21, 60]. The evolution of aesthetic judgement is the dynamical state of a system, and like any such system it can move toward enrichment or toward collapse.

The good evolution is the deepening one. Here each turn of the reproduction cycle adds to the aesthetic judgement, so that the beauty found in the experience grows richer with each return, accumulating significance, gathering the resonances of all the intervening life, becoming over years an ever-deeper well of meaning. This is the good cycle in the register of aesthetic judgement: a circulation that returns more than it took, the holonomy of the judgement accumulating positive value along the path of its re-generation (§4.3). The poem returned to over a lifetime that deepens with each reading, the shared journey whose beauty grows richer with each retelling, the relationship whose history becomes more beautiful as it is re-judged across the years, these are the good evolution, the aesthetic judgement enriched by its own reproduction. The bad evolution is the degrading one, and it takes two forms corresponding to the two failures of the cycle. The first is *fixation*: the judgement frozen, the reproduction become rote, the same beauty found in the same way each time with no re-generation, the living judgement hardened into a fixed verdict, the solidification of the aesthetic judgement, its circulation fallen to zero [21]. The poem reduced to a fixed “great poem” one no longer actually reads, the journey hardened into a set anecdote no longer re-felt: the aesthetic judgement has stopped evolving, frozen into a dead possession. The second is *depletion*: the judgement worn away by a reproduction that extracts rather than enriches, the beauty consumed until nothing is left, the over-told story whose charm is exhausted, the experience re-judged so often and so carelessly that its aesthetic value is spent. Both are the bad cycle in the aesthetic register: the judgement either frozen or consumed, its living evolution arrested or its value extracted.

This gives the paper’s aesthetics its dynamical completion, and it gives the cultivation of aesthetic judgement (§12) its temporal object. To cultivate aesthetic judgement is to tend its evolution over time rather than only to refine it at a moment, to keep its reproduction generative rather than rote or extractive, to return to the beautiful in ways that deepen rather than fix or deplete the judgement of it. The mutual aesthetic education of two (§12.7) is, seen now, the joint tending of the evolution of their shared aesthetic judgements: the labour by which two people, returning together to the beauties they have shared, keep the evolution of their common aesthetic judgement on the deepening path rather than letting it freeze or deplete. And the self-presence of relational dynamics (§3) is completed in the same way: the relation’s

dynamics that come to presence include the evolving dynamics of the two subjects' aesthetic judgements moving, through the reproduction cycle, toward an ever more deeply shared accord. The aesthetic and the political-economic, the judgement and its reproduction, the perception of beauty and the dynamics of the relation, are here seen to be one moving system, and the beauty of a long shared life is, in the end, the good evolution of a shared aesthetic judgement, deepened across a lifetime of generative reproduction. *χαλεπὰ τὰ καλὰ*: the beautiful is difficult, and now its difficulty is seen to be also temporal, the difficulty not only of striking the accord but of tending its evolution, over a whole life, on the deepening path.

10.4 The dialectic of the general and the particular

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

The problem is this. Two relational subjects cannot be required to have identical aesthetic judgements, to do so would be to annul their distinctness, to demand the fusion that this series has refused from its foundation, the merging of two into one that destroys the resonance it pretends to perfect (§3.2). A “we” whose two members judged all beauty identically would not be a relation of two but a single judging subject wearing two faces; the particularity of each, the irreducible difference of their perception, is a condition of there being two to relate rather than an obstacle to the relation. And yet a shared aesthetic judgement, a *general* accord, a common way of finding things beautiful, is genuinely needed, for without it there is no “we” that judges, no shared sensibility, no common aesthetic life, only two strangers who happen to perceive in parallel. The relation requires both: a generality (the shared accord, the common sensibility) and a particularity (the irreducible difference of each judgement, the distinctness of each perceiving subject). And these two requirements pull against each other, the generality toward convergence, the particularity toward divergence, so that the matter is a *dialectical* tension to be held rather than a simple good to be maximised.

The resolution is the materialist dialectic's resolution of the general and the particular, and it is precisely the concept of the *concrete universal* that this paper invoked at the outset as its method (§1.4). The genuine general is not the abstract universal that is reached by stripping away all particularity, the empty common residue, the homogenised judgement that all must share by having surrendered what is their own. The genuine general is the *concrete* universal: the commonality that exists *in and through* the particulars, generated by their relation, real only as the shared life of distinct perceivers who remain distinct. The shared aesthetic judgement of a “we” is general in this concrete sense: not an identity imposed upon two by the erasure of their difference, but a commonality generated between two who remain different, a shared

accord that lives through their particular judgements rather than in place of them. This is the materialist insight against the idealist abstraction: the universal is not above the particulars, subsuming them; it is among them, generated by their relation, and has no existence apart from the particulars whose commonality it is [35]. Applied here: the shared aesthetic judgement is not a third judgement above the two, to which both must conform, but the living commonality that the two particular judgements generate between them while remaining two. And the tension between the general and the particular, between the pull toward shared accord and the pull toward irreducible difference, is not a defect to be resolved by the victory of one side but the very *motor* of the relation's aesthetic development, the contradiction whose ongoing motion is the relation's aesthetic life. The materialist dialectic holds that contradiction is the source of development; here the contradiction of the general and the particular is the source of the development of the shared aesthetic judgement, which advances not by resolving the tension but by its perpetual working.

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

10.5 A light formal rendering: two coupled fields

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

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

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

The dialectic is now legible in the dynamics, and it yields exactly the two errors the previous subsection named, plus the deep reason the particular is required. A system of *pure coupling*, the self terms suppressed, only the divergence-penalising term left, collapses: the two fields are driven to identity, settling into a single shared configuration, all difference annihilated. This is homogenisation, and in the dynamics it is a positive danger rather than merely a loss of richness, for a system collapsed to a single homogeneous configuration has lost all dynamical diversity, and a system without diversity *cannot escape a degenerating attractor*. Should the shared attractor into which the two judgements have collapsed begin to degenerate, to become a “bad” attractor, a fixed and frozen configuration, the solidification analysed above (§10.3), the homogenised system has no resource by which to leave it: both fields are at the same dead point, and there is no perturbation, no divergent tendency, no alternative trajectory to carry the system out. The generativity of the system is extinguished, frozen at a dead attractor with no path away. This is the dynamical meaning of the fusion the relational ontology forbids: not merely the loss of two-ness, but the loss of the diversity that is the condition of continued evolution, and so the extinction of generativity.

And here is the deep role of the particular, the self term, the irreducible individuality of each judgement: *it is the possibility of escape from the extinction of generativity*. Because the two fields retain their own proper dynamics, their own divergent tendencies, the system retains diversity, and diversity is precisely what allows a system to leave a degenerating attractor. When the shared attractor begins to die, the self term of one or the other field can carry it off the dead point, perturb the system, open a divergence that provides a direction of escape, and so migrate the system toward a new attractor where generativity can resume. The particularity of the two judgements is, in this light, not a romantic concession to individuality but a structural necessity for the survival of the relation's generativity: it is the diversity reserve, the evolutionary variance, the source of the perturbations by which a relation escapes the death of its shared accords. A relation whose two members have become aesthetically identical has spent this reserve and is, for that reason, fragile, unable to renew a sensibility that has gone stale, trapped in whatever shared judgement it has frozen into. A relation whose two members remain aesthetically distinct, while genuinely sharing, retains the reserve, and can therefore keep escaping the deaths of its accords, keep migrating to new and living attractors, keep its generativity from extinction. The particular is required *for the sake of generativity*, which is the relation's own ultimate end [60]; and so the dialectic of the general and the particular is a unity in which each serves the relation's generativity rather than a standoff between two goods, the general by giving the two a shared aesthetic life, the particular by keeping that life able to

renew itself.

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

11. The Aesthetic Perception of Contingency

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

11.1 Contingency is everywhere; the problem is catching it

The previous sections may have given the impression that contingency must be manufactured, that the everyday is a desert of pure repetition into which openness has to be deliberately imported by the construction of fields. This impression is false, and correcting it is the starting point of the present section. The everyday is not, in fact, pure repetition; its repetitions are shot through with contingency at every moment, with small undetermined irruptions that the routine does not fully suppress. A wildflower has come up at the edge of the path. The light has fallen, just now, in a particular way across a wall. A stranger's face, in passing, has worn an expression that means something. A phrase overheard, a sound, a sudden smell, the everyday leaks contingency continuously, through the seams of its repetition, in a steady stream of small

undetermined events. The problem is not that the everyday lacks contingency. The problem is that almost all of this contingency goes *uncaught*, arrives and departs unnoticed, unregistered, unturned-toward, because the purposive perception of the everyday, fixed on its functions and its destinations, is blind to it.

This reframes the whole question of practice. The deepest practical capacity is not, after all, the construction of fields, demanding as that is; it is the capacity to *catch* the contingency that is already arriving, to notice and receive what the everyday is already offering through its seams. And the minimal event in which this capacity is exercised is very small and entirely free: one catches the wildflower at the roadside, sees it, is touched by it, and turns it toward the one beside one: *look*. In that small act, a contingency that would have passed unnoticed is caught, and in being turned-toward it is shared, and in being shared it enters the structure of the “we” and becomes a deposit, however tiny, in the relation’s wealth. The flower, caught and shared, is a contingency that has intervened in the relational structure, the smallest possible instance of everything this paper has described, requiring no constructed field, no journey, no leisure, nothing but the capacity to catch what is already there and turn it toward the beloved. The chain runs: contingency → perception → sharing → wealth, and it can run anywhere, at any moment, for free.

11.2 The three moments of the perception

The capacity so described is not simple; it has three distinct moments, each a distinct ability that can be present or absent, developed or atrophied, and it is worth separating them because the cultivation of the capacity (§12) is the cultivation of each.

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

The second moment is *being moved*: not merely seeing the contingent thing but being *touched* by it, letting it stir something. Seeing is not enough; one can register a flower coldly, as a fact, and be unmoved. The second moment is the receptivity in which the seen thing is allowed to matter, to provoke a small movement of feeling, to be received as significant rather than merely noted. This is a poetic receptivity, and the Chinese tradition has a precise name for it: *xing* (兴), the stirring of feeling by a thing, the rising of emotion or significance in response to a perceived object, which the classical poetics placed at the very root of poetry, “the poem begins

in *xing*,” in the affective stirring that a thing provokes [43]. To be moved by the roadside flower is to undergo *xing*: to let the small contingent thing stir something, to be affectively reached by it rather than merely registering its presence. This receptivity, too, can be developed or dulled; a life of purely purposive perception dulls it, and the practiced sensibility of the poet keeps it alive.

The third moment is *turning-to-share*: taking what one has seen and been moved by, and turning it toward the other. *Look*. This small act is the one that makes the whole chain relational, and it is the decisive moment for the purposes of this paper, because it is what converts a private aesthetic experience into a relational event. One could see the flower and be moved by it and keep it, a complete solitary aesthetic experience, of the kind the lone traveller has. The turning-toward is what makes it a deposit in the “we”: by sharing the caught contingency, one lets it intervene in the relational structure, makes it a moment of the “we” rather than of the “I.” The turning-to-share is the relational moment of the aesthetic perception of contingency, and it is what distinguishes the capacity this paper describes from the solitary aesthetic sensibility the tradition has long praised. The full capacity is the chain of all three: to see the contingent (recognition), to be moved by it (*xing*), and to turn it toward the beloved (sharing), and these three, as the philosophy of beauty will show (§9.2), are the three registers brought into accord: the real kernel of the contingent thing encountered in recognition, the imaginary investment of being-moved, and the symbolic articulation of the turning-toward. On that account the *look* is not the aftermath of a completed aesthetic judgement but its very completion, the moment at which the relational subject’s judgement achieves the shared symbolic accord its relational constitution demands, and a relationship rich in this capacity, in which both partners habitually catch and share the contingent beauty the world leaks, is rich in a continuous stream of small generative deposits that require no journey and no constructed field, only the cultivated perception that catches what is already there.

11.3 A skill, not an engineering: the portable container

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

This is the movement from *scaffolding to skill*, and it is the deep logic of the paper’s eventual

generalisation of travel (§15). The literal journey is a scaffolding: a powerful, expensive, external frame that opens the field all at once, and whose chief value, beyond the field it opens, is that it *teaches*, it lets one experience the field vividly enough to recognise it, to learn what it is and what it feels like to catch and share the contingent within it. But the mature form of the practice is not the perpetual construction of scaffoldings, which would indeed be effortful and elite; it is the skill that the scaffolding taught, carried back into the everyday, exercisable without the scaffolding. The journey shows what the field is; the skill lets one open it anywhere. And spaciousness is what makes the catching possible at every point: the skilled perceiver is one who keeps, within themselves and within their day, enough emptiness, enough freedom from the total occupation of purpose, that the contingent has room to be noticed when it arrives. Without that interior spaciousness the contingency leaks past uncaught, the perception too full of purpose to register the flower. The skill, then, is inseparable from the cultivation of an interior emptiness: the aesthetic perception of contingency is, among other things, the capacity to keep oneself empty enough to catch what comes.

The skill connects, finally, to two things the series has already established. It is the positive, capacitated form of what the previous paper marked as the un-programmability of the good [65]: there it was shown that the good cannot be reduced to a procedure and must be judged afresh in each case; here that un-programmable judgement is given its positive name as a cultivated perceptual skill, the thing one develops where a procedure cannot be supplied. And it is the everyday exercise of what the series called witnessing [62]: to catch the flower and say *look* is the smallest act of shared witnessing, the turning of two gazes toward one thing, the constitution of a shared seeing that is a moment of the “we.” The aesthetic perception of contingency is witnessing made into a daily skill, and its cultivation, to which the paper turns next, is the cultivation of the capacity to witness the world together, beautifully, at the scale of a roadside flower.

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

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

The first is the travel poetics of Bashō, whose *Oku no Hosomichi*, the narrow road to the deep north, is the supreme record of the aesthetic perception of contingency exercised on a journey [36]. Bashō’s practice is exactly the chain this section has described: the catching of small contingent things (a particular silence, the cry of a cicada, the look of a ruined gate), the being-moved by them (the *haiku* is the deposit of a *xing*, the stirring crystallised), and in the form of the travel diary itself, the turning of them toward another, the sharing of the caught moment with a reader and, within the journey, with the companion Sora who travelled beside him. Bashō’s aesthetic of *sabi* and the lightness he called *karumi* are, among other things, disciplines of the perception of contingent beauty, trained capacities to catch and be moved by

the small, the passing, the un-grand, exactly the contingencies the purposive gaze misses.

The second is the Chinese tradition of the landscape travel-record and the landscape poem, the *youji* of writers from Liu Zongyuan to Xu Xiake, and the landscape poetry of Xie Lingyun, Wang Wei, and their lineage, in which the journey into mountains and waters is at once a literal travel and a discipline of perception, the cultivation of an eye and a heart attuned to the beauty of the contingent and the spacious [44]. The Chinese landscape aesthetic is, in a deep sense, an aesthetic of spaciousness: the valuing of emptiness in the painting and the poem, the significance of what is not depicted, the use of the void, the unbrushed silk, the unsaid word, the empty distance, as the very medium of beauty. This is the aesthetic correlate of the eleventh chapter's metaphysics of emptiness (§2.8): a whole tradition of perception trained to find the use of the vessel in its emptiness, the beauty of the landscape in its spacious void.

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

12. Aesthetic Education: Cultivating the Judgement of the Good

If the construction of the field is an aesthetic problem (§7.6), and the perception of what arises within it is an aesthetic skill (§11), then the cultivation of the capacity for both is an *aesthetic education*. This is the philosophical summit of the paper, and also its most exposed wager, for it will argue that aesthetic education is not a refinement added to ethical life but, at the limit, the most fundamental form of ethical education there is. The section advances three theses of increasing radicality. The first, already stated, is that the construction of the field is aesthetic. The second distinguishes two kinds of beauty, the received and the enacted, and locates the second at the root of the long-noted kinship between practical ethics and the aesthetic. The third, the most radical, is that ethical judgement, at the point where rules give out, operates aesthetically, so that the good cannot finally be separated from the beautiful, and the deepest ethical education is aesthetic. The section defends the third thesis in a guarded form, confronts it with its strongest objectors, surveys the classical and modern theories of aesthetic education, descends to the question of how the relevant capacities are actually cultivated between two people, and closes on the difficulty that the whole edifice rests upon: that beautiful things are difficult.

12.1 Why aesthetic education, and not simply ethical education

The claim that the cultivation of the good is an aesthetic rather than a narrowly ethical education depends on a result established in the previous paper and reactivated here: that the good is not programmable [65]. If the good of an intimate relation could be reduced to a set of rules, do this, refrain from that, follow the procedure, then its cultivation would be a matter of teaching the rules, and ethical education would be the transmission of a code. But the good of a relation cannot be so reduced; it requires, in each concrete case, a judgement of what is fitting here, now, with this person, that no rule determines, because the concrete case always exceeds the rule's generality. This was the lesson of the previous paper's closing recognition that the good must be judged afresh in the flesh of each particular relation, and it has a direct consequence for education: if the good is not a code, its cultivation cannot be the transmission of a code, and must instead be the cultivation of the *judgement* that operates where the code gives out.

What is the structure of that judgement? It is the judgement of what is fitting in a concrete case that no rule subsumes, a holistic, situated grasp of the right proportion, the apt response, the fitting measure, exercised on a particular that no universal exhausts. And this, the section will argue, is the structure of aesthetic judgement. The judgement that catches the right measure in a concrete case, where no rule can supply it, is the same judgement in the construction of a field, the perception of a contingency, and the response to an ethical situation; it is, in each, a felt grasp of the fitting that is irreducible to procedure. If that is so, then the cultivation of the good is the cultivation of this judgement, and the cultivation of this judgement is aesthetic education, the education of the capacity to perceive and respond to the fitting where no rule can be followed. This is why the education the good requires is aesthetic and not merely ethical in the narrow, rule-transmitting sense: because the good itself, at its un-programmable core, requires a judgement whose structure is aesthetic.

12.2 Thesis Two: receptive beauty and enactive beauty

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

Thesis Two.

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

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

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

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

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

Thesis Three (guarded form).

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

is an aesthetic education.

The argument for the guarded form proceeds in two steps, the first structural and the second concerning purity. The structural step is this. Ethical life cannot be exhaustively governed by rules, because rules are general and situations are particular, and the particular always in principle exceeds the general; there is always a gap between the rule and the case, which judgement must cross. What crosses it? Not another rule, for that would only reproduce the gap; but a capacity to grasp, in the concrete situation, what is fitting, a capacity Aristotle named *phronesis*, practical wisdom, the perception of the right thing to do in the particular case, which he was careful to say could not be reduced to rules and belonged to perception rather than to demonstration [4]. Now consider the structure of aesthetic judgement as Kant analysed it: the judgement of beauty is, for Kant, a *reflective* judgement, one that finds the universal in the particular rather than subsuming the particular under a given universal; it is non-conceptual, it does not apply a determinate concept, yet it claims a kind of universality; it is the free play of the faculties grasping a purposiveness without a determinate purpose, a fittingness with no rule that the fittingness instances [24]. The two structures, *phronesis* and aesthetic judgement, are, the thesis claims, the same structure: both are the non-conceptual grasp of a fitting particular that no rule subsumes, the finding of the right measure in the concrete where no determinate universal can be applied. *Phronesis* at its summit and aesthetic judgement coincide: the perception of the fitting in the ethical case and the perception of the fitting in the aesthetic case are one capacity, exercised on different materials. This is the bridge Kant's third *Critique* was written to build, the judgement that mediates between the realm of nature and the realm of freedom [24], and the thesis takes it at its word: the faculty that judges beauty is the faculty that, at its limit, judges the good.

The second step concerns purity, and it is the heart of the matter and the author's own deepest reason for the thesis. Consider the difference between two ways of doing the right thing. In the first, one does the right thing because a rule, an obligation, an internalised norm, requires it: one has been formed to act so, and one acts so because one is so formed. In the second, one does the right thing because one perceives, freshly and for oneself, that it is the fitting thing to do, because one sees its fittingness, is moved by it, and enacts it out of that perception, as one might be moved to complete a line of verse in the only way that fits. The two may issue in the same outward act; but they differ in their source, and the difference is the difference between a structured second nature and a free response. The rule-governed good is *structured humanity*: a humanity formed by the internalisation of external norms, acting rightly because it has been built to, its rightness the operation of an installed structure rather than a free perception. Such goodness is reliable, and it is not nothing, a world of people reliably formed to act well is far better than its opposite, but it is not *pure*, for it is heteronomous in the deepest sense: the source of the action is the installed structure, the internalised rule, the formed disposition, and not the free perceiving subject. The aesthetically-grounded good is different. To act rightly because one perceives, oneself and freshly, the fittingness of the act, to be moved by the beauty

of the fitting response and to enact it out of that being-moved, is to act from a source that is one's own free perception rather than an installed structure; and only such action, the thesis holds, has purely ethical character, because only in it is the subject the genuine origin of the good it does, rather than the executor of a structure built into it. The rule-governed good is safe, reliable, and structured; the aesthetically-grounded good is dangerous, unreliable, and free, and only the free is pure. This is why, on the deepest version of the thesis, the truly ethical can only be the aesthetic: because only a goodness that springs from the free perception of the fitting, rather than from the operation of an internalised rule, is the goodness of a free subject rather than the functioning of a structured one.

Thesis Three (extreme form, entertained not asserted).

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

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

12.4 The strongest objections, and the reply

A thesis this radical must face its strongest objectors at full strength, and there are two whose force is sufficient to require, not refutation, but the guarding that the thesis has already built into itself. The series' practice has been to let the hardest objection stand at full force [65]; the practice is kept here.

The Kantian objection: the heteronomy of inclination. The first objection comes from Kant's own ethics, and it is sharp precisely because the thesis leaned on Kant's aesthetics. For Kant the moral worth of an action lies in its being done from duty, from respect for the moral law, and *not* from inclination, however amiable; an action done because one is moved to it,

because one feels its fittingness or is drawn by its beauty, is for Kant exactly *not* a moral action in the full sense, but at best a fortunate *pathological* one, done from feeling rather than from the rational recognition of duty. On this view the thesis has it exactly backwards: to ground the good in the aesthetic perception of the fitting, in being-moved by the beauty of the response, is to ground it in inclination, and inclination is precisely what Kant excludes from the purely moral. The aesthetically-grounded good, far from being the pure good, would be on Kantian grounds the impure one, the good done from feeling rather than from law.

The reply does not deny the Kantian point but relocates the disagreement. The objection assumes that the alternative to acting-from-feeling is acting-from-the-rational-law, and that purity lies with the latter. But the thesis's purity argument was directed at exactly this: the rational law, internalised and operative as the source of one's action, is itself a structure, the structure of duty installed in the subject, and action from it is, in the sense the thesis specified, the operation of an installed structure rather than the free response of the perceiving subject. The thesis and Kant agree that inclination as mere pathological impulse is no ground for the good; they disagree about whether the free perception of the fitting is "inclination" in that sense. The thesis holds that it is not, that the perception of the fitting, the being-moved by the beauty of the right response, is a *judgement* rather than a blind pathological pull, the reflective grasp of a fittingness, which has more in common with Kant's own aesthetic judgement (universal, disinterested, reflective) than with the inclinations he excluded. The disagreement, then, is whether the faculty of reflective judgement, which Kant himself placed between nature and freedom, can be the source of moral action; Kant says the source must be pure practical reason, the thesis says the source can be the reflective perception of the fitting. This is a real and unresolved disagreement, and the paper does not pretend to settle it against Kant; it claims only that the thesis is not refuted by the charge of grounding the good in mere inclination, because the perception of the fitting is a judgement rather than mere inclination, and that whether such judgement can be a pure ground of the good is exactly the open question the thesis raises against the Kantian orthodoxy, not a confusion the orthodoxy disposes of.

The objection from the aestheticisation of ethics: the fascist spectre. The second objection is graver, because it is historical and not merely conceptual, and because the previous paper already conceded its force in another form [65]. To make the good a matter of the beautiful, to aestheticise ethics, is to invite the most dangerous confusion of the last century: the aestheticisation of politics that Benjamin diagnosed at the heart of fascism, the treatment of the political as a work of art to be composed, the people as material to be shaped into a beautiful whole, the leader as artist and the nation as artwork [5]. If the good is the beautiful enacted, what prevents the beautiful-but-monstrous, the magnificently staged rally, the aesthetically perfect and morally abominable order, the cruelty committed with style? The previous paper conceded exactly this point in its own register, granting that a relation could be formally beautiful, could have the geometry of the good cycle, and yet be unjust, so that aesthetic form alone does not secure goodness [65]. The objection here is the same at a higher pitch: the aestheticisation of ethics threatens to license the beautiful atrocity, to make style a sufficient credential for the good, and history shows where that leads.

This is the objection that forces the thesis into its guarded form and keeps the extreme form a temptation rather than an assertion. The reply has three parts, and none of them fully dissolves the danger, which is as it should be. First, the thesis distinguishes receptive and enactive beauty, and the fascist aestheticisation is an aestheticisation of the *spectacle*, of receptive beauty, the beauty beheld by the masses in the staged rally, not of the enactive beauty of how persons are treated; and enactive beauty, the beauty of the fitting treatment of *this* person, is precisely what the beautiful atrocity lacks, since the atrocity treats persons as material for a spectacle rather than meeting them in the aptness their particularity demands. The fascist spectacle is receptively magnificent and enactively monstrous; the distinction the thesis draws is exactly the one that the beautiful atrocity violates. Second, the enactive beauty the thesis prizes is inseparable, by the analysis of the whole series, from the non-extractive, non-dominative treatment of the other, the fitting response is the one that meets the other as an end and returns rather than retains [64, 65], so that a “beautiful” treatment that reduced the other to material would, on the thesis’s own account of enactive beauty, not be beautiful but its counterfeit, the meretricious mistaken for the beautiful. Third, and most honestly, the danger is real and the guarding is necessary precisely because the extreme form, unguarded, could not make these distinctions stick: if every ethical question simply *were* an aesthetic one, with no further criterion, then the magnificent and the monstrous could not be told apart by anything but taste, and taste can be trained to monstrosity. It is exactly to keep the criterion of enactive beauty, the fitting, non-extractive meeting of the particular other, from collapsing into mere spectacular magnificence that the thesis must be held in its guarded form, in which the aesthetic judgement that grounds the good is the judgement of *enactive* fittingness and not of *receptive* splendour. The fascist spectre is the standing proof that the extreme form is too dangerous to assert; it is the reason the paper entertains that form as a precipice rather than standing on it. *The beautiful that grounds the good is the beauty of the fitting deed, not the beauty of the magnificent show*, and the whole weight of the thesis rests on a distinction that history shows to be perpetually under threat of erasure.

12.5 The classical theories of aesthetic education

The thought that the cultivation of the human being passes essentially through the beautiful is old and deep, and the thesis of this paper is its inheritor rather than its inventor. The classical theories are surveyed in Table 3; the text draws out the four that bear most directly on the argument.

The foundational modern text is Schiller’s *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, and it is foundational precisely because it makes the claim this paper makes: that the way to a free and whole humanity runs through the aesthetic [53]. Schiller’s problem was the one this paper has met in another form, how a being divided between sensuous inclination and rational law might become free and whole rather than either the slave of impulse or the executor of an installed law. His answer was the *play-drive* (*Spieltrieb*), the faculty that arises in the free play between the sensuous and the rational and that is exercised paradigmatically in the experience of beauty; in aesthetic play the human being is, Schiller said, most fully human, because there

alone the two halves of its nature are reconciled in freedom rather than one subordinated to the other. This is, in a different vocabulary, exactly the thesis’s contrast between the structured humanity of the installed rule and the free humanity of the aesthetic response: Schiller’s aesthetic education is the cultivation of the freedom that lies beyond both impulse and law, in the play where the human being is whole. The paper’s purity argument is Schiller’s insight in the register of ethics, that only the aesthetically free response is the response of a whole and free human being, rather than of one half of a divided one obeying the other.

The decisive analysis of the faculty is Kant’s, already invoked: the *Critique of Judgment* supplies the structure of the reflective aesthetic judgement on which the whole thesis turns, and it is Kant who frames that faculty as the bridge between nature and freedom, the very mediation the thesis exploits [24]. Aristotle supplies the ethical half of the bridge, the *phronesis* whose structure the thesis identifies with aesthetic judgement [4]. And the Confucian tradition supplies what the Western sources lack: an explicit, institutionalised programme of aesthetic education as the core of ethical formation. The *Analects* states it with a concision the West never matched: 兴于诗, 立于礼, 成于乐, one is aroused by poetry, established by ritual, and *completed by music* [9]. Here the cultivation of the person begins in the affective stirring of poetry (the *xing* of §11.2) and *culminates* in music, the ethical formation of the human being completed in an aesthetic accomplishment, the harmony of the well-formed character figured as, and achieved through, the harmony of music. This is the classical locus of the paper’s two beauties: *xing*, the arousal by poetry, is receptive beauty at the root of formation; *cheng yu yue*, completion in music, is enactive beauty as the summit of the formed character, the life made harmonious as a piece of music is made harmonious. The Confucian sequence is the thesis of this section stated two and a half millennia early: ethical cultivation begins and ends in the aesthetic.

12.6 The modern theories of aesthetic education

The modern theories, surveyed in Table 4, develop the classical inheritance in three directions that matter to the paper: the democratisation of aesthetic experience, its critical and emancipatory edge, and its concrete pedagogy.

Dewey’s *Art as Experience* performs the decisive democratising move, and it is the modern source closest to the paper’s own argument [11]. Against the confinement of the aesthetic to museums and masterpieces, Dewey located aesthetic experience in the consummation of ordinary experience, in any stretch of lived experience that achieves a certain wholeness, completion, and felt unity, which he called “an experience.” The roadside flower, caught and consummated into a complete small experience, is aesthetic in exactly Dewey’s sense; the aesthetic perception of contingency is the Deweyan finding of the aesthetic in the texture of ordinary life, and the paper’s insistence that the good of the everyday is available without grand apparatus is Dewey’s democratisation carried into the ethics of intimacy. Cai Yuanpei’s programme of “replacing religion with aesthetic education” carries the democratising impulse into a whole national pedagogy, proposing aesthetic cultivation as the universal, secular path to the formation of a free and elevated humanity, the institutional dream of exactly the thesis this paper argues [7].

Source	Core concept	Bearing on the thesis
Schiller [52, 53]	The play-drive (<i>Spieltrieb</i>); beauty as the reconciliation of sense and reason	The freedom beyond both impulse and law is reached through the aesthetic — the paper’s purity argument in its original form.
Kant [24]	Reflective aesthetic judgement; judgement as the bridge of nature and freedom	Supplies the structure of the faculty the thesis identifies with <i>phronesis</i> ; the mediation the thesis exploits.
Aristotle [4]	<i>Phronesis</i> : perception of the fitting in the particular, irreducible to rule	The ethical half of the bridge; practical wisdom as non-conceptual grasp of the fitting.
Confucius [9]	兴于诗，立于礼，成于乐: aroused by poetry, completed in music	Ethical formation begins (<i>xing</i> , receptive) and culminates (music, enactive) in the aesthetic.
Plato [46]	The difficulty of the beautiful; beauty and the good ascending together	χαλεπὰ τὰ καλά: the beautiful resists definition — the un-programmability at the section’s close.
Daoist [29]	虚; the use of emptiness; the uncarved	The aesthetic education of the perception of spaciousness and the un-forced.

Table 3: Classical theories of aesthetic education and their bearing on the paper’s three theses.

The critical edge is supplied by the Frankfurt tradition. Adorno’s aesthetics locates in the genuine aesthetic experience a resistance to instrumental reason, the aesthetic as the comportment that refuses to reduce its object to a use, that beholds rather than exploits, and so stands against the total administration of the world by the logic of means and ends [1]. This gives the paper’s aesthetic perception its critical-political dimension, taken up in the next section: to perceive aesthetically, to behold the contingent for its own sake rather than for its use, is already a small refusal of the instrumentalisation that the administered world imposes. Rancière sharpens this into an explicit politics: the aesthetic is the “distribution of the sensible,” the prior partition of what can be perceived, by whom, as significant, so that to alter what is perceptible, to make the overlooked perceptible, is a political act, and aesthetic education, the cultivation of new capacities of perception, is the redistribution of the sensible [48]. The cultivation of the aesthetic perception of contingency is, in Rancière’s terms, the acquisition of a capacity to perceive what the dominant distribution renders imperceptible, a politics of perception, whose stakes the following section will make concrete.

Two further modern sources deserve note for joining the aesthetic to the ethical in exactly the paper’s way. Iris Murdoch made *attention*, the just and loving gaze, the patient regard that sees the other truly, the centre of the moral life, and her attention is aesthetic in structure: it is the disinterested, careful beholding that the aesthetic perception of a thing requires, turned upon a person, so that to see the other justly is to behold them with the regard one gives a thing of beauty [39]. Elaine Scarry argued that the experience of beauty trains the fair, decentred

Source	Contribution	Bearing on the paper
Dewey [11]	“An experience”; the aesthetic in the consummation of ordinary life	Democratizes the aesthetic; the roadside flower is aesthetic in Dewey’s exact sense.
Cai Yuanpei [7]	Aesthetic education in place of religion; universal secular formation	The institutional dream of the thesis; aesthetic cultivation as the path to a free humanity.
Adorno [1]	The aesthetic as resistance to instrumental reason	Beholding-not-using as a refusal of administration; the critical edge of perception.
Rancière [48]	The distribution of the sensible; aesthetics as politics	Cultivating perception redistributes the perceptible — a politics of perception.
Murdoch [39]	Attention; the just and loving gaze	The moral work of attention is aesthetic in structure — seeing truly is loving rightly.
Scarry [51]	Beauty as prompting justice; the decentred, fair regard	Receptive beauty trains the fair attention that the just response requires.
Modern pedagogy [13, 17, 38, 55]	Sensory education; artistic formation; aesthetic education as practice	Concrete methods for cultivating perception — how the capacities are actually trained.

Table 4: Modern theories of aesthetic education and their bearing on the paper.

attention that justice requires, that to be stopped and decentred by a beautiful thing is to practice the very unselfing that just regard for others demands [51]. Both are, in the paper’s terms, theorists of how receptive beauty schools enactive beauty: how the trained perception of the beautiful becomes the capacity for the fitting, attentive, just response. And the concrete pedagogies, Montessori’s education of the senses, Steiner’s artistic formation of the whole child, the aesthetic-education programmes of Greene and Eisner, supply what a paper on cultivation must not omit: actual methods by which the capacities of aesthetic perception are trained, evidence that the aesthetic education the thesis requires is a practiced art with a literature of its own, rather than a pious wish [13, 17, 38, 55].

12.7 How it is cultivated: the mutual aesthetic education of two

The theories describe the cultivation of a person; this paper’s concern is the cultivation of a “we,” and the distinctive claim of this subsection is that between two people aesthetic education is *mutual*, that each is the other’s teacher, and the relation itself a school. This is not a metaphor. The capacities at issue, the perception of contingent beauty, the receptivity of *xing*, the judgement of the enactively fitting, are cultivated, between two people, largely *by each other*, in three concrete ways.

The first is the pedagogy of *look*. When one partner catches a contingent beauty and turns it toward the other, *look*, they do not merely share a moment; they *teach a way of seeing*.

The turning-toward is a demonstration: it shows the other what is worth catching, trains the other's eye toward the kind of thing one has learned to see, awakens in the other a *xing* they might not have had. Over time, two people who habitually turn contingent beauties toward each other educate each other's perception, each becoming more able to catch what the other catches, until they come to share a trained sensibility, a common eye for the beautiful, built up from a thousand acts of mutual showing. The relation becomes a school of perception in which each is continually teaching the other to see, and the curriculum is the contingent beauty of the shared world.

The second is the pedagogy of shared retelling, which is also the reproduction of experience (§4.2) seen from the side of aesthetic education. To retell a shared journey, to return together to the beauty once caught, is to re-cultivate the perception of it, to deepen, in the retelling, the capacity to perceive what the experience held, and to refine together the sensibility that first caught it. Shared retelling is mutual aesthetic education exercised upon the past: the joint re-perceiving of what was lived, by which the two refine together their common capacity to perceive. This connects the paper's political economy to its aesthetics: the reproduction of experience is, at the same time, the mutual cultivation of the sensibility that perceives experience, so that the labour that conserves the relation's wealth is the same labour that educates its perception.

The third is the pedagogy of enacted beauty: each partner teaches the other the enactively fitting by enacting it. When one meets the other's vulnerability with exactly the right measure, responds to their distress with exactly the fitting grace, the other learns, not by precept but by undergoing, what the fitting response is, and is formed toward the capacity to give it in turn. To be treated beautifully is to be educated in the enactment of beauty; the well-met partner learns, from being well met, how to meet. The relation is thus a reciprocal school of enactive beauty, each forming the other's capacity for the fitting response by the gift of fitting responses received. And this is the deepest sense in which the relation is the mutual cultivation of the good: by treating each other beautifully, two people educate each other in the enactment of the good, so that the relation becomes, over a lifetime, a mutual aesthetic education in the most consequential of all the arts, the art of meeting another person fittingly, which is the same, by the argument of this section, as the art of treating them well.

12.8 χαλεπὰ τὰ καλὰ: that the beautiful is difficult

It remains to name the difficulty on which the whole edifice rests, and it is fitting to name it with the oldest words for it. In Plato's *Hippias Major*, Socrates and the sophist Hippias attempt to say what the beautiful is, and fail; Hippias, who can speak fluently and at length on every other subject, is reduced, on this one, to a succession of definitions that Socrates dismantles one by one, until the dialogue ends not in an answer but in the proverb Socrates offers in place of one: χαλεπὰ τὰ καλὰ, beautiful things are difficult [46]. It is a remarkable ending. The man who could define anything could not define the beautiful; the dialogue that sought the essence of beauty found only its difficulty. And the difficulty is not accidental but essential: the beautiful resists definition because it is not the kind of thing a definition can

capture, not a property specifiable by a rule, but exactly the un-ruled fittingness that the whole of this section has been concerned with. *χαλεπὰ τὰ καλὰ* is the most ancient name for the un-programmability of the beautiful, and by the thesis of this section, of the good.

This difficulty is its confirmation rather than a defect of the account, and it explains the section's central claim about education. Because the beautiful cannot be reduced to a rule, it cannot be *taught*, not in the sense in which a rule is taught, by transmission of a content to be applied. It can only be *cultivated*, developed, in oneself and in another, through long exposure, practice, attention, and the slow refinement of a perception, the way taste is cultivated rather than taught, the way an eye is trained rather than instructed. This is exactly why the cultivation of the good must be an aesthetic *education* in the deep sense and not a moral *instruction*: because the good, like the beautiful and for the same reason, cannot be transmitted as a rule but can only be cultivated as a sensibility. And it is why the cultivation is so difficult, so slow, so resistant to method, so dependent on the long mutual schooling of two people who teach each other to see and to meet over a whole shared life. *χαλεπὰ τὰ καλὰ*: the beautiful is difficult, the good is difficult, and they are difficult in the same way and for the same reason, because neither is a rule to be followed but a fitting to be perceived, and the perception of the fitting is the most difficult and the most uninstructable of all the human capacities, the one that can only be grown. That it is difficult is not a reason to doubt that it is the heart of the matter; it is the sign that one has reached the heart of the matter, the place where Socrates himself was reduced to a proverb, and where this paper, having followed the good to its root in the beautiful, can do no more than name the difficulty and turn to the cultivation that is the only response to it.

13. The Continuity of Ethics and Aesthetics: A History of the Debate

The third thesis, that ethical judgement, at its limit, is aesthetic, was advanced in the previous section as though it were a bold novelty to be defended against objections. It is not a novelty. It is the latest entry in one of the longest and most consequential debates in the history of philosophy: the debate over whether ethics and aesthetics are continuous or discontinuous, whether the good and the beautiful are at bottom one or are irreducibly distinct. This section sets the thesis in that debate, and the placement is not a scholarly formality but a strengthening: a thesis that stands within a long lineage of serious thought, and that can locate itself precisely against the strongest statements of the opposing view, is a different and sturdier thing than a bold claim defended in isolation. The section surveys the affirmative lineage, the tradition that has held the good and the beautiful to be continuous, then confronts the debate's most powerful negative pole, Kierkegaard's insistence on their rupture, which is the true strongest opponent of the paper's thesis and which the previous section's objections did not yet face. It closes by locating Thesis Three within the debate and stating how it answers the rupture.

13.1 The affirmative lineage: the good and the beautiful as one

The thought that the good and the beautiful are continuous, that to be good is, at the deepest level, to be beautiful in one's being and one's action, and that the perception of the good is akin to the perception of the beautiful, is ancient and recurrent, and it forms a lineage the paper's thesis joins. The lineage is surveyed in Table 5; its principal moments deserve discussion.

The Greek root is the word itself: *kalokagathia* (*kalos kai agathos*), the ideal of the beautiful-and-good as a single excellence, the noble person whose goodness and beauty are one, which expressed in a single hyphenated virtue the Greek sense that the admirable in conduct and the beautiful in form were aspects of one human excellence rather than separate achievements. Plato gave this metaphysical depth: in the ascent of the *Symposium*, the lover rises toward a Beauty that is also the Good, the two Forms allied at the summit, so that the love of beauty rightly pursued becomes the love of the good, and the perception of beauty is the beginning of the soul's turn toward the good. The proximity of *kalon* and *agathon* in Plato is the metaphysical charter of the affirmative lineage: beauty and goodness ascend together, and at the height they are scarcely to be distinguished.

The British moral-sense tradition gave the continuity an epistemological form. Shaftesbury, its founder, held that we perceive moral good and evil by a *moral sense* that is explicitly modelled on, and continuous with, the sense of beauty: just as we perceive the harmony and proportion of a beautiful form by an immediate sense rather than by reasoning, so we perceive the harmony and proportion of a virtuous character by an analogous immediate sense, and virtue is, on this view, a kind of beauty, the beauty of a well-proportioned soul, perceived by a taste for the moral as the connoisseur perceives the beauty of a work by a taste for the beautiful [54]. For Shaftesbury the good and the beautiful are perceived by the same kind of faculty, a sense or taste, and moral excellence simply *is* a species of beauty, the beauty of character. This is the affirmative thesis in its clearest early-modern form, and it is the direct ancestor of the paper's claim that the perception of the good is structurally aesthetic.

Schiller carried the continuity to its highest point in the concept of the *beautiful soul* (*die schöne Seele*). For Schiller, the merely dutiful person, who does the right thing against inclination by force of moral will, has not yet achieved the highest moral condition; that condition is reached only when duty and inclination are reconciled, when one does the good *gladly*, when virtue has become a second nature so thoroughly that the right action flows from the whole person without inner conflict, and this reconciled condition, in which morality has become grace, Schiller called the beautiful soul [52, 53]. The beautiful soul does not struggle to be good against itself; it is good as a beautiful thing is beautiful, effortlessly, gracefully, as an expression of its whole reconciled nature. Here the continuity of ethics and aesthetics reaches its summit: moral perfection is figured as beauty, the perfected character as a beautiful soul, the highest good as the achievement of moral grace. The paper's purity argument (§12.3) is a near descendant of Schiller's beautiful soul: the freely-perceived fitting response, issuing from the whole person rather than from the operation of an installed rule, is the action of a beautiful soul, and its superiority to the merely dutiful is Schiller's superiority of grace to struggle.

The twentieth century gave the continuity its most compressed statement and several of its most careful defences. Wittgenstein, in the *Tractatus*, wrote the lapidary sentence that stands almost as the paper's motto: *Ethik und Ästhetik sind Eins*, ethics and aesthetics are one [67]. The remark is enigmatic and the *Tractatus* does not unfold it, but in its context, among the propositions on the mystical, on the inexpressible, on what shows itself but cannot be said, it locates ethics and aesthetics together as concerned with the same thing: not facts within the world but the meaning or value of the world as a whole, the dimension that cannot be stated in propositions but shows itself, and that ethics (the value of action) and aesthetics (the value of the beautiful) approach as one. Later in the century, and in a quite different key, Iris Murdoch made attention the centre of the moral life and made attention aesthetic in structure: the moral task is to see truly, to attend to reality justly and lovingly, to overcome the self's distorting fantasy and perceive the other as they are, and this just and loving attention is the very attention the perception of beauty requires, so that the experience of beauty, which decentres the self and fixes it on something other, is a training-ground for the unselfing that moral attention demands [39]. Martha Nussbaum argued that literature is itself a form of moral philosophy, that the fine-grained perception of particulars which the novel cultivates is exactly the perception that practical wisdom requires, and that the moral life depends on a capacity for perception, the seeing of the morally salient features of a concrete situation, that is cultivated by art and is irreducible to the application of principles [42]. And Bernard Williams, with the broader anti-theory current, mounted a sustained attack on the pretension of ethical theory to reduce the moral life to a system of principles, insisting on the ineliminable role of judgement, character, and the perception of the particular, a critique that, while not itself a continuity thesis, clears the ground for one by denying that ethics is the application of a code and affirming that it rests on capacities of perception and judgement that the code cannot replace [66]. The affirmative lineage thus runs unbroken from *kalokagathia* to the contemporary priority of perception over principle, and the paper's Thesis Three is its inheritor.

13.2 The temptation and the danger: Nietzsche

Before the strongest opponent, a figure must be named who is neither simply for nor against the continuity but who marks both its temptation and its danger: Nietzsche. For Nietzsche gave the continuity of ethics and aesthetics its most intoxicating and most perilous formulation: that existence is justified only as an *aesthetic* phenomenon, that the value of life is finally aesthetic rather than moral, that the moral interpretation of existence is to be overcome and replaced by an aesthetic one in which life is affirmed as one affirms a work of art, beyond good and evil [40]. This is the continuity thesis pushed past the point the paper will follow it: not the claim that ethical judgement is aesthetic in structure, but the claim that the ethical is to be *replaced* by the aesthetic, that morality is a falsification to be overcome in favour of the aesthetic justification of life. Nietzsche is the temptation of the extreme form of Thesis Three (§12.3) made into a philosophy: the abolition of the ethical into the aesthetic, the aesthetic justification of existence that leaves good and evil behind.

And he is, in the same gesture, its danger. For the aesthetic justification of existence, unmoored

Source	Form of the continuity	Bearing on Thesis Three
Greek <i>kalokagathia</i>	The beautiful-and-good as one human excellence	The ideal in which goodness and beauty are aspects of one excellence.
Plato	<i>Kalon</i> and <i>agathon</i> allied at the summit of the ascent	Beauty and goodness ascend together; perceiving beauty begins the turn to the good.
Shaftesbury [54]	The moral sense modelled on the sense of beauty	Virtue is a species of beauty, perceived by a taste; direct ancestor of the thesis.
Schiller [53]	The beautiful soul: virtue become grace	Moral perfection as beauty; the purity argument's near ancestor.
Wittgenstein [67]	"Ethics and aesthetics are one" (<i>Tractatus</i> 6.421)	Both concern the value of the world that shows but cannot be said.
Murdoch [39]	Attention: the just and loving gaze, aesthetic in structure	Moral seeing is aesthetic seeing; beauty trains moral attention.
Nussbaum [42]	Literature as moral philosophy; perception over principle	Practical wisdom is fine-grained perception, cultivated by art.
Williams [66]	Anti-theory: judgement and character over system	Clears the ground: ethics is not the application of a code.

Table 5: The affirmative lineage holding ethics and aesthetics continuous. Thesis Three is the latest entry in this tradition.

from any ethical constraint, is precisely the thought that the previous section identified as the precipice, the licence for the beautiful-but-monstrous, the aestheticisation that can find existence "justified" as a spectacle regardless of its cruelty (§12.4). Nietzsche marks the point at which the continuity thesis, pushed to the replacement of ethics by aesthetics, becomes dangerous; and his presence in the debate is the standing reminder of why the paper holds Thesis Three in its guarded form and entertains the extreme form only as a temptation. The paper inherits the affirmative lineage's claim that ethics and aesthetics are *continuous*, that ethical judgement is aesthetic in structure, but it refuses Nietzsche's further claim that ethics is therefore to be *replaced* by aesthetics, that the good is to be abolished into the beautiful. Continuity is not replacement. That ethical judgement is aesthetic in structure does not entail that anything aesthetically affirmable is thereby good; it entails that the perception of the good has the structure of aesthetic perception, which is a claim about the faculty, not a licence to abolish the distinction between good and evil into a matter of taste. Nietzsche is the figure who shows what it would mean to cross that line, and why the paper does not cross it.

13.3 The strongest opponent: Kierkegaard's rupture

The affirmative lineage has a great opponent, and the paper's thesis must face it at full strength, for it is the most powerful statement of the discontinuity of ethics and aesthetics ever made, and it comes from a thinker who understood the aesthetic life from within better than its celebrants. Kierkegaard's *Either/Or* is built upon the thesis that the aesthetic and the ethical are *discontinuous* rather than continuous, separated by a qualitative leap, related not as lower and higher on one scale but as two mutually exclusive modes of existence between which one must *choose* [26]. The very title states it: *either* the aesthetic *or* the ethical, not both, not a continuity from one to the other, but an exclusive disjunction demanding a decision. This is the antithesis of everything the affirmative lineage holds, and it is argued by a man who gave the aesthetic life its most seductive and most searching portrayal.

The first volume of *Either/Or* presents the aesthetic life from the inside: the life organised around the immediate, the interesting, the pleasurable, the beautiful, the life of the aesthete who lives for the cultivation of mood and the avoidance of boredom, who treats existence as material for interesting experience, who is exquisitely sensitive to beauty and incapable of commitment. Kierkegaard portrays this life with such power because he knew it; and his critique is the more devastating for its sympathy. The aesthetic life, he shows, however refined, is finally *despair*, a despair often unconscious of itself, but despair nonetheless, because the aesthetic existence has no continuity, no self that persists through time, no commitment that binds the moments into a life. The aesthete, living for the interesting moment, is dispersed among moments; he has no self, only a succession of moods and experiences, and beneath his cultivation lies an emptiness, a melancholy, a despair that the relentless pursuit of the interesting is designed not to cure but to outrun. The aesthetic life consumes the world, including other people, as material for its own experience; it cannot love, because love requires a commitment the aesthete cannot make; it cannot become a self, because selfhood requires the continuity the aesthetic existence lacks.

The ethical, in the second volume, is the leap out of this despair, and crucially, it is a *leap*, not a continuous development. One does not refine the aesthetic life until it becomes ethical; one chooses, by a qualitative decision, to exist ethically rather than aesthetically, and the choice is a discontinuity, a break, a conversion from one mode of existence to another. The ethical life is the life of commitment, continuity, the self that binds itself through time by its choices, marriage rather than seduction, the keeping of vows rather than the cultivation of moods, the becoming of a self through commitment rather than the dispersal of the self among experiences. And the ethical is reached not by perfecting the aesthetic but by *renouncing* it, by the either/or in which one chooses the ethical against the aesthetic. This is the rupture: the aesthetic and the ethical are not one, not continuous, not aspects of a single excellence; they are opposed modes of existence, and the moral life begins precisely where the aesthetic life is renounced. Against *kalokagathia*, against the beautiful soul, against "ethics and aesthetics are one," Kierkegaard sets the either/or: ethics and aesthetics are two, and you must choose.

This is the strongest opponent, and its strength must be granted fully. Kierkegaard is not

denying that the aesthetic has value; he is denying that ethical existence is continuous with it, insisting that the move from the aesthetic to the ethical is a break rather than a development, and grounding this on a profound analysis of the aesthetic life's incapacity for commitment, continuity, and genuine love. If he is right, the paper's Thesis Three is not merely overstated but fundamentally mistaken: ethical judgement would not be aesthetic at its limit but precisely what one reaches by *leaving* the aesthetic behind, and to ground the good in aesthetic perception would be to remain in the aesthetic despair the ethical must renounce. The objection is grave, and it cannot be met by the replies the previous section gave to Kant and to the fascist spectre, for it operates at a deeper level: it concerns not whether aesthetic judgement can ground the good, but whether the aesthetic mode of existence is not precisely what the ethical must break with.

13.4 The reply: the consumptive aesthetic and the enactive aesthetic

The reply to Kierkegaard is the hinge on which the paper's whole aesthetics turns, and it is made not by denying his analysis but by drawing a distinction within the aesthetic that his account, for all its power, does not draw. Kierkegaard's aesthete is a particular figure: the consumer of experience, the one who lives for the interesting moment, who treats the world and others as material for his own moods, who cannot commit because commitment would end the pursuit of the next interesting thing. The aesthetic life Kierkegaard anatomises and condemns is the *consumptive* aesthetic: the aesthetic as the consumption of experience for the self's own sake, the aesthetic in the register the paper has called, in Lacanian terms, the Imaginary, the captivation, the pleasurable investment, the absorption of the world as material for the self's experience. And Kierkegaard is entirely right about this aesthetic: it is despair, it cannot love, it cannot found a self, and the ethical must indeed break with it. The consumptive aesthetic and the ethical *are* discontinuous; on this Kierkegaard and the paper agree completely.

But the consumptive aesthetic is not the whole of the aesthetic, and the distinction the paper drew between receptive and enactive beauty (§12.2) is precisely the distinction Kierkegaard's account omits. Kierkegaard's aesthete lives in receptive beauty turned consumptive, beauty received as experience to be consumed for the self. But there is the *enactive* aesthetic: beauty not consumed but *done*, the beauty of the fitting response, the grace of the well-met moment, the beauty enacted in how one treats another. And the enactive aesthetic is not consumptive at all; it is the very opposite of the aesthete's consumption of the world. To respond to the beloved's vulnerability with exactly the fitting grace is to give oneself rightly to another rather than to consume an experience for oneself; it is an act of commitment, of attention to the other, of the very love the consumptive aesthete cannot manage. The enactive aesthetic is committed, continuous, other-directed, everything the consumptive aesthetic is not, and everything Kierkegaard rightly demanded of the ethical. Indeed, the enactive aesthetic is exactly the beautiful soul of Schiller: the person whose ethical commitment has become grace, whose right action flows beautifully from a reconciled character, whose goodness is enacted as beauty. The enactive aesthetic is not the despair the ethical must renounce; it is the ethical itself, perceived in its beauty.

So the reply to Kierkegaard is this. What ruptures with the ethical is the *consumptive* aesthetic, the Imaginary captivation, the consumption of experience, the aesthete's dispersal among moods, and on this rupture the paper agrees: Thesis Three does not ground the good in the consumptive aesthetic, and would join Kierkegaard in renouncing it. What is *continuous* with the ethical, what is, indeed, the ethical at its highest, is the *enactive* aesthetic: the beauty of the fitting, committed, other-directed response, the grace of the beautiful soul, the perception of what is fitting in the concrete case that is at once aesthetic and ethical. Kierkegaard's either/or is real, but it falls *within* the aesthetic, between its consumptive and enactive forms, not between the aesthetic as such and the ethical. The choice he rightly demands, between the dispersed consumption of experience and the committed becoming of a self, is the choice between the consumptive and the enactive aesthetic, and the enactive side of that choice is continuous with, is indeed identical to, the ethical life he championed. Thesis Three is thus not refuted by Kierkegaard but refined by him: it must specify that the aesthetic with which the ethical is continuous is the enactive and not the consumptive, the giving and not the consuming, the beauty done and not the beauty merely fed upon. With that specification, which the paper's prior distinction already supplied, the rupture Kierkegaard insisted upon is preserved exactly where it belongs, between two aesthetics, and the continuity the affirmative lineage insisted upon is preserved exactly where it belongs, between the enactive aesthetic and the good. The strongest opponent, fully granted, turns out to deepen rather than defeat the thesis, by forcing the distinction that locates the continuity precisely.

13.5 The location of Thesis Three in the debate

Thesis Three can now be located exactly in the debate it joins. It stands within the affirmative lineage, with *kalokagathia*, Shaftesbury's moral sense, Schiller's beautiful soul, Wittgenstein's "ethics and aesthetics are one," Murdoch's attention, Nussbaum's perception, in holding that ethical judgement is continuous with aesthetic judgement, that the perception of the good is structurally the perception of the fitting, that the good is enacted as beauty. It refuses, with the paper's guarding, Nietzsche's further step from continuity to replacement, holding that the structural continuity of ethical and aesthetic judgement does not license the abolition of the ethical into the aesthetic. And it answers the strongest opponent, Kierkegaard, not by denying his rupture but by relocating it: the rupture is real, but it falls between the consumptive and the enactive aesthetic, so that the consumptive aesthetic is indeed discontinuous with the ethical (as Kierkegaard held) while the enactive aesthetic is continuous with it (as the affirmative lineage held). The paper's contribution to this ancient debate is precisely this relocation: the recognition that the dispute between the continuity theorists and Kierkegaard is resolved by distinguishing two aesthetics, and that once they are distinguished, both sides are seen to be right about different things, Kierkegaard about the consumptive aesthetic, the affirmative lineage about the enactive.

This is why the paper can hold Thesis Three in its guarded form with confidence while entertaining the extreme form only as a temptation. The guarded form, that ethical judgement at its limit operates aesthetically, that the cultivation of the good is the cultivation of aesthetic

judgement in its enactive form, is the affirmative lineage's thesis, refined by Kierkegaard's distinction and defended against Kant's and Benjamin's objections. The extreme form, that all ethics is aesthetics, that the good is simply the beautiful, is Nietzsche's step, the abolition of the distinction, and it is too dangerous to assert because, unguarded, it cannot keep the consumptive aesthetic from passing as the good, cannot keep the beautiful spectacle from licensing the monstrous deed. The whole weight of the paper's aesthetics rests on the distinction between the two aesthetics, receptive and enactive, consumptive and giving, and on the location of the continuity of ethics and beauty in the enactive alone. *χαλεπὰ τὰ καλὰ*: the beautiful is difficult, and its difficulty here is the difficulty of holding the continuity precisely where it belongs and the rupture precisely where it belongs, against both the temptation to collapse them entirely and the temptation to rupture them entirely. The good is the beautiful enacted; but only the beautiful enacted, and not the beautiful consumed, is the good, and the whole of the paper's ethics of intimacy, of travel, of the fitting response and the shared aesthetic accord, lives in that distinction.

14. The Political Economy of Beauty: The Contested Remainder

The aesthetic perception of contingency and the spaciousness it requires have been presented, so far, as goods of the intimate relation, private capacities for a private flourishing. This section shows that they are nothing so contained. The capacity to perceive the beautiful, and the emptiness that perception requires, have a political-economic weight: they are forces in the world of capital, sought and fought over, and the contest over them is one of the quiet fronts of the struggle between the administered world and what resists it. The argument proceeds through a concrete case, the costly emptiness of a luxury department store, read first as the capture of the aesthetic by capital, then as the site of a remainder capital cannot seize, and finally as one point on a spectrum of such contests. The section closes by drawing from the case an emancipatory thesis: that the cultivation of aesthetic perception is a micro-politics of de-alienation, the building of a capacity that capital may use but cannot confiscate.

14.1 The costly emptiness of Ginza Six

Consider a fact that ought, on a narrowly economic logic, to be impossible. Ginza Six is among the most expensive retail real estate in Tokyo, and Tokyo's is among the most expensive in the world; every square metre of its floor space commands a rent that makes its use a matter of the most careful calculation. And yet, on its sixth floor, in the heart of this most costly of spaces, Ginza Six gives over a large expanse to emptiness: a broad, open, uncrowded hall in which, periodically renewed, stands a major work of contemporary art, a vast installation, a hanging sculpture, a piece by an artist of the first rank, and the space is free, open to anyone, selling nothing. On the logic of maximal rent-extraction this is madness; the same floor area, partitioned into boutiques, would yield a fortune in rent that the empty hall forgoes. The store deliberately, expensively, leaves a great space empty and fills it with free beauty. The fact is not unique to Ginza Six, the costly atrium, the foundation gallery, the corporate plaza given to public art, are familiar features of the high-capital landscape, but Ginza Six states it with

peculiar clarity, because the contrast between the price of the space and the gratuity of its use is so stark. Why does capital, which wastes nothing, pay so dearly for emptiness and beauty?

14.2 The first reading: capital's capture of the aesthetic

The first answer is that this is the most refined calculation rather than madness, and that the apparent gift is in truth the most sophisticated form of extraction. The empty hall and its free beauty are an instrument of it rather than a forgoing of profit, working by a logic more advanced than the rent it appears to waste. The beauty draws people in, it is a lure, an attraction that brings footfall the boutiques alone could not. It lengthens their stay, and lengthened stay is increased spending. It confers upon the whole establishment an aura of culture, refinement, and generosity that raises the brand and justifies the prices throughout. And in the age of the photograph, it manufactures spectacle: the free artwork is endlessly photographed and circulated, a vast unpaid advertisement performed by the visitors themselves, the empty hall converted into the most efficient marketing the money could buy. On this reading the emptiness is the most expensive advertising space in the building, and the free beauty is bait; the gift is a transaction in which the visitor, drawn by beauty and moved to share it, performs unpaid promotional labour and is induced to spend. This is the culture industry in its perfected form, the moment Adorno foresaw when the aesthetic, which ought to resist instrumental reason, is itself wholly instrumentalised, when even beauty, even the contemplative emptiness that seems the very opposite of commerce, is captured and made to serve the logic of the market [1, 10]. The spectacle, in Debord's sense, has annexed the aesthetic; the beholding of beauty has become a moment in the circulation of capital. On this reading the paper's own prized capacities are revealed as already colonised: the aesthetic perception of contingency, the love of spacious beauty, are exactly the susceptibilities that capital has learned to farm.

14.3 The second reading: the irreducible remainder

The first reading is true, and it is not the whole truth, and the dialectical task is to see what it leaves out without denying what it captures. For consider what actually happens to a particular person who, coming to the store for some errand of consumption, rounds a corner on the sixth floor and is met, unexpectedly, by the great open space and the work of art standing in it. Something happens in them. They stop; they are, for a moment, taken, the purposive errand suspended, the gaze caught, a small genuine experience of beauty undergone. And this experience is *real*, whatever the motive of the space that occasioned it. The store's calculation does not reach into the experience and hollow it; the person is genuinely stopped, genuinely moved, genuinely, for that moment, released from the purposive consumption that brought them, into the disinterested beholding of something beautiful for its own sake. Here is the remainder the first reading cannot capture: the aesthetic experience, once it occurs, has a reality and a value that exceed and escape the instrumental frame that produced it. This remainder is, in the precise vocabulary of the philosophy of beauty developed earlier (§9.2), the moment of the *real* in the aesthetic experience, the kernel that resists symbolisation, and therefore resists the symbolic capture by which capital would convert the experience wholly into

a commodity. Capital built the container for its own ends; but what happens in the container, in the person who is genuinely stopped by genuine beauty, is not exhausted by those ends, and cannot be, because the experience of beauty is a genuine suspension of the purposive, and a genuine suspension of the purposive is precisely what serves no purpose, what stands outside the means-end logic even when that logic arranged for it to occur.

This is the deep point, and it is the paper's whole argument returning in the register of political economy. The aesthetic experience is, by its nature, the beholding of something for its own sake rather than for its use; it is the moment in which the purposive is suspended and something is met as gratuitously there. Such a moment cannot be fully instrumentalised *from within*, because the moment it is genuinely undergone it is, by its very structure, a stepping-outside of instrumentality, a small piece of non-alienated experience occurring in the very heart of the apparatus of alienation. Capital can build the container, can arrange the occasion, can profit from the footfall and the photographs; but it cannot make the person's actual experience of the beauty be itself an instrumental experience, for then it would not be an experience of beauty at all but merely another transaction, and the lure would fail. Capital needs the experience to be genuine in order to profit from it, a fake beauty would draw no one, and the genuineness it needs is exactly the remainder that escapes it. The store requires that the visitor really be stopped, really be moved; and in really being stopped and moved, the visitor has a moment of genuine non-instrumental experience that the store's instrumentality cannot reach into and convert. The remainder is structural, not accidental: capital's capture of the aesthetic depends on leaving intact precisely the non-instrumental core that defeats capture.

14.4 The dialectic: beauty as a contested field

The two readings do not cancel; they compose a dialectic, and the dialectic is the truth of the matter. Beauty, in the world of capital, is neither simply liberating nor simply captured; it is a *contested field*, a site of struggle in which capture and remainder are locked together, each requiring and resisting the other. The first reading establishes that the aesthetic is real political-economic force, that beauty and spacious emptiness do genuine economic work, draw real footfall, command real rent, justify real premiums; capital's willingness to pay dearly for them is the hardest possible proof that they are powers in the world rather than private trivialities. The second reading establishes that this force, even as capital wields it, carries a remainder capital cannot confiscate, a non-instrumental core that, being the very thing that gives beauty its drawing power, cannot be converted into pure instrument without destroying the power it was meant to serve. Beauty is thus simultaneously the most capturable and the least confiscatable of goods: capturable because its force is real and capital can harness it, unconfiscatable because the force depends on a non-instrumental core that resists conversion. The contest between these is permanent and unresolvable, and it is fought, micro-cosmically, in every person who is genuinely stopped by beauty in a space designed to profit from their being stopped.

This connects the case directly to the dialectic of controlled contingency (§7.4). Ginza Six is a *container built by capital*: its boundary is rigidly controlled for commercial ends, the space

is a retail environment, arranged to sell, while its interior, the actual aesthetic experience it occasions, remains genuinely open, uncontrolled, the visitor's own. The structure is exactly that of the field: a controlled boundary enclosing an open interior. What the case adds is that the boundary's control and the interior's openness can serve *different masters*, the boundary serving capital's commercial purpose, the interior serving the visitor's non-instrumental experience, and that this divergence is the very form of the contest. Capital controls the container; the remainder lives in the contents; and the political economy of beauty is the struggle over a field whose boundary one party holds and whose interior escapes them.

14.5 无之以以为用: emptiness confirmed by capital

There is a further and deeper point in the case, and it concerns emptiness specifically. What Ginza Six pays for, most strikingly, is *emptiness* rather than only beauty, the open, uncrowded, spacious hall, the deliberate non-filling of the most fillable space. And in paying so dearly for emptiness, capital confirms, against its own filling logic, the ancient thesis of the eleventh chapter: that the use of the vessel is in its emptiness, that what is not there gives use [29]. The most calculating filler of space, the logic that would partition every square metre into rentable use, is driven, by the discovery that emptiness draws, that spaciousness has a power density of filling lacks, to leave a great space empty, and thereby to confirm 无之以以为用 in the one register that cannot be accused of mysticism: the register of rent. Capital has discovered, and paid to confirm, that emptiness is of use. The Daoist metaphysics of the void, which the paper has carried throughout as the deepest ground of the field, receives here its most unlikely and most decisive proof: that even the logic of maximal filling is forced, by the nature of value, to acknowledge that the empty is of use, and to pay the highest price for it.

But the same case shows that emptiness, too, is contested. The spaciousness capital pays for is spaciousness instrumentalised, emptiness deployed as a lure, the void made to work for the filling it appears to refuse. The atmospheric emptiness of the luxury hall is not the same as the spaciousness of the field, even though it borrows its form; it is emptiness in the service of consumption, the void as ambience, designed to dispose the visitor to spend. And yet, the remainder again, the emptiness, even instrumentalised, still opens a real space in which a real suspension of the purposive can occur; capital's instrumental emptiness still, despite itself, affords moments of the genuine spaciousness it was built to exploit. Emptiness, like beauty, is a contested field: paid for by capital, deployed as ambience, and yet harbouring a remainder that escapes the deployment, a genuine openness within the instrumentalised one. The struggle over beauty is, at its root, a struggle over emptiness, over whether the space that is opened will be a space for genuine non-instrumental experience or merely an ambience engineered for consumption, and the two are perpetually entangled, the genuine void haunting the engineered one it is made to wear.

14.6 The spectrum of cases

Ginza Six is one point on a spectrum, and placing it among others clarifies what is and is not specific to it. Consider three cases, ordered by the degree to which the aesthetic is captured

by capital.

At one end stands the *unownable* aesthetic: the beauty of the mountain and the water, the landscape that the wayfaring tradition perceived (§11.4), the contingent beauty of the wildflower at the roadside. This beauty is, in its nature, resistant to capture, because it is not produced by capital, not enclosed, not sold; the mountain's beauty is free in a sense the gallery's is not, available to anyone with the trained perception to catch it, owned by no one and rentable by no one. Capital can sell access to the mountain, the ticket, the lodge, the guided tour, but it cannot own the beauty itself, which remains available to the unmonied wayfarer with the seeing eye, and which the poorest perceiver with the richest perception possesses more fully than the wealthiest tourist who photographs it without seeing. This is the aesthetic at its most unalienated: a beauty no one made and no one can confiscate, requiring for its enjoyment nothing but the cultivated perception this paper has described.

In the middle stands the *contested* aesthetic of Ginza Six: beauty produced and enclosed by capital, deployed for profit, and yet harbouring the irreducible remainder. Here the capture is real and the resistance is real, and the case is dialectical through and through, the gallery is neither the free mountain nor the pure trap, but the contested field in which both forces operate at once.

At the other end stands the *extracted* aesthetic, the case in which capture is most nearly complete: the photogenic site engineered for the image, the "Instagrammable" location whose entire reality is its capacity to generate shareable photographs, the destination that exists to be photographed and has no other being. Here the aesthetic has been most thoroughly instrumentalised: the place is beautiful to be *captured* rather than beautiful to be beheld, designed backward from the photograph, its every feature calculated for the image it will yield. And here the remainder is most nearly extinguished, not because the structure differs from the gallery's, but because the perception the place cultivates is the perception that does not behold but only captures, the gaze that does not undergo beauty but only records it for circulation. The extracted aesthetic is the triumph of dead material over living perception (§4.4): a place built for the photograph, undergone by no one, the beauty wholly converted into the image and the experience wholly evacuated. Yet even here the remainder is not quite zero, for a visitor with the cultivated perception might still, against the grain of the place's design, actually behold rather than capture, and have a genuine moment the engineered site did not intend. The spectrum has no endpoint of total capture, because the remainder, however reduced, is structural; but the extracted case shows how nearly it can be approached, and how the difference between the captured and the free turns, in the end, not on the place but on the perception brought to it.

14.7 How beauty creates a value cycle: the mechanism

The analysis so far has established that beauty is a real political-economic force, that it draws footfall, commands rent, justifies premiums, but it has treated this force statically, as a power beauty possesses, without showing the *mechanism* by which beauty exercises it: how, dynam-

ically, beauty creates and sustains a cycle of value. This mechanism must now be set out, for it is the link between the paper's phenomenology of aesthetic perception and its political economy, and it shows the political economy of beauty to be not a static fact but a dynamic cycle with the same structure as the relational reproduction the paper analysed at its centre.

The cycle has a definite point of ignition, and the point is the act of perception. Beauty is not a passive property awaiting valuation; it is an active power that *seizes perception*, stops the passer-by, catches the gaze, draws the subject out of the purposive errand that brought them into the non-purposive beholding of something for its own sake (§11.2, §11). This seizure is the ignition of the value cycle. Before it, the subject is a purposive agent moving through means toward ends; in it, the subject is arrested, captured, released for a moment into the aesthetic experience, and it is exactly this arrest, the conversion of a purposive passage into a non-purposive beholding, that beauty performs and that nothing else performs so well. The person stopped on the sixth floor of Ginza Six by the great space and the work standing in it (§14.5) is the value cycle igniting: a purposive consumer seized, against the grain of their errand, into a genuine aesthetic experience. Beauty makes the subject perceive; the making-perceive is the first moment of the cycle.

The second moment is the generation of value in the perception itself, and here the three-register analysis specifies what the value is (§9.3). The seized perception is a genuine experience, the Real surplus of the beautiful thing met, invested with Imaginary captivation, raised toward the Symbolic of the shareable, and this experience is itself a value: not yet an economic magnitude, but a lived good, the non-instrumental experience that the subject undergoes and that has worth in the undergoing. This is the value beauty generates at the source: the aesthetic experience as a lived good. And it is, crucially, a value with the double character the dialectic established (§14.4): it can be captured economically, converted into footfall, dwell-time, the premium the subject will pay to be where such experiences occur, and yet it carries the irreducible remainder, the non-instrumental core that the economic capture depends upon and cannot itself produce. The value beauty generates is at once capturable (it can be turned to economic account) and unconfiscatable (its economic capture requires the genuineness that escapes capture).

The third moment is the one that makes this a *cycle* rather than a single event: the reproduction of the value, by which the aesthetic experience generates further perception and so renews the source. The aesthetic experience, once undergone, is reproduced, recounted, returned to, shared, made into a reason to come back and a reason others come (§4). And this reproduction feeds the source: the recounted experience draws new perceivers, the return visit renews the experience, the shared beauty propagates the seizure of perception to others, so that the value generated at the source flows back to generate more perception, more experience, more value. This is the value cycle proper: beauty seizes perception, perception generates value, value is reproduced, and the reproduction renews and amplifies the seizure of perception, a self-sustaining circulation in which beauty, by being perceived and the perception reproduced, generates a flow of value that returns to its source and augments it. The political economy of beauty is this cycle: not a static force but a dynamic circulation, ignited by aesthetic perception

and sustained by its reproduction.

14.8 The good and the bad value cycle

That beauty creates a value cycle does not yet say whether the cycle is good or bad, and the distinction, which the paper has drawn for every other cycle it has analysed (§4.3, §10.3), applies here with full force and full discriminating power. The value cycle that beauty ignites can run as a good cycle, accumulating value and preserving the remainder, or as a bad cycle, extracting value and consuming the remainder until beauty itself is hollowed out.

The good value cycle is the one in which the reproduction of the aesthetic experience is *nourishing*, in which each turn of the cycle deepens the experience, enriches the perception, and conserves the non-instrumental remainder that is beauty's living core. Here beauty is perceived, the perception generates genuine experience, the experience is reproduced in ways that renew rather than exhaust it, and the cycle accumulates value while keeping beauty alive: the place returned to that grows richer with each visit, the beauty whose reproduction deepens it, the cultivated perception that finds more in it each time. The value accumulates, in the deepening of experience, in the reputation that draws others, in the relational wealth of those who share it, and the remainder is preserved, because the reproduction is the kind that nourishes rather than extracts. This is the good cycle in the register of the political economy of beauty: a circulation that returns more than it takes, the holonomy of value accumulating along the path of nourishing reproduction (§4.3), beauty growing rather than diminishing as it is perceived and reproduced.

The bad value cycle is the one in which the reproduction is *extractive*, in which each turn consumes the experience, depletes the perception, and hollows out the remainder until beauty is reduced to a spent commodity. Here beauty is perceived, but the perception is reproduced in ways that exhaust it: the experience consumed for its extractable value, the beauty photographed without being beheld, the place worn smooth by an extraction that takes the value and gives nothing back, until the remainder, the genuine non-instrumental core that drew perception in the first place, is consumed away, and beauty, hollowed, loses the very power by which it ignited the cycle. This is the Instagram extreme of the spectrum (§14.6): the beauty extracted so thoroughly that nothing is left to behold, the experience consumed until the place that drew millions for its beauty no longer holds any, the remainder spent, the cycle collapsing as the beauty it fed upon is exhausted. The bad value cycle is self-undermining, for it consumes its own source: extracting the remainder that was the condition of beauty's drawing-power, it kills the goose, and the cycle that hollowed out its beauty finds, at last, that it has nothing left to circulate. The decisive variable, here as everywhere in the paper, is the manner of its reproduction rather than beauty itself, nourishing or extractive, conserving the remainder or consuming it, and the same beauty that, well reproduced, founds a good cycle of accumulating value is, badly reproduced, fed into a bad cycle that consumes it to nothing.

14.9 The value cycle as relational production

The deepest truth about the value cycle of beauty is that it is, at its root, a cycle of *relational production*, and this returns the political economy of beauty to the paper's unified core (§8). For the value that beauty generates is not, fundamentally, a value residing in objects or accruing to capital; it is the value generated when a subject is drawn, through beauty, into a relation, with the beautiful thing, with the place, with those who behold it together, with the world the beauty opens, and undergoes, in that relation, the generation of a value that belongs to the relation. The aesthetic experience that ignites the cycle is the coming-to-presence of a relation between the perceiver and what is perceived; the value it generates is relational value; and the reproduction that sustains the cycle is the reproduction of that relation, the relational production analysed at the paper's centre (§6). Beauty creates a value cycle because beauty draws subjects into relations, and relations, reproduced, generate and circulate value: the value cycle of beauty is relational production seen in the register of political economy, the same bringing-forth of value by a relational subject that the paper has tracked under the names of creation, reproduction, and the good cycle, now seen as the engine that beauty ignites and sustains.

This is why the good value cycle and the bad correspond so exactly to the good and bad cycles of relational production (§6.3). The good value cycle nourishes the relation that beauty opens, preserves its generativity, conserves the remainder that is the relation's living core, it satisfies, in the economic register, the criteria of good relational production. The bad value cycle extracts from the relation beauty opens, consumes its generativity, hollows out the remainder, it is the bad relational production, the extractive cycle, in the economic register. And the remainder that capital cannot confiscate (§14.3) is, seen now, precisely the relational core of the aesthetic experience: the non-instrumental relation between perceiver and perceived that is the genuine source of beauty's value, which capital can build a container around and profit from but cannot itself produce, because it is generated only in the genuine relation that beauty opens and that no instrumental arrangement can manufacture. The political economy of beauty is, in its depths, the political economy of relational production: beauty creates value by drawing subjects into relations that generate value, and the cycle it ignites is good or bad according to whether that relational production is nourished or extracted, the same distinction, the same criteria, the same keystone, now seen to govern the circulation of value that beauty sets in motion.

14.10 The emancipatory upshot: aesthetic education as micro-politics

The spectrum yields the section's emancipatory thesis, and with it the political stakes of the whole aesthetic argument. What distinguishes the three cases, in the end, is less the place than the *perception* brought to it, for the cultivated perception can find the unalienated remainder even in the contested gallery and the extracted site, while the uncultivated perception misses the free beauty even of the mountain, photographing the landscape without ever beholding it. The decisive variable is the perception, and the perception is cultivable. This is where the paper's aesthetics becomes a politics. To cultivate the aesthetic perception of contingency, the capacity to behold rather than capture, to be genuinely stopped by genuine beauty, to undergo

the non-instrumental experience for its own sake, is to cultivate a capacity that capital can use but cannot confiscate: a capacity for non-alienated experience that, once possessed, can be exercised even within the apparatus of alienation, finding the remainder that escapes capture wherever beauty occurs, in the gallery built to profit from it and the site built to extract it and the mountain that no one built at all.

This is a *micro-politics of de-alienation*. Alienation, in the classical analysis, is the condition in which one's activity and experience are appropriated rather than one's own, instrumentalised, turned into means for ends not one's own [35]; and the administered world extends this condition across ever more of life, until even leisure, even beauty, even the contemplative suspension of purpose is captured and made to work. Against this, the cultivation of aesthetic perception builds a capacity for genuine non-instrumental experience that capital cannot fully appropriate, because its value lies precisely in the non-instrumentality that capture would destroy. Each genuine beholding of beauty, each real suspension of the purposive, is a small piece of de-alienated experience reclaimed, a moment in which one's experience is genuinely one's own, undergone for its own sake, escaping the means-end logic even when occurring in its midst. And this reclamation is available to anyone, requiring no wealth, no leisure, no apparatus, only the cultivated perception that this paper has argued can be developed, and developed, between two people, mutually, as the relation's own aesthetic education (§12.7). The politics of perception that Rancière named (§12.6) is here given its intimate and practical form: two people cultivating in each other the capacity to perceive the unalienated remainder, and so building between them a small commons of de-alienated experience that the administered world cannot enclose. The cultivation of beauty's perception is not a retreat from politics into private aesthetics; it is a micro-politics, the building of a capacity for freedom at the scale of a perception, exercised in the catching of a wildflower and the beholding of a remainder, available to all and confiscatable by none. *χαλεπὰ τὰ καλὰ*: the beautiful is difficult, and its difficulty is now seen to be also its political promise, for what cannot be reduced to a rule cannot be wholly captured by a system, and the un-programmable perception of the beautiful is, for that very reason, the seed of a freedom the administered world cannot finally administer.

15. The Generalized Field of Travel

The paper has spoken throughout of travel in its literal sense, the journey to an unfamiliar place. It is time to generalise. "Travel," it will be argued, names not essentially a movement through geographical space but a *function*: the construction of the special field, the opening of the spacious, contingent, suspended condition within which a relation comes to presence. The literal journey is the most efficient and powerful instance of this function, but it is an instance, not the essence; and once the function is distinguished from its most familiar instance, it becomes possible to perform it without the journey, to construct the field within the everyday, with neither distance nor expense. This generalisation is the practical culmination of the paper, and it is offered not as a conclusion that closes the argument but as an opening that hands it on. It is also the resolution of a worry that has shadowed the paper from the start: that its goods are the privileges of those who can afford to travel.

15.1 Travel as a functional concept

What, in the end, did the literal journey do? It opened the special field: it exchanged the fixed background, suspended the roles, restored contingency, framed a bounded continuous time, threw two people into symmetric unfamiliarity and forced co-presence, and beneath all these, opened the spaciousness in which a relation could come to presence. These are the functions; the journey is their vehicle. And once the functions are named in their own right, it becomes clear that they are not necessarily tied to geographical movement. The exchange of background, the suspension of roles, the restoration of contingency, the opening of spaciousness, each of these can, in principle, be effected without going anywhere, by other means than the journey. The journey effects them all at once, powerfully and reliably, which is its great advantage; but it holds no monopoly on them. To generalise travel is to recognise that “travel,” in the sense that has mattered to this paper, *is* the performance of these functions, the construction of the special field, and that the literal journey is one way, the most efficient way, but not the only way, of performing it.

This recognition reorganises the whole paper retrospectively. Every feature of the field analysed in §2 is, seen now, a function that can be sought in the everyday: one can exchange the background by altering the familiar setting; one can suspend roles by deliberately and jointly bracketing the everyday’s demands for a protected span; one can restore contingency by introducing the undetermined into the over-determined day; one can open spaciousness by refusing, for a while, the everyday’s total assignment of function. The generalised field of travel is the everyday deliberately opened into a field, the construction, without the journey, of the spacious contingent condition the journey opens with such ease. And the deepest of the functions, the one that underlies all the others and is the most portable of all, is the one the aesthetic chapters identified: the perception that catches the contingent and the spaciousness that lets it be caught. For if the contingent is always already leaking through the seams of the everyday (§11.1), then the field is, in a sense, always already half-open, awaiting only the perception that would catch what it offers. To generalise travel is, at its root, to carry the perception home.

15.2 From scaffolding to skill

The relation between the literal journey and the generalised field is the relation, introduced earlier, between scaffolding and skill (§11.3). The literal journey is a scaffolding: a powerful external structure, erected at some cost, that opens the field reliably and completely, holding it open by main force of distance, expense, and the wholesale suspension a journey effects. Its value is double. It opens the field, here and now, for the two who travel; and, the deeper value, it *teaches the field*, lets two people experience the special field vividly enough to learn what it is, to recognise its character, to know from the inside what it is to be in it and to catch and share within it. The journey is the demonstration class in which one learns, by undergoing it, what the field is and what one does within it.

But the mature form of the practice is not the perpetual erection of scaffoldings. To require a literal journey every time one wished to open the field would be to remain forever dependent

on an expensive external structure, and it is exactly this dependence that would make the paper's goods the privilege of the moneyed and the free. The mature form is the *skill* that the scaffolding taught: the internalised capacity to open the field, or to catch what the half-open everyday already offers, without the external structure. Once two people have learned the field, learned it, perhaps, through literal journeys that showed them what it is, they can begin to open it at home, in the ordinary day, by the cultivated capacities the journeys taught them: the perception that catches the contingent, the taste that constructs the frame, the restraint that keeps the vessel empty, the mutual attention that turns the caught beauty toward the other. The scaffolding comes down; the skill remains; and the skill opens, in the midst of the everyday, the field the scaffolding was erected to open. This is the movement the whole paper has been tending toward: from the journey that opens the field by force, to the skill that opens it anywhere; from travel as a thing one does occasionally and expensively, to travel as a capacity one carries always and exercises freely. The literal journey is the demonstration; the generalised field is the daily practice; and the bridge between them is the cultivation, through the one, of the skill that performs the other.

15.3 The de-alienation of the everyday, and the answer to elitism

This resolves the worry of elitism, and the resolution is also the paper's deepest political claim. The worry is obvious and serious: if the good this paper describes required literal travel, it would be the privilege of those with the money and the leisure to travel, and a philosophy of intimacy resting on it would be a philosophy for the comfortable, complicit in the very inequality the series has elsewhere opposed [63, 64]. The generalisation dissolves the worry. The generalised field does not require distance or expense; it requires the cultivated capacities, perception, taste, restraint, attention, which depend on no wealth and are, as the previous section argued, exactly the capacities that capital can use but cannot confiscate and that the poorest perceiver may possess more fully than the richest tourist (§14.6). The good of the field is therefore, in its generalised form, *universally available*: open to any two people willing to cultivate the perception and do the relational labour, regardless of their means. The literal journey is a privilege; the generalised field is not, and the movement from the one to the other is the movement from a good available to the few to a good available to all.

This is, in the terms the previous section established, the *de-alienation of the everyday*. The alienated everyday is the everyday wholly assigned to function, every hour given to labour or its reproduction, every space to use, the whole of life instrumentalised under the administered order, with no opening for the non-instrumental, the gratuitous, the spacious [10, 35]. To open a field within this everyday, to clear a protected span in which roles are suspended and the purposive lifted, to catch the contingent beauty leaking through the seams, to undergo a moment of genuine non-instrumental experience with the beloved, is to reclaim a piece of the everyday from its alienation, to make, within the administered order, a small space that is genuinely one's own. And because this reclamation requires no wealth, it is available where wealth is not: the de-alienation of the everyday is a freedom the poor can practice as fully as the rich, perhaps more fully, since the cultivated perception that is its only requirement

is no respecter of means. Here the paper's politics reaches its conclusion. The cultivation of the field's skill is the building, by two people, of a capacity to de-alienate their everyday, to open, within the administered world and without its permission, recurring small fields of genuine, spacious, non-instrumental, shared experience. This is not a retreat from the political into the domestic; it is a politics conducted at the scale of the everyday, the construction of a commons of de-alienated experience that the administered order cannot enclose because it requires nothing the order controls. The generalised field of travel is the everyday reclaimed, and the reclaiming is available to all.

15.4 Generative openness: a principle, and a limit

The generalisation of travel permits one further abstraction, which the paper states as a principle and then, characteristically, marks as opening beyond itself. Throughout, the condition underlying the field has been spaciousness (§2.8), the emptiness in the sense of the *Daodejing's* eleventh chapter, the room left unfilled in which the contingent can arrive and be caught. The generalisation now lets this be seen not as a feature peculiar to travel but as a general *resource*, the openness that any field requires if relational generativity is to occur within it, and the resource can be named: *generative openness*, the condition of not being so wholly filled by function that nothing unplanned can enter. A field, of whatever kind, is generative to the degree that it preserves this openness; and the principle may be stated generally: *a field is by preserving the openness in which unplanned, meaningful events may emerge* rather than made generative by adding activity to it,. The political economy of beauty already confirmed this from the side of value (§14.5): the costly emptiness that capital pays dearly to preserve is generative openness recognised, even by capital, as a resource rather than a waste.

Two qualifications keep the principle from being misunderstood, and the second of them marks the paper's limit. The first: generative openness is not emptiness as a style. It must not be confused with minimalism, or with an aesthetic of bareness, for the point is that room must be left for the unplanned rather than that less is better, and that room may be held open as well by a thing that invites lingering (a window, a bench, a painting, a piano, a table wide enough to gather around) as by literal vacancy. Generative openness is the condition of not being wholly closed by function, whatever holds that condition open; it is a structural property of a field, not a decorative quantity of empty space. The second qualification is the limit. The principle of generative openness plainly reaches beyond the intimate relation that is this paper's subject, it bears on the design of rooms and houses, of schools and libraries and cities, of institutions and their allocation of time and budget and attention, wherever the question arises whether a space or a structure preserves the openness in which generative events can occur or forecloses it by total functionalisation. But the full development of generative openness as a principle of design, spatial, temporal, institutional, is not the work of this paper, and would, if pursued here, carry the argument away from the relational field it is meant to illuminate into a general theory of generative design the paper cannot contain. The paper therefore states the principle, notes that the field of travel and the costly emptiness of the gallery and the unfilled room are instances of it, and marks its general development as a directed opening (§16.3), a principle

this paper discovers at the limit of its own subject and hands on to a theory of generative design it borders but does not enter. That generative openness is a real and general resource, the paper affirms; what a full theory of its cultivation across spaces, times, and institutions would be, it leaves, deliberately, to other work.

15.5 An opening, not a conclusion

It would be false to the matter to present the generalised field as a solution achieved, a technique mastered, a conclusion reached. The generalisation opens a practice; it does not complete one. To open a field within the everyday is difficult, and to do it repeatedly, sustainably, against the everyday's constant pressure to close back down, is more difficult still, a labour without end, a practice that must be perpetually renewed because the everyday perpetually re-alienates, the opened field perpetually re-closing into routine. The paper does not pretend to have mastered this practice or to be able to hand the reader a method for it; *χαλεπὰ τὰ καλὰ*, and the generalised field, being an aesthetic accomplishment, cannot be reduced to a method any more than the good or the beautiful can. What the paper offers is the recognition that the practice exists, that its direction is the movement from scaffolding to skill, and that its goal is the daily, mutual, un-programmable cultivation of the capacity to open fields of de-alienated shared experience in the midst of an everyday that is forever closing them. How to sustain this practice, how to keep the field open against the everyday's pressure, how not to let the skill decay back into the routine it was meant to interrupt, these are real and open questions, and the paper hands them on rather than answering them. The generalised field is not the paper's conclusion but its opening: the point at which the understanding it has built passes into a practice that exceeds it, and the reader is left not with a doctrine but with a direction and a difficulty. To which the only fitting response is the one the whole paper has been arguing for: not a method, but the cultivation, slow and mutual and lifelong, of the perception and the taste and the love that open the field, and the difficult, unending, beautiful labour of keeping it open, together.

16. The Closure of the Temporal Arch, and Directed Fissures

The paper closes by completing the figure with which its phenomenology began, the temporal arch of the journey, and then, in the manner this series has adopted for its mid-sequence papers, by opening rather than sealing: marking the places where the argument, pressed further, runs out of what this paper can say and points toward papers still to come. The field of travel is a source, not a terminus, and its closing is an opening.

16.1 The closure of the temporal arch

The phenomenology began with a temporal arch: co-creation before the journey, the lived field during it, and the reproduction in retelling after (§2.1, §4.2). The arch can now be seen whole, and seen to be a complete circuit of generation and reproduction. In co-creation, two people jointly intend a world that does not yet exist, beginning to build the “we” in imagination

before the journey opens. In the lived field, the world is entered and the “we” is generated vividly, brought to the self-presence of its own dynamics in the spacious, contingent, suspended condition the journey opens. In reproduction, the generated experience is carried across the threshold of return and woven, in shared retelling, into the relation’s lasting wealth, establishing the good cycle by which a single journey becomes an ever-deepening common possession. The three phases are not a sequence of separate episodes but the moments of one circuit: the co-created anticipation rehearses the field, the lived field generates the wealth, the reproduction conserves and augments it, and the conserved wealth becomes, in turn, part of what the next co-creation draws upon, so that the arch is a spiral rather than a line from beginning to end, each journey’s reproduced wealth feeding the imagination of the next. The “we” is forged across the whole arch and the whole spiral: not in the journey alone but in the imagining before, the living during, and the retelling after, and in the way each completed circuit enriches the ground from which the next begins. This is the complete shape of what a shared journey is, not an episode with a start and a finish, but a turn of a spiral by which two people, over a life of journeys imagined, lived, and retold, build and rebuild the “we” they are.

And the spiral does not, in the end, require the journeys to be literal. The generalisation of the previous section completes the figure: the same arch, anticipation, living, retelling, structures the generalised field as much as the literal one, and the spiral of generation and reproduction turns as truly in a life of small everyday fields, opened by skill and woven by retelling, as in a life of great journeys. The temporal arch is the shape of the field’s life, literal or generalised; and its closure here is the recognition that the field, in either form, is a circuit rather than a moment, not an event but a practice that spirals through a whole shared life.

16.2 A note on the paper’s length and difficulty

A word is owed about this paper itself, for it is among the longest and most difficult in the series, and the fact is a consequence of its subject rather than incidental. The paper set out to follow a shared journey through phenomenology, political economy, ethics, and aesthetics, and found, at its centre, that the deepest of these is the aesthetic, and that the aesthetic resists exactly the kind of completion a paper is supposed to achieve. This was a discovery about the object rather than a failure of organisation. The beautiful, as the whole of the paper’s aesthetics argued, does not lie wholly within the empirical, the demonstrable, the formalisable; it is not, like an object of natural science, governed by stutable laws that further inquiry converges upon, nor, like an object of engineering, reducible to a procedure that can be specified and completed. It has a remainder, the Real that resists symbolisation, the un-programmable fitting, the accord that must be struck afresh and tended in its evolution, that no system captures and no treatise closes. And a paper faithful to such an object must, in some measure, share its character: it cannot be cleanly completed, cannot be reduced to a system, cannot reach the kind of closure that a paper on a formalisable subject can reach, because its object does not permit it.

The length and the resistance to closure are therefore not defects to be apologised for but the form’s fidelity to its content. A short, systematic, cleanly concluded paper on the beautiful would, by its very neatness, have betrayed the difficulty it claimed to describe, would have

implied, against its own thesis, that the beautiful is after all a formalisable thing that a system can contain. That this paper is long, ramifying, and finally unconcludable, that it opens more than it closes, that its last word is a set of fissures rather than a conclusion, is the formal enactment of its central claim. *χαλεπὰ τὰ καλὰ*: the beautiful is difficult, and a true account of the beautiful must be difficult in the same way and for the same reason, must itself resist the completion its object resists. This is the series' long practice, that the form of a paper should enact its content; here the practice reaches the case where the content is the resistance of the beautiful to formal completion, and the form, accordingly, is a paper that cannot be completed, only opened. The difficulty of the paper is the difficulty of the beautiful, undergone in the writing as the beautiful is undergone in the perceiving, and the only honest response to it is the one the paper has counselled throughout: not a method that would dissolve the difficulty, but the patient, lifelong, mutual cultivation of a perception equal to it.

16.3 Directed fissures

In the manner of this series' mid-sequence papers, the close opens rather than concludes. Five fissures are marked, places where the argument, pressed past the edge of what this paper establishes, points toward a paper that might carry it further.

The first fissure is the *return and the everyday's re-closing*. The paper has argued that the generated field must be carried across the threshold of return (§4.5) and that the generalised field must be sustained against the everyday's pressure to re-close (§15.5). But how the field, once opened, is *kept* open in time, how the relation's good condition is sustained against the constant entropy of routine, what the temporal dynamics of opening and re-closing are, how attunement is maintained and re-tuned across the long time of a shared life, is a question this paper opens and does not answer. It points toward a paper on the temporal sustenance of the relation's good condition: the dynamics, left open in the formal companion's own dynamical layer [21], of how a good cycle is kept turning against the tendency of every cycle to wind down.

The second fissure is the *solitary and the shared*. The paper distinguished the solitary journey's revelation of the self from the shared journey's generation of the "we" (§3.4), but it treated the solitary chiefly as a foil. The relation between the two, how the self that the solitary journey reveals is related to the "we" that the shared journey generates, whether and how one must be able to be alone in order to be genuinely together, what the solitary and the shared owe each other in a life, is a deep question this paper only touches. It points toward a paper on the subject of the relation: who the one must be who can enter the "we" without dissolving into it, the question the previous paper also marked as open [65].

The third fissure is the *third-party other and the ethics of the many*. The paper opened, in the ethics of facing the third party (§5.4), the question of how the dyad treats those beyond it, and marked this as the first step from the ethics of intimacy toward the ethics of the many. But the full ethics of the relational commons, how the "we" of two extends to the "we" of many, how the goods and dangers of the dyadic field scale to the family, the community, the basin,

is the horizon beyond this paper, the watershed the previous paper also marked [63, 65]. It points toward a paper on the scaling of the relational field beyond the dyad.

The fourth fissure is the *politics of perception*. The paper argued that aesthetic education is a micro-politics of de-alienation (§14.10), the cultivation of a capacity for non-alienated experience that capital cannot confiscate. But the full political theory implicit in this, the redistribution of the sensible as a programme, the relation between the cultivation of perception and the transformation of the administered order, whether a politics of perception can be more than micro, is a horizon this paper only indicates. It points toward a paper on the politics of aesthetic education: the question whether the de-alienation practiced at the scale of a perception can be raised to the scale of a society.

The fifth fissure is the *formal phenomenology of the field*. The paper invoked the formal companion lightly, the self-presence of relational dynamics as the foregrounding of the fusion-space operator (§3.3), the good cycle of reproduction as holonomy accumulated along the retelling path (§4.3). But a full formal treatment of the field, of how the exchange of background, the opening of spaciousness, and the foregrounding of the dynamics appear in the formalism of the companion, of whether the phenomenological features have exact formal correlates, is left undone. It points toward a formal companion to this paper, as “From Fluid to Braid” is the formal companion to the previous one [21]: a formal phenomenology of the field of travel.

The sixth fissure is the deepest of all, and the paper has marked it explicitly within its own body: the *just and generative reproduction of suffering*. The paper established that conflict and pain, well reproduced, can become a relation’s wealth (§9.8), and gave the good reproduction of suffering the structure of four criteria, teleological, ontological, political-economic, and power-dialectical (§9.9). But it gave only the criteria, the direction of the good, and not the method, the route to it; and the full theory of how two people justly and generatively reproduce a shared suffering, how, concretely, a pain is returned to and transfigured so that it stays generative, joint, non-exploitative, and free of domination, is the largest task the paper opens and cannot complete. It points toward a paper of its own: a theory of the just reproduction of suffering, which this paper has framed in its four criteria but whose method remains, like the beautiful it so closely resembles, difficult, un-programmable, and yet to be found.

The seventh fissure is the *life of a created work in the public sphere*. The paper established that creation is co-creation and co-creation is relational production (§8), and that the ethics of relational production governs the creation and destruction of co-created works, but it found, at the edge of this, a case that exceeds the relational frame: the work that enters public culture, belonging no longer to any determinate “we” but to an anonymous, non-reciprocal, institutional public including the unborn (§8.5). The paper marked, there, the limit of the theory of relational production, refusing to dissolve the public sphere into a magnified relation, and naming the overlap of the relational-productive and the public, the way a created thing is at once the product of a relational subject and a member of a public world, as a problem governed by two different logics. The full theory of this overlap, of the ethics of public creations and the claims of the anonymous and the unborn, is opened here and not closed; it points toward

a theory of the public sphere that the theory of relational production borders but does not contain.

The eighth fissure is *generative openness as a principle of design*. The paper found, at the limit of its generalisation, that the spaciousness underlying the field of travel is an instance of a general resource, generative openness, the unfilled room in which unplanned and meaningful events may emerge, and that this resource bears far beyond the intimate relation, on the design of spaces, times, and institutions wherever the question arises whether a structure preserves the openness in which generative events can occur (§15.4). But the paper marked, there, its own limit, declining to develop generative openness into a general theory of design lest the argument be carried away from its relational subject. The full theory, of generative openness across the spatial, the temporal, and the institutional, of how spaces and schedules and institutions may be designed to preserve rather than foreclose the room for generative events, is opened here and not pursued; it points toward a theory of generative design that this paper borders but does not enter.

These eight are directed openings rather than loose ends, each a place where the field of travel, fully entered, shows more than this paper can contain. The field is a source. What it generates exceeds what any single paper can hold, and the fissures mark where the excess points. χαλεπὰ τὰ καλὰ: the beautiful is difficult, and the difficulty is inexhaustible, which is the very sign of a source rather than a reason for despair, that one can return to it again and again and never find it spent.

And here, at the last, the generalisation that has run through the whole paper completes itself in a single recognition. The field of travel was never, finally, about travel. The deepest purpose of faring into the unfamiliar is not to leave the everyday behind, but to learn, and to bring home, how to recreate, within the everyday, the field in which relational subjects can continue to come into being. The journey teaches the field; the skill carries it home; and the highest accomplishment the paper has described is the cultivated capacity to open rather than the great journey, in the midst of an ordinary shared life, the spacious and contingent field in which two people go on generating the “we” they are. To learn how to travel, even where one remains; to keep, within the everyday, the openness in which the relation can continue to come to presence, this is what the field of travel, generalised, finally asks. The field of travel is such a source, and this paper has done no more, and no less, than open it.

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This paper, more than any in the series, was written before its occasion: it imagines a journey not yet taken, with one person who loves to travel and who has already taught me, without ever meaning to teach, most of what these pages try to say. The wildflower at the roadside is not only an example chosen for the argument; it is the kind of thing she notices and turns toward the world, and the turning is the whole of what I have tried to understand. If anything here is true, it was learned from her, in the ordinary days before any journey; if anything here is false, it is where I have not yet learned to see what she sees. The field this paper describes

is one I hope we will build, journey by journey, in the life ahead; and the cultivation it calls aesthetic education is the one I have already begun to receive from her, simply by knowing her. To the girl who belongs to the forest, with whom I long to fare into the unfamiliar: this is yours, written before our first journey, in anticipation of every world we will build together, and the giving keeps nothing back.

[TODO: Author to complete: scholarly acknowledgements and any institutional notes before circulation.]

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