

The Emergence of Culture in Intimate Relation

The Three-Register Dialectic of the Relational Real

Between two people a whole world is spoken in words no third person can translate.

Wanhong

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huangwanhong@serendip.ngo huang-wanhong.com +81-080-8946-0827
LAZO GINZA HIGASHI 402, MINATO 2-6-4, CHUO KU, TOKYO, JAPAN 104-0043 (temporary; for the
latest contact address see huang-wanhong.com)

观乎人文，以化成天下。

*Observe the patterns of the human,
and by them the world is brought to form.*

化者，生生之谓也。

To culture is to make live, and live again.

— after the *Book of Changes*

致她——

For her—

那个属于森林的女孩，

the girl who belongs to the forest,

与我共写一种只有我们懂得的语言。

with whom I write a language only we two understand.

致我最爱的人。 To the one I love most.

Abstract

This paper develops an ontology, a phenomenology, and an ethics of culture as it emerges in intimate relation. Its guiding claim is that culture is misconceived when taken as a finished and transmissible object and is rightly conceived as a generation that does not close: the dialectical exteriorization, across the three registers of experience and under material constraint, of the interwoven generative history of relational subjects. The paper works first at the level of culture in general, passing through the major theories of cultural formation—transmission and collective representation, symbol and interpretation, structure and reproduction, culture as the encoding of power, the Chinese *wen-hua* tradition, and the dialogic—and locating within them a position they leave open. That position is stated as a variant of the Lacanian theory of the three registers, here called the *three-register dialectic of the relational Real*: the Real is granted a hitherto neglected relational form; culture is shown to span all three registers, none dispensable; and the registers are set into a materially driven, dialectical motion, so that culture has no final truth, is never static, and develops through the historical sublation of its own forms.

On this ground the paper turns to its proper subject, the emergence of culture in the intimate dyad, which it takes as the minimal and most exposed unit of cultural emergence. Five mechanisms are shown to belong to the dyad alone: the vacancy of any external authority to fix meaning, so that the two must serve as each other's symbolic authority; the mutual interweaving of two structures of desire; a density of shared living that lets culture sediment at a visible speed; the heightened, intimate configuration of the three registers; and a fragility by which a whole shared culture may collapse. A middle-scale case, the family ethos (*jiafeng*), is examined to draw out the epistemology of a dialectical view of culture and the study of power within it. The paper closes with the political economy and ethics of intimate culture: how such culture is produced under material conditions, how capital, having exhausted older frontiers, reaches into the bond itself to capture the value it generates, and on what the just generation of culture depends—namely, that the generation of value, which carries power, must in the same movement generate the counter-power that restrains power and prevents its entrenchment.

Beyond its revision of Lacan, the paper advances five theses of its own: the *non-transferability thesis*, that a relational culture's resistance to transfer rises with the depth of its anchoring in interwoven drive; the *vacancy thesis*, that the externalization of symbolic authority sets a system's endogeneity and its stability in inverse tension; *capture-as-decoherence*, that capital captures a relational culture not by seizing it but by preserving its symbolic form while drawing off its coherence in the Real; the *counter-power criterion*, that a cultural form persists through changed conditions only insofar as it endogenously generates a counter-power against its own power; and the *real-anchoring thesis*, that a relational culture's resistance to power, capital, and time arises from its anchoring in the register of the Real.

Keywords: culture in intimate relation; generative relational being; the relational Real; the commodification of culture; generative justice.

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

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Part One Ontology and Epistemology: How Culture Emerges

1. Introduction: The First Fissure and the Problem of *Wen* and *Hua*

A previous paper of this series closed not in synthesis but in a set of directed fissures, and the first of them pointed here. That paper concerned the aesthetics of the quotidian and the education of perception, and it argued that between two people turned toward a shared world a capacity for perceiving beauty may be cultivated that neither carries alone [33]. It ended by observing that such a shared capacity, once it takes on a durable and transmissible form, has already crossed a boundary the aesthetic alone cannot name. When a gesture repeated between two people hardens into a rite, when a mistaken word is kept on purpose and becomes a name, when a way of seeing is sedimented into a way of living that can be handed on, something has emerged that is no longer a perception and not yet an institution. That something is culture, and this paper takes its emergence in intimate relation for its subject.

The word chosen for the subject is not innocent, and the paper begins by refusing to let it settle too quickly. In English *culture* carries an agricultural inheritance, from *colere*, to till, to tend, to cultivate; the metaphor is of a ground worked and a growth husbanded, and it leans, for all its life, toward the image of a thing cultivated and then possessed, a heritage held. The Chinese term for culture, *wenhua* (文化), carries a different charge, and the difference is instructive rather than decorative. It is built of two characters. *Wen* (文) is pattern, marking, the woven grain of a thing, the sign; *hua* (化) is transformation, generation, the bringing-to-live and bringing-to-form. *Hua* is verbal before it is nominal. To *hua* is to transform, to generate, to make live and live again, and the classical locus—“observe the patterns of the human, and by them bring the world to form”—reads culture not as a deposit but as an ongoing act of formation [23]. The tension between these two inheritances, the tended possession and the ongoing transformation, is not a matter of etymological curiosity. It is the whole problem of the paper in miniature, and it already announces the thesis: that culture is misconceived when it is taken as a finished and transmissible object, and rightly conceived when it is taken as a generation that does not close.

The question, and the special site at which it is asked

The general question is what culture is, ontologically and epistemologically: in what manner it exists, how it comes to be, and how it can be known. That question has a long literature, and the first part of this paper works through it, not to survey it but to locate a position within it that the existing accounts have left open. But the general question is not, for this series, the final one. This is a philosophy of intimacy, and its concern with culture is a concern with culture at its smallest and most exposed, in the relation between two people. The intimate dyad is the minimal unit of cultural emergence, the smallest system in which a culture can arise at all, and it is therefore the site at which the mechanism of emergence is most nakedly

visible. What in a nation or an epoch is buried under the weight of institutions, laws, and the dead accumulation of centuries stands, in a couple, close enough to be watched as it happens. One can almost see the moment a private word is coined and accepted, the moment a shared silence acquires a meaning; and one can also see, with a clarity no macro-culture affords, what it costs when such a culture collapses. The particular is not here an application of the general arrived at late. It is the place where the general is legible.

This double structure organizes the paper. The general and the special are related as universality and the particularity that both instances and exceeds it. The first part develops a general ontology and epistemology of cultural emergence, and it is deliberately general: its claims about how culture comes to be, its dialectic of the material and the ideal, its account of culture across the registers of experience, are meant to hold of culture as such. The second part, which is the heart of the paper and the reason the series exists, descends into the intimate dyad and asks what the general framework becomes when the cultural unit is not a people but a pair, and it finds there mechanisms that belong to the dyad alone and appear nowhere else: the vacancy, between two people, of any external authority to fix meaning; the mutual implication of two structures of desire; a density of shared living that lets culture sediment at a visible speed; a fragility that can return a whole shared world to ruin. The third part turns from what culture is and how it is lived to how it is produced and how it is captured, tracing the material conditions under which intimate culture is generated and the means by which capital, having exhausted older frontiers, reaches into the relation itself to draw value from the very bond.

Three lines run through the whole

The argument is carried by three lines that are not confined to separate chapters but run through the whole, and it is worth naming them at the outset so that their recurrence is read as design rather than repetition. The first is the line of *historical materialism*: that culture, however much it exceeds its conditions, is produced under material conditions and cannot be understood apart from the forces and relations of its production. This line insists throughout that the emergence of culture is constrained, that its forms are historical rather than eternal, and that the manner of its production and of its capture is a question of political economy and not only of meaning. The second is the line of *the Hegelian dialectic*: that culture is spirit exteriorized, going out of itself into a visible form, coming to know itself in that form, and returning to itself altered, so that exteriorization is not loss but the necessary path of self-knowledge, and so that the movement of culture, including its estrangements, has the shape of a determinate negation rather than a mere succession. The third is the line of *psychoanalysis*: that culture is bound to drive, that it is the coding, the sublimation, the sedimented shared fantasy through which what cannot be directly said is given a transmissible form, and that in intimate relation, above all, culture is the sediment of two structures of desire woven into one. These three lines converge, in the meta-theoretical statement that opens the paper's second movement, on a single framework, a variant of the Lacanian theory of the three registers reworked so that the Real is granted a relational form, so that culture is shown to span all three registers, and so that the registers are set into dialectical and materially driven motion rather

than left as a static topology. That framework, named in its place the *three-register dialectic of the relational Real*, is the theoretical spine on which the whole rests, and the introduction names it here only as a promise to be redeemed.

What the paper contributes, with its limits showing

The contribution can be stated plainly and with its limits in view. It is, first, an ontology of cultural emergence that locates culture neither in a transmissible object nor in a symbolic system nor in an encoding of power alone, but in the dialectical exteriorization, across three registers and under material constraint, of the interwoven generative history of relational subjects. It is, second, a phenomenology of intimate culture that takes the dyad seriously as a special site and describes the mechanisms proper to it, and this is where the paper means to earn its place in the series, for these mechanisms have not, to the author's knowledge, been gathered and named. It is, third, an ethics and a political economy of intimate culture that shows how the value such culture generates is produced, how it is captured, and on what its just generation depends, joining this to the theory of generative justice the series has developed in exchange with Eglash [11]. The paper does not offer a completed system, and it does not close its own central concept, which would contradict in its form the generativity the concept names. It offers a framework, a set of mechanisms, and a criterion, and it holds them open, in the manner its subject demands, toward what a later work must take up.

2. A Taxonomy of Definitions of Culture

Before the several theories of culture are taken up one by one, they should be laid out as a field, for they do not merely differ in emphasis but disagree at the root, in what they take culture *to be*. A theory of cultural formation always rests on a prior commitment about the mode of existence of its object, and it is at that level, and not at the level of particular findings, that the position of this paper is to be located. The purpose of this section is therefore cartographic. It sets two axes across which the major commitments can be plotted, places each of the traditions the following sections examine at its coordinate, and shows that the position this paper will occupy is not one more entry in a list but a region of the map the existing traditions have left vacant. To argue for the originality of a view by exhibiting an unoccupied coordinate is more honest than to assert it, because it makes the claim answerable: if the coordinate were already filled, the argument would fail, and it can be seen at a glance whether it is.

Two axes

The first axis concerns the *mode of being* of culture, and it runs from the settled to the generative. At one pole culture is a completed and transmissible entity, a heritage that exists in the manner of an object, handed from one bearer to the next and in principle the same across the handing. At the other pole culture is an ongoing process, unfinished by nature, existing only in the manner of an event that is always still occurring. This is the axis on which the etymological tension of the previous section, between the tended possession and the ongoing transformation, becomes a theoretical variable.

The second axis concerns the *bearer* of culture, and it runs from the individual to the relational-or-structural. At one pole the individual is the unit that carries culture, its container or its vehicle, and culture is what is deposited in persons. At the other pole culture obtains between or above persons, in a structure or a relation that no single individual instances, so that the individual is an effect or a moment of the culture rather than its container. These two axes are not independent in practice, but they are distinct in principle, and plotting the traditions against both at once discloses a structure that neither axis alone would show.

The map

Plotted against these axes, the traditions examined in the following sections fall as the table records. Each row states, besides the coordinate, what the tradition takes culture to be, how it treats drive, and how it treats power, so that the two lines this paper carries through its ontology—the psychoanalytic and the question of power—can be seen entering, or failing to enter, each account.

Tradition	Coordinate	What culture is	Drive	Power
Transmission & collective representation <i>Tylor,</i> <i>Durkheim</i>	settled × collec- tive	a learned, transmitted whole; collective repre- sentation, social fact	untouched; cul- ture as outer norm	unthematized; power hidden in the coercion of the “social fact”
Symbol & inter- pretation <i>Geertz, Cassirer</i>	settled × struc- tural	a prior web of meaning, a system of symbolic forms	symbolic order as big Other; the subject meets lack on entering lan- guage	the power di- mension of meaning left undeveloped
Structure & reproduction <i>Lévi-Strauss,</i> <i>Bourdieu</i>	settled-tending- dynamic × struc- tural	deep structure; cultural capital, accruable, con- vertible, extractable	desire organized by the logic of distinction, its drive-root undug	<i>central:</i> culture as the hidden mechanism of class reproduc- tion
Power as ontol- ogy <i>Gramsci, Fou- cault, Hall</i>	dynamic × struc- tural (power con- gealed)	the encoding of a power order; no culture outside power	inside the sym- bolic via the phallic signifier (the weld)	<i>ontological:</i> power structure defines culture structure
The dialogic <i>Bakhtin</i>	generative × dia- logic	the unfinished, generated in answering	answerability touches the other’s desire, unsystematized	heteroglossia implies a counter- hegemony, un- theorized
The Chinese <i>wen-hua</i> <i>Yijing, Confu- cian, Daoist</i>	generative × civi- lizational	<i>hua</i> : transformation, bringing-to-form; cul- ture as ongoing act	sublimation im- plicit in <i>liyue</i> (rites and mu- sic), undertheo- rized	pedagogy from above; the power face of <i>huacheng</i>
GRB (this paper)	generative × relational (va- cant)	the dialectical exteri- orization, across three registers, of interwoven drive and generative his- tory	<i>ground:</i> cul- ture as coding, sublimation, the sediment of shared fantasy	power is inter- nal to culture, yet just genera- tion generates the <i>counter-</i> <i>power</i> against its entrench- ment

Reading the map

Read downward, the table shows a drift rather than a scatter. The mode of being moves from the settled toward the generative; the bearer moves from the individual and the structural toward the relational; and the two columns on the right, drive and power, move from the untouched toward the thematic, so that what the earliest traditions do not register at all becomes, in the lower rows, the explicit matter of the account. The lowest row, the position of this paper, occupies the coordinate the drift approaches but none of the existing traditions reaches: the generative and the relational together, with drive taken as the ground of culture and power taken as internal to it yet answerable, within the same generative movement, to a counter-power that prevents its entrenchment. That the phallic signifier appears in the drive column of the power tradition and the counter-power in the power column of this paper's own row is not incidental. It marks the two welds by which the psychoanalytic line and the line of power are joined to each other and to the whole, and both are redeemed in their places below.

Two uses follow, and they set the plan of the rest of Part One. The task of the antithesis, when it comes, will be to draw the upper six traditions from their several coordinates toward the vacant one, not by refuting each in turn but by exposing the presupposition they share and inverting it. The task of the synthesis will be to name and define the coordinate so reached. The sections that immediately follow, however, owe each tradition a fair hearing on its own terms before any of this can be earned, and they proceed in the order of the table, from the tradition that holds culture most nearly as a settled thing to the two that already lean, half a foot, toward the generation this paper will claim.

3. Transmission and Collective Representation

The first tradition is the one that gave the modern concept its founding definition, and it is placed first because it holds culture most nearly as a settled thing. When Tylor opened *Primitive Culture* in 1871 with the sentence that culture is “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” [28], he did three things at once, and each has proved durable. He made culture a *whole*, an ensemble rather than a list, so that its parts are to be understood in their belonging together. He made it *acquired*, learned rather than inherited in the blood, and so severed it from race and biology, which was the definition's great emancipatory achievement and remains its permanent contribution. And he made it acquired *by man as a member of society*, so that the individual receives culture from a collectivity that precedes him. Everything the definition gets right, this paper keeps. What it fixes, and fixes so naturally that the fixing is invisible, is the mode of being of the whole so defined. Culture, in this founding image, is something one *acquires*, and what can be acquired is a thing that was there to be had, standing ready before the acquiring, the same for the next person who will acquire it in turn. The verb quietly installs an object. The complex whole becomes a patrimony, a stock of acquirable items, and the work of the concept from that point forward is the work of transmission: how the stock passes, how it is kept, how it changes across the passing. Culture is modelled on inheritance,

and an inheritance is by definition a thing that exists before and after the one who receives it.

Durkheim gave this image its deepest sociological form, and in doing so raised the collective from the background of Tylor's definition into the explicit ground of culture's existence. The concepts, categories, and beliefs by which the members of a society understand their world are, for Durkheim, *collective representations*: they are not the constructions of individual minds but products of the collectivity, which express, and in expressing sustain, the reality of the group itself [10]. Their mark is that they confront the individual from without and with a force he did not author, the defining property Durkheim assigned to the social fact, which is exterior to any given individual and endowed with a power of constraint [9]. This is a profound advance over Tylor, because it grasps that culture is not merely deposited in individuals but obtains at the level of the collectivity and bears down on the individual with the weight of an independent reality. It moves culture, in the terms of the previous section's map, from the purely individual toward the collective bearer. And yet it moves it only that far, and in one crucial respect it deepens the very fixity it inherits. For the collective representation, precisely by being exterior and constraining, is figured as a thing standing over against the individual, a structure he enters and by which he is formed, already there before him and outlasting him. The advance in the bearer is paid for by an entrenchment in the mode of being. Where Tylor's culture was an acquirable stock, Durkheim's is an exterior and coercive order, and both are, in the decisive sense, *already made*. The individual meets culture as one meets a fact: it is given, it constrains, and its existence does not wait on his participation.

What this tradition sees, and what its presupposition costs

It would be an error, and the kind of error this paper is at pains to avoid, to treat this tradition as simply mistaken. It sees something real, and the seeing must be preserved. Culture *is* transmissible; it *does* sediment into durable forms that outlast particular occasions; it *does* confront the individual with the force of something he did not make and cannot simply revise at will. A private language between two people, once established, bears down on each of them with a version of exactly this exteriority: one cannot unilaterally decide that a word the two of you made together now means something else. The transmissibility and the sedimented durability that this tradition places at the centre are genuine features of culture, and any account that denied them, in the name of process and generation, would be a sentimentalism deserving the correction this tradition would administer to it. *Wen*—pattern, the durable mark—is not an illusion.

But the presupposition beneath the seeing exacts a price, and the price is the disappearance of the very thing this paper means to recover. By modelling culture on the acquirable stock and the exterior fact, the tradition renders unthinkable the moment of *emergence*: the event in which a culture that did not exist comes to be, between people who are making it, before it has hardened into anything transmissible or exterior at all. If culture is what is already there to be acquired, then the coming-to-be of the not-yet-there falls outside the concept. One can ask how a culture is transmitted, maintained, or eroded; one cannot, within this frame, ask how it is *generated*, because generation is precisely the passage from the not-yet-cultural to

the cultural, and a theory that begins from the already-made has placed that passage before its own first page. And it is the moment of emergence, not the fact of transmission, that the intimate dyad exhibits with unique clarity and that this paper takes as its subject. Two people do not, in the first instance, *acquire* their shared culture; they *make* it, and one can watch them make it. The founding tradition, for all it correctly sees, cannot look at that making, because its concept of culture is built from the residue the making leaves behind. This is the sense in which it is the antithesis's main point of attack: not that transmission is unreal, but that transmission is the afterlife of an emergence the tradition cannot think, and that to take the afterlife for the whole is to mistake the ash for the fire.

4. Symbol and Interpretation

The second tradition is the one this paper most nearly resembles and must therefore most carefully distinguish itself from, for it comes closest to the truth and misses it in the most instructive way. Its thesis is that culture is meaning, and that the medium of meaning is the symbol. Cassirer gave the thesis its widest philosophical frame: the human being is not so much a rational animal as a symbolic one, an *animal symbolicum*, and culture is the totality of the symbolic forms—language, myth, art, religion, science—through which a world is constituted at all rather than merely encountered [6, 7]. On this view culture is not one region of human life but the medium in which human life as such takes place, since there is no access to a world except through some symbolic form that shapes it. Geertz brought the thesis down from the philosophy of forms to the practice of interpretation. Believing, with Weber, that the human being is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, Geertz took culture to be those webs, and the study of it to be not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning [15]. Culture is public because meaning is public: it lives in symbols that can be read, and the reading, his *thick description*, is the patient recovery of the layered significance that separates a wink from a twitch, a significance that the physical motion alone cannot carry and that only the web of meaning supplies.

This is a great advance over the first tradition, and along the axis this paper cares about most it moves in the right direction. It sees that culture is not a stock of items but a texture of meaning; that meaning is relational, a matter of a sign's place in a web rather than of any property it carries in itself; and that culture is therefore closer to a language than to a patrimony. The metaphor of the web is almost the metaphor this paper wants, for a web is a structure of relations and not a heap of things. And Geertz's insistence that culture is spun by those suspended in it seems, for a moment, to grant exactly the generativity the first tradition denied: the web is woven, and weaving is an act.

Where the web hangs already spun

But the moment does not hold, and the reason it does not hold is the presupposition this tradition shares, beneath its advances, with the one before it. The web, in the end, is encountered as *already spun*. For all that Geertz says the webs are spun by those suspended in them, the

suspension is prior in his account to any spinning one could observe: the individual is born into webs of significance that precede him, and interpretation, thick description, is addressed to meaning that is *already there* to be read, a public text the ethnographer arrives late to and construes. The generativity in the metaphor is grammatically present and analytically absent. One never, in this tradition, catches the web in the act of being woven; one finds it woven and reads it. And Cassirer's symbolic forms are still more nearly a priori: they are the standing conditions of any experience whatever, the forms a world must take to be a world, and as such they precede every particular act of meaning as its condition rather than issuing from it. In the terms of the map, the tradition has moved culture toward the relational and the structural in its account of the *bearer* of meaning—meaning lives in the web, between the signs—while leaving its *mode of being* settled: the web is a prior structure into which the individual is inducted, and meaning is found, decoded, interpreted, never watched as it comes to be. The symbolic system is treated as anterior to the subjects who move within it, and the subject is figured as one who enters a language already spoken.

The symbolic order and the lack it opens

It is exactly here, at the point where the symbolic system is granted priority over the subject, that the psychoanalytic line of this paper first enters, and it enters not to refute this tradition but to name a dimension the tradition leaves in the dark. For if the subject is inducted into a symbolic order that precedes him, then the relation between the subject and that order is not neutral, and psychoanalysis is the discourse that has taken the measure of what that induction costs. In the Lacanian account the symbolic order is the register of language and law, the treasury of signifiers that is there before the subject and that the subject must enter to become a speaking being at all; and this entry is not a gain only. To enter language is to submit what one is to what can be said of it, and since no signifier can ever say the whole of what the subject is, the entry opens, at the very heart of the subject, a constitutive lack, an emptiness that the symbolic order institutes by the same act with which it constitutes the subject [22]. The symbolic order that Cassirer and Geertz describe from the outside, as the medium of meaning, is described by psychoanalysis from the inside, as the big Other into which desire is inducted and by which it is marked with a lack it can never fill. This is the first appearance of a thesis the paper will develop at length: that culture, considered as a symbolic system, is not a neutral web of meaning but the very apparatus by which drive is first coded, and that the coding leaves a remainder. The interpretive tradition sees the web and reads its meanings; it does not see that the web is stretched over a hole, that the subject suspended in significance is suspended over its own constitutive lack, and that the meanings it spins are, among other things, ways of living beside that lack. What the tradition cannot see, because it stays at the level of the symbolic taken alone, is precisely what the later sections of this paper must recover: that culture spans more than the symbolic, and that beneath the web of meaning runs a register the web does not exhaust.

5. Structure and Reproduction

The third tradition asks a question the first two do not: not what culture is or how it means, but what culture *does*, and in particular what work it performs in holding a social order together and passing it on. Its two moments, the structural and the reproductive, are distinct, but they share the conviction that beneath the surface of cultural life lies a structure that organizes it, and that the structure is prior to and largely hidden from the agents whose practice it governs.

In its structural moment, associated with Lévi-Strauss, the thesis is that the diversity of cultural forms—myths, kinship systems, classifications—is the surface transformation of a small number of deep structures, ultimately grounded in the binary operations of the mind, so that the anthropologist’s task is to recover the invariant structure of which the visible culture is a permutation [25]. This is a powerful vision, and it sees something the interpretive tradition can underplay: that culture has a structure with its own logic, not reducible to the meanings its participants avow, a grammar that generates the sayable without being itself said. But it purchases this depth at the price of the agents entirely. The structure operates behind their backs and through them; they are its bearers, not its authors; and the structure itself is timeless, a synchronic order from which history and emergence have been evacuated on principle. Culture here is at its most settled precisely where it is at its most sophisticated: the deep structure is the very type of a thing that is always already there.

Bourdieu’s reproductive moment is the one this paper must engage most closely, because it is the sharpest and because its central concept, cultural capital, stands in the most direct opposition to what this paper will claim about intimate culture. Bourdieu set out to overcome the antinomy of structure and agency, and his instrument was the *habitus*: a system of durable, transposable dispositions, laid down in the body by a whole history of conditioning, which generates practices without being either free choice or mechanical determination, an incorporated structure that reproduces the objective structure that produced it [4]. Around the *habitus* he built an economy of *capital* in several forms—economic, social, and, decisively, cultural—and showed how taste, comportment, and cultivation, far from being the free play of sensibility they present themselves as, function as *cultural capital*: assets, unequally distributed along class lines, that can be accumulated, that can be converted into economic and social advantage, and that are transmitted across generations through the family and the school so as to reproduce the class structure while concealing that reproduction behind the appearance of individual merit [5]. This is a genuine and permanent achievement, and it is where the historical-materialist line of this paper first enters the argument. Bourdieu makes visible what the interpretive tradition leaves in shadow: that culture is not an innocent web of meaning but an instrument in the reproduction of social relations, that the power to say what counts as cultivation is a class power, and that the question of who owns and transmits cultural competence is a question of political economy. Any account of culture that forgot this—any celebration of intimate culture as a pure generative idyll—would have earned Bourdieu’s contempt, and rightly.

The extractability of cultural capital, and the point of divergence

But the very concept that makes Bourdieu's analysis so powerful marks the exact place where this paper will part from it, and the point must be stated with precision, because a carelessness here would either concede too much or claim too much. The category *capital* imports into the analysis of culture the defining logic of capital as such: that it is a value which can be accumulated, which can be converted across domains, and which can be made to yield a return. Cultural capital, on Bourdieu's account, is accruable, is convertible into economic and social advantage, and is, in its objectified and institutionalized states above all, extractable—made to work, cashed in, put to the reproduction of advantage. It is true, and Bourdieu is careful about this, that cultural capital in its embodied state cannot be handed over like a coin, since it is incorporated into a habitus over time and dies with its bearer; the point of divergence is not a claim that Bourdieu missed this nuance. The point of divergence is that for Bourdieu even embodied cultural capital, however slowly acquired, is still *capital*: it is oriented to accumulation and return, its value is its convertibility, and its cultural meaning is legible, in the last analysis, as position in a field of struggle. What Bourdieu's frame cannot register—because its founding metaphor forbids it—is a form of culture whose value is precisely *not* of this kind: a culture generated within a relation whose worth is non-accruable, non-convertible, and non-extractable, because it is not an asset that positions its holders in an external field but a real bond that exists only in and for the relation itself. This is the form of culture the intimate dyad generates, and it is the antithesis, term for term, of cultural capital: where cultural capital is transferable in principle and extractable in fact, intimate culture is non-transferable in principle and, this paper will argue, resistant to extraction at its core. The disagreement is recorded here and settled later, at the synthesis and again in the phenomenology of the dyad; for now it is enough to have marked that the strongest theory of culture-as-reproduction is built on a metaphor—capital—whose reach this paper means to bound, by exhibiting a culture that lies wholly outside it.

6. Power as the Ontology of Culture

The fourth tradition makes the strongest claim in the field, and it is placed last among the settled traditions because the antithesis will find it the hardest to answer. Its thesis is not the mild one that culture is influenced by power, which no one denies, but the radical one that power is the very being of culture: that culture, in its constitution and not merely in its uses, *is* the encoding of a power order, so that to analyze a culture just is to analyze the relations of domination it congeals and transmits. On this view there is no culture outside power, no cultural form that is not, at bottom, a sedimentation of force, and the appearance of a culture that stands apart from power—an innocent web of meaning, a free play of taste, a private world between two people—is exactly the illusion by which power secures itself.

Gramsci gave the thesis its foundational form with the concept of *hegemony*. The rule of a dominant class, he saw, does not rest on coercion alone; it rests, more deeply and more durably, on the manufacture of *consent*, achieved in the domain of culture, where the worldview of the

ruling class is diffused through the institutions of civil society until it is received by the subordinate classes as simple common sense, the natural order of things rather than the interested construction it is [16]. Culture, in this account, is the very medium in which domination is made to feel like nature, and its political function is not incidental to it but constitutive: a culture is a settlement of hegemony, a way of organizing consent to an order of power. Foucault radicalized the thesis by dissolving its remaining reference to a class that holds power. Power, for him, is not possessed but exercised, not concentrated in a ruler or a class but capillary, distributed through the finest grain of social life, and inseparable from knowledge: every ordering of knowledge is an exercise of power, every regime of power produces its knowledge, and the two are so bound that he wrote them with a single hyphenated name, *power/knowledge* [14]. Discourse, on this account, does not describe a world so much as constitute the objects it appears to describe, and the subject itself, far from being the author of culture, is one of culture's products, formed by the disciplinary and discursive practices that traverse it [13]. Stuart Hall carried the thesis into the analysis of contemporary culture, holding culture to be not a thing to appreciate but a critical site of social action where power relations are established and may be unsettled, and showing, in his account of encoding and decoding, how the meanings a dominant order encodes into its messages may be received, negotiated, or opposed by those who decode them [17]. Hall's is the most dialectical version, for it reopens, within the domain of cultural power, a space of contestation the others tend to close; but it remains within the tradition's founding thesis, that the field on which the contest occurs is a field of power through and through.

The evidence of the tradition, read from the Chinese material

The thesis is not an abstraction, and it can be seen with particular clarity in the cultural forms this series knows best. The Confucian order of *jun-chen-fu-zi*, ruler and minister, father and son, is a culture in the fullest sense, a whole texture of rite, sentiment, and meaning; and it is, at the same time and by the same texture, the encoding of a hierarchy of power, a distribution of authority naturalized into the order of the cosmos and the affections. The culture of divinity and the culture of imperial authority perform the same operation at the largest scale: the power of heaven and the power of the throne are written into the culture as the way things simply are, so that *tianming*, the mandate of heaven, installs a political order in the position of the ultimate authority, the place this series has learned from psychoanalysis to call the big Other. Read through this tradition, a vast amount of what any culture contains discloses itself as the sedimentation of a power order into the seemingly natural forms of meaning and feeling, and this reading is not false. It is one of the most powerful instruments of cultural analysis there is, and the antithesis of this paper will not pretend otherwise.

The weld: the phallic signifier

Before the tradition's radical consequence is drawn, one connection must be made, because it joins this tradition to the psychoanalytic line and shows that the two are not parallel tracks but a single one. If culture is a symbolic phenomenon, as the interpretive tradition holds, and if

power is internal to culture, as this tradition holds, then the question arises how power is lodged *within* the symbolic, and psychoanalysis gives the answer in the concept of the master signifier, and at the deepest level the *phallic signifier*. In the Lacanian account the symbolic order is not a flat field of equivalent signs; it is organized around privileged signifiers that anchor its differences and orient its axis of authority, and the phallic signifier is the name for that which organizes the symbolic order's structure of power, the point around which the difference that founds hierarchy is arranged [22]. This is the weld between the two lines this paper carries. Power does not enter culture from outside, as an external force bending a neutral medium; it is internal to the symbolic order's very constitution, lodged there through the phallic organization of the signifying chain, which is the same apparatus by which, as the interpretive section began to show, drive is coded and the subject's lack is opened. The line of power and the line of drive are therefore one line, joined at the phallic signifier: the coding of drive and the encoding of power are the same operation of the symbolic order seen from two sides.

The radical consequence, and the threat to this paper

From the thesis, so welded, follows the consequence that makes this tradition the hardest the antithesis must face. If power is internal to the constitution of culture as such, and if there is no cultural form that is not a sedimentation of power, then there is *no outside*. There is no site from which a culture free of power could be generated, no position of pure critique standing clear of the relations of domination, because the very medium in which any culture or any critique would have to be made is already, constitutively, a medium of power. A certain strain of psychoanalytically informed critique states the consequence at its sharpest: there is no pure feminism, and more generally no pure emancipatory culture, not because emancipation is not worth wanting but because there exists no system of production and social relation that is not already traversed by power, and hence no cultural form, however oppositional, that is generated in a space power has not already structured. This is the reason the tradition is placed at the head of the antithesis's difficulties. This paper means to claim that intimate relation can generate a culture of its own, endogenously, and this tradition replies, before the claim is even made, that there is no endogenous space to generate it in, that the very intimacy in which the couple would build their private world is already shot through with the phallic organization of power, that the private is a fold of the public and not an exception to it. The claim of an endogenous intimate culture is, on this tradition's terms, a naivety, and the synthesis of this paper cannot proceed until the objection has been met head-on. It will not be met by denial. It will be met, when the time comes, by conceding that power is indeed internal to all culture and turning that very concession into the ground of a different answer; but that answer belongs to the synthesis, and the tradition is left here, at the close of the thesis, in possession of its full and undiminished force.

7. The Chinese *Wen-Hua* Tradition

The five traditions examined so far are Western, and they share, for all their differences, a common descent from the social sciences and the philosophy of the modern West. There is a

body of Chinese reflection on *wen* (文) and *hua* (化) that does not belong to that descent and is not, in the strict sense, a theory of culture in the modern disciplinary meaning at all: it is closer to a discourse on civilization, cultivation, and the forming of persons and a world. It is included here as an independent strand, and not merely as an epigraph, because its difference of concern preserves an insight the Western traditions, with the partial exception of the dialogic, tend to lose—and because the terms of the intimacy series have from the beginning drawn on this material. The section confines itself to what can be stated with confidence; where it would require a philological or exegetical judgement the author is better placed to make, it marks the place and leaves it open rather than filling it with a claim it cannot warrant.

What can be stated: the verbal force of *hua*

One observation can be made with confidence, and it is the one that matters most for the argument, because it is grammatical before it is interpretive. The modern compound *wenhua* is built of two characters whose senses pull in the direction this paper has been arguing. *Wen* is pattern, the woven grain, the mark or sign—the nominal, deposited face of culture, close to what the transmission tradition sees. *Hua* is transformation, and its force is *verbal*: to *hua* is to transform, to convert, to bring to form, to cause to change or grow. Where the Latin *cultura* leans, through its agricultural root, toward the tended growth that becomes a possession, *hua* names the transforming itself, the ongoing action rather than its settled product. This is not an exotic subtlety but a plain feature of the term, and it is exactly the feature the settled Western traditions let fall: that at the heart of the very word for culture, in one of its two components, stands a verb of generation. The Chinese compound thus holds, in its internal tension between *wen* and *hua*, the same tension this paper has set at the centre of its ontology, between the pattern that is deposited and the transformation that generates it; and it holds the generative pole in a term that will not let it be forgotten.

The locus classicus for reading culture as an act of formation rather than a deposit is the phrase from the *Tuan* commentary on the hexagram Bi (贲) in the *Book of Changes*—which may be rendered “observe the patterns of the human, and by them bring the world to form” [23]. What can be said with confidence, and only this, is that here *huacheng* (the bringing-to-form) names an ongoing cultivation of a shared world, rather than the handing-on of a finished heritage: the character *hua* does the work of a verb of formation, consistent with the grammatical point just made. Any more particular claim about the passage—its place within the philosophy of the *Changes*, the commentarial tradition that reads it, its relation to the classical theory of *liyue* (rites and music), and the exact weight of *renwen* (the human pattern) in it—is a matter of exegesis the present author is better placed to supply, and it is left open here rather than asserted.

Marked and left open

[TODO: The following are to be supplied or verified by the author, who has the classical competence the argument here requires; the section deliberately does not assert them.]

- The Confucian account of *liye* as a cultivation that forms persons and generates a relational order, and its bearing on the thesis that culture is generative rather than deposited — to be developed with the specific textual support the author judges apt.
- The Daoist material on *daosheng* (the Ways begetting) and *ziran* (self-so, spontaneity) —generation as spontaneous, non-coercive bringing-forth—and its connection to the treatment of water and of *xuande* (dark virtue) in the earlier papers of this series, stated only to the extent the author wishes to warrant.
- The exact sense in which *hua* is to be distinguished from mere change, and whether a stronger claim than the grammatical one above can be responsibly made.

The strand's function, and its internal tension

Whatever the detail with which the classical material is finally filled in, the strand's function in the argument can be stated now, for it is structural. It supplies, from outside the Western descent, the one thing that descent tends to lose: a conception of culture in which the generative, verbal, ongoing character of formation is not an afterthought but is lodged in the very term. In the map of the second section it therefore falls at the generative pole, near the dialogic, and it is a second witness—independent of Bakhtin, and older—to the truth that culture is process before it is product.

But the strand carries a tension that must be held, and it is the same dialectical caution the paper has applied to every tradition. The forming of a world and the cultivation of persons have, historically, also been instruments of a hierarchical order: a *huacheng* directed from above, a cultivation that forms subjects to their places in a structure of authority. The generative insight and the pedagogy of hierarchy have coexisted in this tradition, and to take the insight without noticing the hierarchy would be to commit, on Chinese material, exactly the naivety the power tradition of the previous section warned against. The strand is therefore not a refuge from the problem of power but another instance of it, to be evaluated dialectically: its conception of generative formation is a real gift to the argument, and its historical entanglement with a cultivation imposed from above is a real limit, and both are carried forward—the gift to the synthesis, the limit to the treatment of power and of cultural evolution that the synthesis will require.

8. The Dialogic and the Unfinished

The last of the traditions is the one that has already, as the map recorded, set half a foot across the line the antithesis will complete. It is the dialogic tradition of Bakhtin, and it is placed here, at the end of the thesis, because it is less an opposing view to be overcome than a near-ally whose insight the paper will take up and radicalize. Where the four preceding traditions, for all their differences, tend to render culture as something settled—an acquirable whole, a prior web, a deep structure, a congealed order of power—Bakhtin's thought is organized around the refusal of settlement, and its governing concepts name, one after another, the ways in which

meaning declines to close.

The first is *dialogism*. For Bakhtin the word is never solitary and never first; every utterance is a link in a chain of utterances, shaped in advance by the words it answers and turned in advance toward the response it anticipates, so that meaning lives not in the utterance taken alone but in the relation between utterances, in the space of address and reply [2]. An utterance is oriented, before it is even spoken, toward an addressee whose answering word it already reaches for; meaning is a matter of this orientation, this being-toward-the-other, rather than a content lodged in a sign. The second is *answerability*, the theme of his earliest work: the self is constituted in and as its responsiveness to the other, answerable in the double sense of being obliged to respond and of being responsible in responding, so that subjectivity itself is a dialogic and ethical event before it is a substance. The third is *heteroglossia*, the internal stratification of any living language into a multiplicity of social voices—dialects, registers, professional and class and generational tongues—that coexist in tension and contend within every utterance, so that a language is never one but always a contested plurality, and its unity is an achievement of force rather than a natural fact [2]. And the fourth, the deepest, is *unfinalizability*. Nothing conclusive, Bakhtin insists, has yet taken place in the world; the ultimate word about the world and about any self has not been and cannot be spoken; every apparently final word is penultimate, shadowed by the possibility of a response that would reopen it, and the self above all retains, against every external attempt to fix and complete it, the capacity to mean again [3]. In his reading of Dostoevsky this becomes *polyphony*: a work in which a plurality of consciousnesses, each with its own validity, sound together without being merged into or subordinated to a single authorial voice, a whole that is genuinely a chorus and not a monologue in disguise.

Why the tradition leans toward this paper

It should be plain how far this tradition has already moved toward the position the paper will occupy. Its conception of culture, drawn out of these concepts, is of something generated in the between of address and answer, existing only in the ongoing exchange, and constitutively unfinished; and this is, in its formal shape, close to what this paper will claim of the culture generated in intimate relation. The dialogic word that is oriented toward its answer is not far from the private language that two people build in the alternation of speaking and being understood; the unfinalizable self that keeps the power to mean again is the self this series has always defended against the closures that would reduce it; and the polyphony that lets voices sound together without merging is a model, at the scale of the novel, of what a good relation lets its two members be. Of all the traditions surveyed, this is the one whose truth the synthesis will most nearly keep, and it is a second witness, alongside the verbal force of *hva*, to the thesis that culture is process before it is product.

What it lacks, and why it is not yet the synthesis

But it is not yet the synthesis, and the difference is exactly what the antithesis and the meta-theoretical statement must add. Bakhtin gives the *form* of unfinished, dialogic generation

without the apparatus that would explain its *depth* and its *stakes*. Three things are missing, and each is supplied by a line this paper carries. First, there is no theory of *drive*: the dialogic orientation toward the other touches, but does not systematize, the question of what in the subject reaches for the other's answer, and it is the psychoanalytic account of desire and its lack that gives the reaching its root, showing that the dialogue is not only an exchange of meanings but a circulation of desire around a constitutive emptiness. Second, there is no articulated theory of the *registers*: Bakhtin's dialogism lives almost entirely in the medium of the word, the symbolic, and does not thematize the imaginary body of identification or the real of the unsymbolizable bond, which the couple's culture, this paper will argue, inhabits no less than it inhabits language. Third, there is no *materialism* of the kind the paper insists on: heteroglossia registers that language is a field of social contention, and gestures thereby toward power, but it does not anchor the dialogic process in the forces and relations of production that condition which voices may be raised and which answers may be given. Bakhtin, in short, has the generativity and the unfinishedness, and lacks the drive, the registers, and the material ground that would turn a poetics of the unfinished word into an ontology of cultural emergence. The thesis therefore ends where it should, at a tradition that has named the destination without yet possessing the means to reach it. The means are the business of the antithesis, and the antithesis begins, as it must, not by adding one more view to these six but by stepping back to state the framework within which all six will be reread.

9. East and West: An Unactivated Resonance

Before the antithesis states its framework, one connection across the traditions just surveyed must be drawn, because it is the connection that motivates the framework and shows why a new one is needed. The six traditions do not merely occupy different coordinates on the map; two of them, arising on opposite sides of the world and out of wholly unrelated lineages, point toward the same buried truth, and the recognition of this convergence is the hinge on which the paper turns from thesis to antithesis. The section that performs this turn is not a comparison offered for its own sake, a pairing of East and West laid side by side for balance. It is the identification of a resonance that has never been activated, and the claim that activating it requires precisely the apparatus the next section will supply.

The resonance

Set the dialogic tradition beside the verbal force of *hua*, and a single shape appears twice. Bakhtin's dialogism holds that meaning is generated in the between of address and answer and is constitutively unfinished, that nothing conclusive has yet been said and the ultimate word cannot be spoken [3]. The Chinese *hua* holds, in the plain grammar of the term, that at the heart of culture stands a verb of transformation, an ongoing bringing-to-form rather than a settled deposit. These are not the same doctrine, and it would be a distortion to collapse them; the one is a twentieth-century poetics of the novel and of the utterance, the other a classical vocabulary of civilization and cultivation. But they converge on one thing, and they converge on it against the main current of the traditions around them: that culture is *process*

before it is product, generation before deposit, the unfinished before the finished. What the settled traditions of the West most persistently lose—the moment of generation, the ongoing act, the refusal of closure—these two, from their opposite origins, independently preserve. The resonance is real, and it is the more striking for being unforced: a Russian theory of the dialogic word and a classical Chinese verb of formation, with no line of influence between them, agree that the being of culture is generative.

Why the resonance has not been activated

Yet the resonance has never done the work it could do, and the reason is that each of its two poles possesses the insight without the means to develop it. The Chinese tradition holds the generative conception of culture in a vocabulary of great depth, but it does not bring to that conception the analytic apparatus the modern question of culture requires: it does not thematize drive and its lack, it does not articulate the registers of experience, and it does not carry a critique of the material and political conditions under which culture is produced and captured. It has the insight and not the analysis. The Western traditions, conversely, have built exactly these analytic instruments—the psychoanalysis of desire, the theory of the symbolic order, the political economy of cultural production—but have overwhelmingly put them at the service of the settled conception, using them to anatomize culture as a prior web, a deep structure, or a congealed order of power, and thereby burying the very generativity the dialogic strand alone, at the margin, kept alive. The West has the analysis and, mostly, not the insight. Each pole, in short, has half of what a complete account requires, and the two halves have never been joined, because joining them requires a framework that is neither simply Chinese nor simply Western, that can hold the generative conception of culture and the analytic apparatus of drive, register, and material condition in a single structure.

The framework as the activator

This is the office the next section's framework is built to perform, and naming that office is the business of this turn. The three-register dialectic of the relational Real is not offered as a reconciliation that splits the difference between East and West, nor as a synthesis that dissolves either into the other. It is offered as the apparatus that activates the resonance: a more fundamental ontology of relational generation within which each tradition's truth finds its place. The generative conception that the dialogic strand and the Chinese *hua* independently preserve becomes, within this framework, the basic character of culture as such—culture as the ongoing, unfinished exteriorization of a relational generativity. And the analytic instruments the West has built become the means of specifying *how* that generation works: drive as what is coded and sublimated in it, the three registers as the dimensions across which it is exteriorized, the material conditions as what constrains it, the phallic organization of the symbolic as where power enters it, and the counter-power of a just generation as what keeps that power from entrenching. The framework does not adjudicate between the traditions; it gives each its function within a generative ontology none of them, alone, possessed. With this office named, the thesis is complete and the antithesis can begin, not by adding a seventh view to the six,

but by stating the framework within which all six are to be reread and each assigned its truth and its limit.

10. The Three-Register Dialectic of the Relational Real

The antithesis does not proceed by adding a seventh theory to the six. It proceeds by stating the framework within which the six are to be reread, each granted its truth and shown its limit, and within which the resonance the previous section identified can at last be activated. This section states that framework. It is a variant of the Lacanian theory of the three registers, and it is arrived at by four determinate revisions of that theory, each of which will be set out with its definition, its difference from orthodox Lacan, its justification, its positive claim, and what it yields for the theory of culture. The framework is named, at the close, the *three-register dialectic of the relational Real*.

Why Lacan, and why revised

The choice of Lacan as the host theory is not eclectic but motivated by a single property: integrative capacity. The Lacanian triad of the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real is one of the few conceptual apparatuses that can hold, within a single structure, everything this paper must relate—the non-symbolizable ground of experience (the Real), the order of language, law, and meaning (the Symbolic), the field of image and identification (the Imaginary), the organization of power (through the phallic signifier within the Symbolic), the economy of drive and its lack (through the objet petit a and the constitutive lack), and the phenomenology of the subject's experience across all three [20, 22]. Each of the six traditions grasps one facet of this and absolutizes it: the interpretive tradition takes the Symbolic alone, the power tradition takes the Symbolic-as-power alone, the transmission tradition takes a sedimented Imaginary-and-Symbolic and freezes it. The virtue of the Lacanian triad is that it can house them all at once and show each as partial. That is the reason to adopt it. The reason to revise it is that, left orthodox, it is a theory of the individual subject and a static topology, and this paper needs a theory of culture, of relation, and of historical motion. The four revisions convert the one into the other.

Revision One: the Real has a neglected relational form

Definition. Orthodox Lacan gives the Real chiefly a negative and individual face: the Real is what resists symbolization absolutely, the traumatic remainder, the ineffable that the signifier cannot reach, encountered by the subject as the abyss around which anxiety turns [21]. The first revision does not deny this face. It claims that the Real has, besides its negative traumatic form, a *positive relational form*: the non-symbolizable coupling generated between two subjects, the “us” that no signifier exhausts, is Real in the precise sense that it exceeds symbolization, yet it is not a trauma and not an abyss but a bond. Both forms of the Real coexist; the revision recovers the second, which the tradition, fixed on the first, left in shadow.

Difference from orthodox Lacan. The revision is deliberately moderate. It does not assert that all Reality is relational, which would be a wholesale ontological reconstruction the paper does not need and would have to defend against every instance of purely individual traumatic Real. It asserts only that alongside the individual traumatic Real there is a relational Real, a positive unsymbolizable borne in the coupling of subjects. This is consonant with a claim developed elsewhere by the present author, that relation is the unsymbolizable in its positive form.

Justification. The interpretive tradition (§4) locks culture in the Symbolic, and the power tradition (§6) locks it in power, precisely because neither has a relational Real to appeal to. Something in intimate culture is neither a meaning nor an encoding of force—the unsayable, unownable “between” of two people—and only a relational Real can name it. *Claim.* The relational form of the Real is the non-symbolizable core of a relational coupling; it is the anchor of culture outside both sign and power, standing beside the traumatic Real rather than replacing it. *Cultural yield.* Endogenous culture has, in the register of the Real, a root that power—whose organ, the phallic signifier, operates in the Symbolic—cannot reach.

Revision Two: the Real is not *completely* symbolizable

Definition. The relational Real, like the traumatic Real, resists complete symbolization: it always leaves a remainder that no sign exhausts and no accounting captures. This revision is a deliberate *retention* of what orthodox Lacan gets right, imported as a discipline against a naive constructivism that would make culture wholly a matter of signs. *Difference from orthodox Lacan.* Almost none; the fidelity is the point.

Justification. Were the Real completely symbolizable, culture could in principle be fully encoded, fully captured, fully commodified, and the resistance that both experience and justice testify to would be unintelligible. The remainder must be preserved. *Claim.* The Real core of culture resists symbolization and therefore resists commodification: this is the ontological ground of what a later section calls the decoherence of capture—the symbolic surface of a bond can be forged and sold while its Real coherence is drawn off and lost, because the surface is symbolizable and the core is not. *Cultural yield.* Intimate culture cannot be completely captured by capital; the claim now has a ground in the structure of the Real rather than resting on sentiment.

Revision Three: culture spans all three registers, none dispensable

Definition. Culture is not a Symbolic phenomenon alone. Every cultural phenomenon is constituted *at once and necessarily* across the three registers: in the Imaginary (image, identification, the aesthetic face), in the Symbolic (language, rule, institution), and in the Real (the non-symbolizable relational core). A “culture” present in only one register is a mutilated abstraction; the presence in each register is substantial and non-derivative.

Difference from orthodox Lacan. The triad, in Lacan, structures the *subject*; here it structures *culture*, a relational object, extending the device as the intimacy series has already extended it to relational trust across the three registers. *Justification.* The transmission tradition seizes an

Imaginary-Symbolic sediment, the interpretive tradition the Symbolic web, the power tradition the Symbolic-as-power; each absolutizes one register. To span all three is the sublation of their several one-sidednesses. *Claim.* Culture has a substantial mode of being in each register; any theory that treats only one is partial. *Cultural yield.* This directly answers the power tradition (§6): if culture were only Symbolic, Foucault and Gramsci would win, for the phallic signifier organizes the Symbolic; but because culture has a substantial, non-derivative existence in the Real—where, by Revisions One and Two, a relational and non-symbolizable core resides—culture possesses an anchor the organ of power cannot reach, and is therefore not locked shut by power. This is the ground the sublation of power (§15) will stand on.

Revision Four: the three registers are not static but in materially driven, dialectical motion

Definition. In orthodox Lacan of the late topology, the three registers are knotted in a Borromean structure, a synchronic and relatively stable form in which each ring is necessary and none superior, the whole holding the subject together [19]. The fourth revision sets this structure into *motion*, and the motion has a determinate form with three components. The first is the *direct dialectic between the registers*: the Symbolic continually works to capture the Real—to name it, to rule it, to render the unsayable “between” into a sign, a rite, at the limit a commodity—while the Real continually overflows the Symbolic, exceeding every naming and returning as the remainder that requires a new form; the Imaginary is the mediating field and the battleground on which this contest is fought. The second is the *deep dialectical form*, Hegelian rather than merely oppositional: the three registers may be read as moments of a self-unfolding of relational spirit—the Imaginary as immediacy (the unmediated image, the specular identification), the Symbolic as mediation and determinate negation (the image cut and negated by the sign), the Real as the negation of the negation (what returns, after the failure of symbolization, as a higher unsymbolizable that is now a mediated Real and not the original one). The third is the *material motor*: this motion is not a self-movement of pure spirit, which would be idealism, but is driven by material conditions—which signifies the Symbolic has to capture the Real with, and in what form the Real overflows, are conditioned by the forces and relations of production, so that media determine the available symbolic forms and material conditions determine the possible forms of relation. This is the joint at which historical materialism and Lacan are welded: the dialectic of the registers has a material engine.

Difference from orthodox Lacan. The synchronic, relatively stable Borromean topology is converted into a diachronic, materially driven contradiction; the Real ceases to be a static resistant remainder and becomes an active moment that overflows and demands new symbolization.

Justification. A static triad yields the *structure* of culture but not its *history*. Only registers in materially driven contradiction, with the Real perpetually overflowing, can ground—ontologically—the claims that culture has no final truth, is never static, and develops.

Programmatic claim (a disciplined historical dialectic, not the slogan that culture has “no truth”): *The truth of culture is historical and non-terminal. Every cultural form is, under*

specific material conditions, one capture by the Symbolic of the relational Real, and is to be evaluated dialectically: one acknowledges its progressive significance under its own historical conditions, and one recognizes the limit it discloses when conditions change and the Real overflows anew. Culture therefore develops—not by converging on an absolute truth, but by the historical sublation of its own prior forms, through the materially driven motion of the three registers. To criticize a cultural form and to acknowledge its former progressiveness are two faces of one dialectical evaluation.

Cultural yield. Cultural evolution is the diachronic unfolding of this contradiction; every form is an incomplete capture of the relational Real; capital's commodification is the extreme form of Symbolic capture and necessarily meets the Real's resistance; the encoding of power likewise cannot lock culture shut. This revision supplies the ontological ground for the dialectical sublation of power (§15) and the dialectic of cultural evolution (§16). By way of illustration: in criticizing an old culture—a rite, a hierarchy of rank—one nonetheless acknowledges, dialectically, its progressive meaning under the conditions that produced it.

The position, and the chain it unlocks

Taken together the four revisions constitute a nameable position, the *three-register dialectic of the relational Real*: a Lacanian variant in which the Real is granted a relational form, in which that Real remains not completely symbolizable, in which culture spans all three registers without any being dispensable, and in which the registers move in a materially driven dialectic. The position unlocks a single chain that is the theoretical spine of the whole paper: the dialectic of the three registers means the Real perpetually overflows the Symbolic; because the Real overflows, culture cannot be locked shut by either power or capital, both of which operate by Symbolic capture; because it cannot be locked shut, culture can develop historically and dialectically; and because its development is bound at once by the resistance of the Real and by the criterion of justice, it has direction without a terminus—no final truth, but not mere drift either. Along this chain the psychoanalytic line is promoted from a mere “ground in drive” to the very skeleton of the framework, the three registers, within which drive, power, and the Real each find their place; and along this same chain the lines of historical materialism and of the Hegelian dialectic are welded to that skeleton, the one as the material motor of the registers' motion, the other as its form. With the framework stated, the antithesis can do its proper work: expose the presupposition the six traditions share, and invert it.

11. The Shared Presupposition and Its Inversion

With the framework stated, the antithesis can do the work the map assigned it: to draw the traditions from their several coordinates toward the vacant one. It does this not by refuting each in turn, which would be tedious and would miss what unites them, but by exposing the single presupposition they share beneath their disagreements and inverting it. The six traditions dispute almost everything—whether culture is a whole or a web or a structure or an encoding of power, whether it means or reproduces or dominates—but underneath the dispute

they agree, with the partial exception of the two that lean toward the generative, on one thing: that culture is, in its mode of being, a *thing already made*. An acquirable heritage, a prior web of meaning, a deep structure operating behind the agents' backs, a congealed order of power into which subjects are inducted—each of these is a culture that stands *before* the individual, who enters it, bears it, is formed or dominated by it, but does not, in the analysis, make it. The individual is the container of culture or its effect, never, at the moment the theory looks, its generating source.

The inversion

The framework of the previous section inverts this presupposition at its root. Culture is not a prior object into which individuals are inducted; it is a process that relational subjects continually generate in their coupling. It is not a web the individual falls into but a weaving the relation performs, and—this is the decisive addition—a weaving that turns back to weave the relation in its turn, so that the subjects who generate the culture are themselves generated, as these subjects, by the culture they generate. The priority the six traditions grant to the made-thing over the making is exactly reversed: the making is primary, and the made-thing, the sedimented culture that the traditions take for the whole, is the residue the making leaves behind and the material the next round of making takes up. What the transmission tradition called an acquirable stock is the ash of a fire it never watched burn; what the interpretive tradition called a web already spun is a weaving caught at a late moment and mistaken for a finished textile; what the structural tradition called a deep structure behind the agents is the sedimented regularity of a generation the agents are even now carrying on.

This inversion is, in its logical form, the Hegelian moment the second line of the paper supplies, and naming it as such shows that the inversion is not a mere reversal of emphasis but a determinate movement. Culture is spirit exteriorized: the relation goes out of itself into a visible, sedimented form—a word, a rite, an institution—and this going-out is not the loss the traditions implicitly treat it as, a congealing of living process into dead thing, but the necessary path by which the relation comes to know itself. The exteriorized culture is the relation's self-objectification, in which it can see what it has become and from which it returns to itself altered, entering the next round of generation already changed by having beheld its own work. The sedimented forms the traditions describe are real, then, and the inversion does not deny them; it relocates them, as moments in a movement, from the status of the thing culture *is* to the status of the residue culture *leaves* and the mirror in which it knows itself. Exteriorization, not as fall but as self-knowledge: this is the form of the inversion, and it is why the paper can keep everything the traditions correctly saw while denying the priority they granted it.

What is kept and what is discarded

The inversion is not a wholesale rejection, and fairness to the traditions requires that its takings and leavings be stated exactly. Each tradition saw something real; the framework keeps the seeing and discards only the presupposition of the made-thing's priority. The table records

this, tradition by tradition.

Tradition	Kept (absorbed)	Discarded / sublated
Transmission & collective representation	transmissibility and sedimentation are real features of culture	its <i>static, already-made</i> mode of being
Symbol & interpretation	culture is a web of meaning, relational, read by thick description	the absolutizing of the Symbolic; meaning as prior to the subjects
Structure & reproduction	culture does reproduce and does have structure	the <i>extractable / transferable</i> premise of cultural capital
Power as ontology	power is internal to all culture (the anti-naïve lesson)	sublated: that culture <i>is</i> Symbolic power-encoding with no outside
The dialogic (Bakhtin)	<i>kept most</i> : dialogism, unfinishedness, generation in answering	only what it lacks is added—drive, the registers, the material ground
The Chinese <i>wen-hua</i>	the verbal, generative force of <i>hua</i> ; process before product	its historical entanglement with a cultivation imposed from above

Read across, the table shows that the dialogic strand is the framework's near kin, from which most is taken, and the power tradition the one that is not discarded but *sublated*—its clear-eyed insistence that power is internal to all culture is kept in full, while its conclusion that culture is therefore nothing but Symbolic power-encoding, with no outside, is negated by the relational Real that the framework installs in a register power cannot reach. The remaining three each surrender only the presupposition of the already-made, in the specific form each gave it: the frozen heritage, the pre-spun web, the extractable asset. With the shared presupposition inverted and each tradition's truth reassigned its place, the antithesis can proceed from this general reversal to the two specific developments the framework demands: the account of culture as the exteriorization of drive, and the dialectic of the material and the ideal on which the whole rests.

12. Culture as the Exteriorization and Organization of Drive

The general inversion must now be given its content, and the first content is the one the psychoanalytic line supplies: that what culture exteriorizes is, at bottom, *drive*. The interpretive tradition began to show, without following it through, that the symbolic order into which the subject is inducted opens a constitutive lack; the framework of the registers lets that beginning be completed. Culture is not the exteriorization of a neutral content, a stock of meanings that might just as well have been otherwise. It is the exteriorization of drive: the giving of a transmissible, shareable form to what in the subject presses toward satisfaction and can never simply attain it, what circles the constitutive lack without filling it. This is the deepest sense in which culture is generated rather than given—it is generated out of the drive's need to find, in the field of the Other, forms through which it can circulate—and it is the sense the settled

traditions, working at the level of meaning or structure or power, could not reach, because the drive is precisely what does not appear at the level of meaning taken alone.

Coding and sublimation

Two operations name how drive becomes culture. The first is *coding*: the drive, which is not itself sayable, is given form in the signifier, and the whole apparatus of the symbolic order is, seen from this angle, the coding by which an unsayable pressure is rendered into a circulable sign. What the interpretive tradition saw as a web of meaning is, from the side of the drive, the coded deposit of a desire that had to find some form or remain mute. The second is *sublimation*, in the precise sense Lacan gave it: the raising of an object to the dignity of the Thing, the investment of a made object—a work, a rite, a phrase—with the weight of that lost and impossible object around which the drive turns [21]. Sublimation is the operation by which the drive's relation to its impossible object is given a cultural body: the poem, the ritual, the shared practice is a sublimation in this sense, an object lifted into the place of the Thing, and this is why cultural forms carry a charge out of all proportion to their manifest content. They are not decorated meanings; they are the drive's impossible object, given a form in which it can be approached without being seized. Culture, coded and sublimated, is the drive's exteriorization into a form that can be shared and handed on.

Shared fantasy: the interweaving in the couple

It is in intimate relation that this account reaches its sharpest and most distinctive form, and the distinction is the seed of the whole second part of the paper. Orthodox psychoanalysis writes the subject's relation to its object in the formula of fantasy, the barred subject in relation to the objet petit a, the object-cause of desire that veils the constitutive lack and lets desire run [20]. In intimate relation this structure is not doubled side by side, as though each partner ran a private fantasy in parallel; it is *interwoven*. Each becomes implicated in the other's fantasy, enters the place of the other's objet a, so that the object-cause around which each one's desire turns is no longer wholly private but is bound up with, and partly occupied by, the other. The private culture of a couple—its idioms, its private jokes, its rites—is the sediment of this interwoven fantasy. A private joke is funny to exactly two people because its charge is anchored in a shared coordinate of desire that only those two occupy; translated to a third, it is not diminished but simply absent, because the third does not stand in the fantasy that gives it its charge. This is the psychoanalytic mechanism of the *non-transferability* the paper claimed against Bourdieu's cultural capital: the couple's culture cannot be handed over, not by an accident of privacy, but because its value is lodged in an interweaving of drive that does not exist outside the relation and cannot be carried out of it. What is transferred, if the outer form is copied, is a shell without its charge—the words of the joke without the desire that made them funny.

The reciprocal turn: culture organizes the drive that generates it

The account would be incomplete, and would fall back into a one-way determination, if it stopped at the drive generating culture. The relation runs both ways, and the reciprocity is essential. Culture is generated by drive and *in turn organizes* the drive that generated it. The idioms and rites a couple make do not merely record a pre-existing structure of desire; they shape it, channel it, give it paths it did not have before, so that the desire of each is progressively formed by the culture the two of them generate. This is the drive-level correlate of the Hegelian return of the previous section: the exteriorized culture comes back to constitute the subjects whose drive exteriorized it. A shared rite does not only express the bond; it deepens and directs the desire that sustains the bond, so that the partners come to want along the channels their shared culture has cut. Culture is thus neither the mere expression of a prior drive nor an autonomous order imposed on drive from without, but the exteriorized form in which drive organizes itself, through the detour of a shared world, into something more determinate than it was.

The material constraint on the forms of fantasy

Here the historical-materialist line enters, to forbid the account from floating free into a pure psychology of desire. The forms in which drive can be coded, the objects that can be raised to the dignity of the Thing, the shared fantasies a couple can weave, are not arbitrary and not unconditioned. They are constrained by material conditions: by the media available to give the drive a form (what can be written, recorded, shown, sent), and by the relations of production that shape which fantasies are livable and which are foreclosed. A shared culture built around objects a market supplies is a different exteriorization of drive from one built around objects the two people make, and which is possible for a given couple is not a free choice but a fact about their material world. The economy of the drive and the economy of production are joined here, at the point where the forms available for the exteriorization of desire are set by the material conditions of a time. This joining is stated now and developed in Part Three, where the capture of intimate culture by capital is shown to operate precisely by supplying, and thereby colonizing, the forms in which the couple's drive would otherwise have found its own exteriorization. For now the point is only that the drive does not exteriorize itself into culture in a vacuum, and that the psychoanalytic account of culture, to be true, must be a materially conditioned one.

13. The Dialectic of the Material and the Ideal

The antithesis closes with the dialectic on which the whole framework balances, and which the two preceding sections have each leaned on without stating: the relation between the material and the ideal in culture. The account of culture as the exteriorization of drive, and before it the inversion that made culture a generation rather than a deposit, both require that culture be at once produced by material conditions and irreducible to them—an ideal form with its own efficacy, yet never floating free of the material ground that conditions it. This double

requirement is the site of the two vulgarizations the paper must refuse, and refusing both is what its position on the material and the ideal amounts to.

Two vulgarizations refused

The first vulgarization is *mechanical determinism*: the reduction of culture to a passive reflection of the economic base, a mere epiphenomenon that registers material conditions and does nothing back. On this view the culture a couple generates would be simply the shadow their material circumstances cast, and to explain the circumstances would be to explain the culture entirely. This is the error against which Engels warned in his later correspondence, and the warning is worth stating in his own terms because it is often forgotten by those who invoke historical materialism most loudly. The ultimately determining element in history, Engels wrote to Bloch in 1890, is the production and reproduction of real life; but to twist this into the claim that the economic element is the *only* determining one is to transform the proposition into a meaningless, abstract, senseless phrase [12]. The economic situation is the base, but the elements of the superstructure exert their own influence on the course of struggles and in many cases preponderate in determining their *form*. Culture, that is, has a *relative autonomy* and a genuine reciprocal action upon the conditions that produce it; it is determined in the last instance, not in the first, and the space between the last instance and the first is exactly the space in which culture does its own work. This relative autonomy is not a concession that weakens the materialist thesis; it is what gives the thesis a culture worth explaining rather than a shadow.

The second vulgarization is the opposite error, *idealism*: the treatment of culture as a self-generating order of meaning or spirit that spins itself out of its own resources, owing nothing essential to the material conditions of its production. This is the error the Hegelian line of the paper, taken alone, would tempt one toward—for if culture is spirit exteriorizing and knowing itself, one might forget that the exteriorization is always into a material medium and under material constraint, and imagine a self-movement of pure relational spirit generating culture out of itself. The framework refuses this as firmly as it refuses the first error. The dialectic of the registers has a material motor, as the meta-theoretical statement insisted: which signifiers are available to capture the Real, which fantasies are livable, which forms the drive can take, are set by the forces and relations of production, and no movement of the registers occurs except in and through a material medium that conditions it.

The dialectical position: constrained but not determined

Between these two refusals stands the position the paper holds throughout, and it can now be stated as a thesis about the material and the ideal as such: culture is *materially constrained but not materially determined*. The distinction is not a verbal hedge but the precise content of the dialectic, and it is the same distinction the intimacy series has maintained in its treatments of trust and of power, that a condition may bound a range of possibility without selecting a point within it. Material conditions set what is possible—they fix the outer limits of the forms culture can take, foreclose some exteriorizations of drive and enable others, supply the media

and the relations within which any cultural generation must occur—and within those limits the generation is genuinely open, genuinely the work of the relational subjects whose drive and history it exteriorizes, and genuinely capable of reacting back upon the conditions that bounded it. The material is the floor and the walls; it is not the choreography. To say culture is constrained is to deny idealism: there is no cultural generation that escapes its material conditions, and the couple that imagines its private world a pure creation owing nothing to its circumstances is deceived. To say culture is not determined is to deny mechanism: the material conditions do not select which culture will be generated within the range they permit, and the couple's generation is a real generation and not the mere playing-out of a material script. Both denials are needed, and holding them together is the dialectic.

Why this closes the antithesis

This dialectic closes the antithesis because it secures, at the level of the material and the ideal, exactly what the whole antithesis was for. The inversion made culture a generation; the account of drive gave the generation its content; and this dialectic gives the generation its correct relation to the material world, neither cut loose from it into idealism nor collapsed into it as its shadow. It is on this basis that the synthesis can define cultural emergence in a way that is at once materialist—bound to the forces and relations of production, historical rather than eternal—and non-reductive—a real generation with its own efficacy, carrying the exteriorized drive of relational subjects across the three registers. The synthesis can now be stated, for the ground it requires is complete: an inversion of the shared presupposition, a psychoanalytic account of what culture exteriorizes, and a dialectic of the material and the ideal that keeps the exteriorization honest. The definition of the emergence of culture in intimate relation follows.

14. The Emergence of Culture in Intimate Relation: A Definition

The synthesis can now state its definition. The thesis surveyed the traditions and mapped their common presupposition; the antithesis inverted that presupposition, gave the inversion its content in the exteriorization of drive, and secured it in a dialectic of the material and the ideal, all within the framework of the three-register dialectic of the relational Real. What these yield, gathered into a single formulation, is a definition of what culture is and how it emerges—general in its statement, and about to be made special, in the second part, to the intimate dyad from which the paper takes its name.

The definition

Definition. *Culture*, in its mode of being, is generated as the dialectical exteriorization, by relational subjects and under the constraint of material conditions, of their interwoven structure of drive and their shared history of generation, into transmissible and re-enactable forms—idioms, rites, private references, understandings—across the three registers of the imaginary,

the symbolic, and the real; a generation that, returning upon the relation that carries it, organizes and sustains that relation in turn.

Every clause of this definition carries a result established earlier, and the definition is best read by unfolding them. *The dialectical exteriorization*: culture is spirit going out of itself into a visible form and returning altered, the Hegelian movement of §11, not a deposit laid down once but a going-out that is a coming-to-self. *By relational subjects*: the unit is neither the individual nor the collectivity but the relation, the coupling in which and for which the culture is made; this is the coordinate the map left vacant and the framework filled. *Under the constraint of material conditions*: the exteriorization is materially constrained but not materially determined, bounded in its range by the forces and relations of production and open within that range, the dialectic of §13. *Of their interwoven structure of drive*: what is exteriorized is drive, coded and sublimated, and in intimate relation the drive of the two is interwoven rather than parallel, so that the culture is the sediment of a shared fantasy, the result of §12. *And their shared history of generation*: culture is not only the exteriorization of a present structure but the sedimentation of a history, the accumulated record of what the relation has generated, folded into forms that can be taken up again. *Into transmissible and re-enactable forms*: the sedimented side the traditions correctly saw is preserved here, as the residue and the material of generation rather than its whole—the idiom that can be repeated, the rite that can be performed again. *Across the three registers*: the forms are not symbolic only but imaginary, symbolic, and real at once, none dispensable, per the third revision; the culture lives as image and identification, as language and rule, and as the non-symbolizable relational core. *At once generated by the relation and, returning upon it, organizes and sustains it*: the reciprocal turn, in which the exteriorized culture comes back to form the very subjects and shape the very drive that generated it, so that culture is not a product the relation has but a process by which the relation continues to be what it is.

What the definition distinguishes and secures

Two distinctions the definition draws are worth making explicit, because the rest of the paper turns on them. The first distinguishes culture from the aesthetic field treated in the preceding paper of this series. The aesthetic, there, was the field of present perception, the beauty generated in the relational event of a shared seeing; culture, here, is what that field becomes when it is sedimented over time and made transmissible and re-enactable—the aesthetic field’s temporal sedimentation and passage into form. Beauty is generated in the moment of shared perception; culture is generated when such moments deposit into idioms and rites that can be carried forward, so that culture stands to the aesthetic field as the sedimented and repeatable stands to the present and singular. This locates the present paper exactly with respect to its predecessor: where that paper asked how a relation generates present beauty, this one asks how a relation generates a durable world.

The second distinction concerns scale, and it must be stated with the caution the paper has

reserved for it. The definition is general; it is meant to hold of culture as such, at any scale. But the paper claims only a *weak analogy*, not a structural identity, between the micro-culture of the intimate dyad and the macro-culture of a people or a symbolic order. The mechanism of emergence—relational subjects exteriorizing interwoven drive and shared history across the registers, under material constraint—may be stated generally, and the general statement illuminates both scales. But the specific features that make the intimate dyad the paper’s subject, above all the vacancy of the big Other and the two-person structure that the second part will develop, do not scale up: a people has a full big Other in its traditions and institutions, where a couple has none, and the analogy between the scales must therefore be drawn as an illumination and not pressed into an identity. The definition holds generally; the phenomenology that follows is of the special case, and the special case is special in ways the general definition does not capture. It is to that special case—the emergence of culture in the intimate dyad, in its irreducible particularity—that the paper now turns, and it is there, and not in the general definition just stated, that the paper means to make its distinctive contribution.

15. The Dialectical Sublation of Power

The synthesis has stated its definition, but it has not yet discharged the debt the thesis left it. The strongest of the traditions, the one that held power to be the very ontology of culture, raised an objection before the paper’s central claim was even made: that there is no outside, no site free of power from which an endogenous culture could be generated, and that the claim of a private world between two people is therefore a naivety, since the intimacy in which the couple would build it is already shot through with the phallic organization of power (§6). This objection must be met before the phenomenology of intimate culture can proceed, and it must be met, as promised, not by denial but by sublation—by conceding what is true in it and turning that concession into the ground of a different answer.

The concession

The concession is total and unhedged: power *is* internal to all culture. The paper does not claim that intimate relation is a sanctuary outside power, a pure space where two people generate a culture untouched by domination. This would be exactly the naivety the power tradition diagnosed, and the framework of the previous sections forbids it, for the same reason the tradition gives: culture spans the symbolic, the symbolic is organized by the phallic signifier, and the phallic signifier is the organ of power within the symbolic order. A culture that spans the symbolic therefore carries power in its very constitution. More than this: the process of generation itself produces power. Wherever value is generated, an asymmetry of contribution, of recognition, of dependence, is generated with it, and this asymmetry is power in its elementary form. There is no generation of culture, not even between two people who love each other, that does not generate power along with it. The psychoanalytic clear-sightedness the tradition shares—that there is no pure emancipatory space because there is no system of production and relation not already traversed by power—is accepted in full. Intimate relation generates power as surely as it generates culture, because generating the one is generating the other.

The turn: the objection was already answered by the fourth principle

But the concession, which looks like a surrender, is the pivot of the reply, for the generation of power was already provided for in the ethics this series built before the objection was raised. The fourth of the five principles of just relational reproduction states that, since the generation of value carries power, a just generation must in the same movement generate the *counter-power* that restrains power and prevents its entrenchment [30]. The objection assumed that to concede power's internality was to concede the game—that if power is everywhere, then the dominated is everywhere and the endogenous culture is a fold of domination like any other. The fourth principle denies the inference. That power is internal to all generation does not entail that all generation is unjust; it entails that the justice of a generation lies not in the absence of power, which is impossible, but in whether the same process that generates power also generates the force that keeps that power from congealing. The question is not *whether* there is power in the couple's culture—there always is—but whether the culture generates, alongside its power, the counter-power that prevents that power from entrenching into fixed domination. Justice is not purity; it is the internal generation of the restraint.

The mechanics: friction and the force that changes direction

The mechanism can be given a form, and a mechanical image makes it exact. Power entering culture is like a body set moving on a surface. One cannot abolish the surface—one cannot generate culture without generating power, as one cannot have motion without a ground. But justice requires two forces to act upon the moving body. The first is a *friction*, a counter-force that resists the unlimited accumulation of power and prevents it from running away into entrenched domination; without it, power accelerates along whatever gradient it finds and congeals into a fixed hierarchy, and the culture degrades into a mere reproduction of that hierarchy—the naturalized rank, the settled hegemony the power tradition described. The second is a *force that changes direction*, a counter-force of non-entrenchment that keeps the structure re-orientable, able to be turned and re-formed rather than locked onto a single axis of authority. A culture with neither force is a body sliding down the gradient of its own power, and this is the fate the power tradition took for the destiny of all culture. A culture that generates both forces—friction against accumulation, and the power to change direction against fixation—is a culture in which power is present but not entrenched, exercised but not congealed. The two forces are not imported from outside the relation; they are generated within it, by the same process that generates the culture and its power, when that process is just.

The ontological deepening of power-to and power-over

This gives the distinction between power-over and power-to, which an earlier paper of this series drew, an ontological depth it did not yet have [32]. That distinction is often heard as a contrast between a bad power that dominates and a good power that enables, as though power-to were simply the absence of power-over, a benign capacity with no coercive edge. The present account shows that this is not quite right, and that the truth is stronger. Power-to is not the absence of power; it is power whose accumulation is met by an internally generated friction and

whose direction is kept open by an internally generated force of re-orientation. Endogenous intimate culture is not a culture *without* power—no culture is—but a culture in which power is *non-dominating*, held in the condition of power-to by the continual internal generation of its own counter-power. The difference between a couple whose shared culture liberates and one whose shared culture dominates is not that the first has escaped power and the second has not; it is that the first generates, with its power, the friction and the re-orientation that keep the power from entrenching, and the second does not. With this, the objection of the power tradition is not evaded but answered on its own ground: yes, power is internal to all culture, including the most intimate; and precisely because the intimacy series built, into its ethics of relational reproduction, the requirement that just generation generate its own counter-power, the internality of power is not the end of the endogenous but the condition it must meet. The phenomenology of intimate culture can now proceed, no longer under the shadow of an objection it has not answered.

16. The Dialectic of Cultural Evolution

One question remains before the synthesis is complete and the paper can descend into the intimate dyad: how culture, so defined, *changes*. The definition gave culture's mode of being and the sublation of power secured its justice, but a culture that is generation rather than deposit must have an account of its own movement through time, and that account must avoid two opposite errors as carefully as the dialectic of the material and the ideal avoided its two. This section gives the dialectic of cultural evolution, and in giving it completes both the synthesis and the Hegelian line that has run through the whole part.

Two errors about cultural change

The first error is the model of *linear progress*: the idea, inherited from the evolutionary anthropology that stands behind the very first tradition, that culture develops along a single ascending track from lower to higher forms, each stage an advance on the last, the whole tending toward a terminus of completion or truth. This is the error that reads the history of culture as a march, and it is refused by everything the paper has established: if the truth of culture is historical and non-terminal, if every cultural form is one materially conditioned capture of a Real that overflows it, then there is no single track and no terminus, and the notion of a highest culture toward which all others are steps is a projection of one form's self-image onto the whole of history. The second error is the opposite: the model of *mere reproduction*, the pessimistic determinism that reads cultural change as no change at all, only the endless recirculation of a power order that reproduces itself under cosmetic variation, so that what looks like development is always the same domination in a new dress. This is the error to which the power tradition, taken without its dialectical corrective, tends: if culture is nothing but the encoding of power, then its history is nothing but the reproduction of power, and the appearance of the new is an illusion. The first error sees only ascent; the second sees only the wheel. Both miss the actual movement, which is neither a line nor a circle but a dialectic.

Evolution as the contradiction of power-generation and counter-power-generation

The actual movement can be stated as a contradiction, and it is the contradiction the previous section prepared. Cultural evolution is the movement of *power-generation against counter-power-generation*. Every cultural form, in generating value, generates power, and that power tends toward entrenchment—toward congealing into a fixed order, a hierarchy naturalized, a hegemony settled. This is the moment of truth in the reproduction model: left to itself, the generation of culture would indeed tend toward the reproduction of an entrenching power. But the generation of power is met, in a just generation, by the internal generation of counter-power, the friction and the re-orientation of the previous section; and this counter-power is the negation that the entrenching power calls forth from within the same process. The culture generates the power; the power tends to entrench; the generation, if just, generates against its own entrenching power a counter-power that negates the entrenchment; and this negation, in turn, opens the culture to a new form, which generates its own power, which tends to entrench, which calls forth its own counter-power, and so on. This is not a line, because it does not ascend toward a terminus; it is not a circle, because the counter-power does not return the culture to where it began but opens it to a form that did not exist before. It is a spiral of determinate negation, and its motor, as always in this paper, is material: which powers entrench and which counter-powers can be generated against them are set by the forces and relations of production, so that the dialectic of cultural evolution is a materially driven contradiction and not a self-movement of spirit.

The negation of the negation, materialized

This is the point at which the Hegelian line of the paper reaches its completion, and it should be named as such. The movement just described is the negation of the negation, the deepest figure of the dialectic, here given a material body and a cultural content. The first negation is the entrenchment of power: the generated culture goes out of itself into a power that congeals, that stands over against the generativity that produced it, that threatens to fix the living relation into a dead hierarchy—the moment of estrangement, of exteriorization become domination. The second negation, the negation of this negation, is the counter-power generated from within: not a return to an original innocence before power, which never existed, but a determinate negation of the entrenchment that carries the culture forward to a new form, a form that preserves what the entrenched power had generated while negating its fixity. Estrangement is thus not the end of the story, as the reproduction model would have it, but a moment in a movement that passes through it; the exteriorized culture that has become a dominating power can be negated in its turn and taken up into a form in which the relation reclaims what its own power had captured. This is why the paper can hold, at once, that power is internal to all culture and that culture is not doomed to the reproduction of domination: because the internality of power is the first negation, and the internal generation of counter-power is the second, and the second is as native to a just generation as the first is to generation as such.

Evaluating a culture historically

From this follows the mode of evaluation the fourth revision announced, and stating it completes the synthesis. A cultural form is to be evaluated neither by its distance along a track of progress nor by its mere function in reproducing power, but dialectically, by its place in this movement. One asks of a form both what it generated and how its power stood: whether, under the material conditions that produced it, it was a genuine advance, a capture of the Real that let the relation generate more than it could before—and whether the power it generated was met by a counter-power or allowed to entrench. The same form may be, under its own conditions, a real progress, and, when conditions change and the Real it captured overflows anew, a fetter to be negated. To criticize an old cultural form and to acknowledge its former progressiveness are therefore, as the programmatic claim held, two faces of one dialectical evaluation: the form was the negation its moment required, and it becomes, in a later moment, the negation to be negated.

From this the paper draws a fourth thesis of its own, a criterion of cultural persistence that stands alongside the geometric criterion of the good cycle developed earlier in the series. Call it the *counter-power criterion*: whether a cultural form can continue to generate across a change in the conditions that produced it turns on whether it generates, endogenously, a counter-power against the power it itself carries. A form that transmits its power without transmitting the means of that power's revision entrenches, and when its conditions change it passes from a form that generated into a form that fetters; a form that carries, with its power, a counter-power that keeps that power open to re-orientation can be turned to conditions its authors did not foresee, and so continues to generate where the rigid form breaks. The criterion does not equate persistence with the presence of counter-power, as though the one were the other; it holds that the endogenous generation of counter-power is what conditions the possibility of persistence through change, the difference between a form that bends and a form that breaks. It is the temporal and evolutionary counterpart, at the scale of a culture's history, of the requirement the sublation of power stated for a culture's justice: the just culture generates the counter-power that keeps its power from entrenching, and the persisting culture is the one whose counter-power lets it be re-oriented rather than broken when its moment passes.

This is the disciplined historical eye the paper has claimed throughout, neither the celebration of a march nor the cynicism of the wheel, but the evaluation of each form by its place in a materially driven spiral that has direction without a terminus. With this, the synthesis is complete: culture is defined, its power is answered, and its evolution is given its dialectic. The general ontology and epistemology of cultural emergence are established, and the paper turns to the particular for which the general was built—the emergence of culture in the intimate dyad.

Part Two Phenomenology: Cultural Phenomena in Intimate Relation

17. Intimate Relation as a Special Site of Cultural Emergence

The first part established what culture is and how it emerges, in general. This part turns to the site for which the general account was built and from which this series takes its name: the intimate relation between two people. The turn is not a change of subject but a descent from the universal to the particular that both instances it and exceeds it, and the descent is the heart of the paper. For if the general ontology of the first part is right, then the intimate dyad is not merely one instance of cultural emergence among others, a small example of a large phenomenon; it is the *minimal and most exposed* instance, the smallest system in which a culture can arise at all, and therefore the site at which the mechanism of emergence, buried elsewhere under institutions and centuries, can be watched almost as it happens. The disproportion the introduction noted—that a philosophy of intimacy should have discussed culture in general at such length and the intimate case so little—is corrected here, and corrected deliberately, for the general was the long approach and the particular is the destination.

Why the dyad is a special site, not merely a small one

It would be possible to treat the intimate dyad as simply a culture in miniature, subject to the same account as any other culture only at a smaller scale, and to read off its features by shrinking the features of macro-culture. This is exactly what the paper does *not* do, and the refusal is the methodological hinge of the whole part. The dyad is not a small culture; it is a *special* one, possessed of structural features that belong to it alone and appear in no larger cultural formation, features that do not scale up and cannot be derived by shrinking the large. The reason was given, in outline, at the close of the definition: the mechanism of emergence may be stated generally, but the specific conditions under which it operates in the dyad—above all the absence of any external authority to fix meaning, and the two-person structure itself—have no counterpart at the scale of a people, which possesses a full apparatus of traditions and institutions where the couple possesses nothing but the two of them. The dyad is therefore special in the strict sense: not a reduced version of the general case, but a case with its own irreducible mechanisms, which the general account illuminates but does not exhaust. To describe those mechanisms is the work of this part, and it is where the paper means to make its distinctive contribution, for these mechanisms have not, to the author's knowledge, been gathered and named as the mechanisms of a culture.

The five pillars

Five such features organize the phenomenology that follows, and they are named here in advance so that their treatment is read as the articulation of a single structure rather than a list of observations. The first is *the dyad and the vacant big Other*: the intimate relation is

the minimal cultural unit, two people with no external third—no tradition, no institution, no majority—to fix the meaning of what they generate, so that the two must serve as each other’s symbolic authority, which is at once what makes their private culture possible and what makes it fragile. The second is *the double interweaving of drive*: the two structures of desire are not parallel but mutually implicated, each entering the other’s fantasy, so that the culture they generate is the sediment of an interweaving that exists nowhere outside the relation. The third is *high-density sedimentation*: the density of shared living—daily, bodily, high in frequency and long in duration—lets intimate culture sediment at a speed no other cultural formation approaches, so that one can almost watch a private form come into being. The fourth is *the special configuration of the three registers*: in intimate relation the imaginary, the symbolic, and the real are configured with a closeness and intensity found in no other cultural site, so that the three-register account of the first part reaches here its fullest embodiment. The fifth is *fragility and reversibility*: an intimate culture can collapse entire, in a way a macro-culture cannot, because its whole existence depends on the continued participation of exactly two people, and this fragility is the price of the very features that make it possible.

Method: a return to the phenomena

One methodological commitment governs this part, and it should be stated before the description begins. The first part was theoretical; it argued, mapped, defined. This part suspends that posture, as far as it can, and returns to the phenomena themselves—to intimate culture as it is actually lived, experienced, and understood, before it is theorized. This is the phenomenological *epoché* in the modest sense the paper can honor: a bracketing of the theoretical apparatus so that the mechanisms may be allowed to show themselves from the phenomena rather than be deduced from the framework. The framework of the first part is not abandoned—it is what lets the phenomena be understood once they have shown themselves—but it is held back at the moment of description, so that the account earns its mechanisms from the lived material and does not merely stamp the general theory onto a smaller case. The order of the part follows this commitment: first the epistemology of intimate culture, how such culture is known and by whom; then its mechanisms, the five pillars in their working; then its hermeneutics, how the meaning of intimate culture is interpreted, and how, at its edge, it is drawn back into negotiation with the outer symbolic order, which returns the particular to the general and opens the way to the ethics and political economy of the final part. The description begins with the phenomena as they are given, and asks first not what they are but how they are known.

18. The Description of Private-Cultural Phenomena

The description begins with the phenomena themselves, and they are so familiar that their strangeness is easily missed. Any relation of sufficient depth generates, over time, a texture of forms that belong to it and to no one else, and the first task is simply to see this texture for what it is: a culture, in the full sense the first part gave the word, generated between two people and bearing every mark the definition named, only at the smallest scale and with the greatest intimacy. The phenomena are small and are usually beneath notice precisely because

they are so intimate, but catalogued plainly they compose an unmistakable cultural whole.

The inventory

There is, first, a *private lexicon*: words that mean, between these two, what they mean nowhere else. A word coined for a thing that has no public name; a public word bent to a private sense; a mispronunciation kept on purpose until it becomes the right pronunciation; a name for a mood, a look, a recurring situation, that the two of them share and no dictionary holds. There are *private references*: the compressed allusion to a shared past event, a place, a person, a disaster, a joke, that carries in a word or a glance a whole history the two of them lived and no one else was present for. There are *inside jokes*, which are private references raised to the pitch of the comic, a charge that discharges in laughter for exactly two people and is inert for any third. There are *private names*, the appellations the two use for each other that no one else uses and that would sound wrong, even faintly transgressive, in another mouth—the diminutive, the epithet, the animal or the object that has become, between them, a name. There are *micro-rites*: the small repeated ceremonies of a shared life, the particular way a departure or a return or a nightfall is marked, the gesture that must be made or the phrase that must be said, whose omission is felt as a wrongness though no external rule requires it. And there are *understandings*: the wordless coordinations, the shared silences that are not empty but full of a determinate content both parties read, the glance across a room that communicates a complete judgement, the gesture that means, to these two, a paragraph. Taken together these are not a scattering of habits; they are the imaginary, symbolic, and real substance of a culture—the images and identifications, the coded signs, and the unsayable “between”—in the concentrated form the dyad alone produces.

How they are given: the first- and second-person structure

What is most distinctive about these phenomena is not their content but the *structure of their givenness*, and it is here that the phenomenology begins to disclose the mechanisms the later sections will name. These forms are given only in the first- and second-person: they exist as, and only as, *our* idiom, spoken by *me* to *you* and understood by you as from me. They have no third-person mode of existence in which they could be surveyed from outside without loss, because their meaning is not a content lodged in them but a charge that exists only in the circuit between the two who share them. This is not true of macro-cultural forms in the same way. A national custom, a public rite, a widely shared idiom has a third-person existence: an outsider can learn it, describe it, come to understand what it means to those who practise it, and though something of the lived sense may escape the outsider, the form itself is there to be studied in the third person, a public object. The private forms of an intimate culture are different in kind. There is no third-person standpoint from which the charge of an inside joke can be observed, because the charge *is* the circuit between the two, and to stand outside the circuit is not to see the charge imperfectly but not to be in its presence at all. The outsider does not understand the private form less well than the two; the outsider is simply not one of the two for whom alone it is a form. This is why the phenomena are given in the first and

second person irreducibly: they are addressed, they live in address, and an addressed meaning surveyed from the position of a non-addressee has ceased to be the thing it was.

The temporality of the forms

One further feature of the phenomena must be marked before their knowing is taken up, because it will matter for the mechanism of sedimentation. These forms have a distinctive *temporality*: each of them was, at some moment, *new*, and became, over some stretch of shared time, *settled*, and the passage from the new to the settled is short enough, in the dense medium of an intimate life, to be within living memory of both parties. A couple can often recall, with a precision impossible for any macro-cultural form, the occasion on which a private word was coined, the event a private reference compresses, the first time a micro-rite was performed before it was a rite. The forms carry their own origins with them; they are sedimented, but the sediment is recent enough that its laying-down is remembered. This is the phenomenological trace of a mechanism the later section on sedimentation will describe: that intimate culture emerges at a speed which brings the moment of emergence itself within the horizon of experience, so that the couple are not only the bearers of their culture but the witnesses of its coming-to-be. With the phenomena thus described—their inventory, their first- and second-person givenness, their remembered temporality—the question can be asked that the epistemology of this culture turns on: how, and by whom, such forms are known.

19. Participatory Knowing and Epistemic Exclusivity

The phenomena described in the previous section pose, by the very structure of their givenness, an epistemological question: how is such a culture known, and by whom? The question is not idle, for the answer discloses a mechanism. If the private forms of an intimate culture are given only in the first and second person, then the knowing of them cannot be the knowing appropriate to a third-person object, and the difference is not a matter of degree but of kind. This section draws out that difference, and shows that the peculiar way intimate culture is known—and the peculiar way it resists being known from outside—is not an incidental feature but direct evidence for the mechanism the pillars will name.

Participatory knowing versus objectifying knowledge

There are two ways a cultural form can be known, and intimate culture admits only the first. The first is *participatory*: one knows the form by standing in the circuit it constitutes, by being one of the two for whom it is a form, by generating and re-enacting it from within. To know an inside joke, in this sense, is to be one of the two people it is funny to; to know a private rite is to be one of the two who perform it and feel its omission as a wrongness. This knowing is not the possession of information about the form; it is participation in the form's ongoing generation, a knowing that is indistinguishable from being a party to the culture known. The second way is *objectifying*: one knows the form as an external object, surveys it, describes it, catalogues its features, explains its function—the knowing an ethnographer brings to a custom, an analyst to

a symptom, an outsider to a practice not their own. Macro-cultural forms admit both kinds of knowing; their participants know them from within, and outsiders may know them, with some loss, from without. Intimate culture admits only the first. There is no objectifying knowledge of an intimate culture that is knowledge of *it*, because the object objectifying knowledge would grasp—the charge, the meaning, the “ours”—exists only in the participatory circuit and is precisely what objectification steps outside of. One can objectify the outward form, the sound of the private word, the motions of the micro-rite; one cannot thereby know the culture, because the culture was never in the outward form but in the circuit the form serves, and the circuit is closed to all but the two.

Exclusivity as evidence, not accident

The decisive point is that this epistemic exclusivity is not a contingent fact about privacy—not a matter of the couple keeping secrets, or of outsiders lacking access they might in principle be granted—but structural evidence for the mechanism of intimate culture. An outsider cannot come to understand a couple’s private forms the way an anthropologist comes to understand a foreign custom, however long the outsider observes, because the barrier is not one of information. The anthropologist’s difficulty is that the custom’s meaning is hard to gather from outside; enough patient observation reduces the difficulty, because the meaning, though hard to reach, is there in the public practice to be reached. The outsider to an intimate culture faces a difficulty of a different order: the meaning is *not there in the observable form at all*, because it is lodged in the interwoven structure of drive that only the two occupy, and no quantity of observation can supply what is missing, since what is missing is not information about the form but a place in the fantasy that charges it. This is why an inside joke explained to a third party is not thereby made funny to them: the explanation supplies the information and withholds the only thing that mattered, which was never information but position. The exclusivity, then, is evidence. It shows that the meaning of intimate culture is anchored not in a public symbolic system, where more observation would yield more understanding, but in a private coordinate of drive, where observation from outside yields nothing, because there is nothing of the relevant kind outside to observe. The knowability of a culture only from within is the epistemic signature of a culture whose substance lies in the register of a relational Real that the participatory circuit alone touches.

Understanding as recognition, and its failure as objectification

Read through the Hegelian line, participatory knowing has a further character that objectifying knowledge lacks: it is a knowing that is at the same time a mutual recognition. To know the culture from within is to know oneself in it and to know the other as the one with whom it is shared, so that the understanding of the shared form is inseparable from the recognition of the self and the other whom the form binds. Understanding an intimate culture is thus a moment of the mutual self-knowledge the relation carries on through its exteriorized forms: in reading the shared idiom rightly, each knows again who they are to the other. And the failure that corresponds to this understanding has a name in the same line: it is the *objectification*

that treats a living, generated form as a finished thing to be surveyed, the misrecognition that mistakes the residue for the culture and the outward form for the charge. When one party comes to treat the shared culture as an object—to survey it, to hold it at the distance of a thing possessed rather than a process shared—the participatory knowing has lapsed into an objectifying one, and the culture, at that moment, has begun to die in that party’s hands, for it lived only in the participation that the objectifying stance has withdrawn. This is the epistemological form of a danger the ethics of the final part will name: that a culture whose being is participatory can be killed by being treated as a thing, and that the treatment as thing is a failure of recognition before it is anything else.

The material mediation of understanding

The historical-materialist line adds its qualification here, as it did to the account of drive, and for the same reason: to prevent the phenomenology from floating free into a pure account of consciousness. Even the participatory understanding of an intimate culture is materially mediated. The forms in which a couple can generate and re-enact their private culture, and therefore the forms in which they can understand it from within, are conditioned by their material circumstances—by the time they have to share, the spaces they inhabit, the media through which they communicate when apart, the consumer scripts that press upon their sense of what a shared life should look like. The participatory knowing is not a pure meeting of two consciousnesses in a vacuum; it is a knowing carried on in and through a material world that shapes what can be understood and how. This qualification does not diminish the exclusivity or the participatory character just established; it locates them in the material world, and in doing so it prepares the passage, at the end of this part, from the phenomenology of intimate culture to the political economy of its production and capture, where the material mediation of understanding becomes the material colonization of it. For now the epistemology is established: intimate culture is known only from within, its exclusivity is evidence of its anchorage in the relational Real, its understanding is a mutual recognition that objectification kills, and even this knowing is mediated by the material conditions in which the relation is lived.

20. The Dyad and the Vacant Big Other

The mechanisms of intimate culture can now be set out, and they are the heart of the paper. The first is the most fundamental, for the others depend on it: the intimate relation is a *dyad*, the minimal cultural unit, two people and no more, and this bare fact of number has consequences for the being of the culture a dyad generates that no larger formation shares. The consequences are drawn out here in two registers, the sociological and the psychoanalytic, which turn out to describe the same structure from two sides.

Simmel: the dyad has no super-individual structure

Simmel saw, with a clarity that has not been improved upon, that the step from two to three is not a step in degree but a change in kind, and that the dyad is therefore sociologically unique

[26]. In a group of three or more, a super-individual structure arises that does not depend on any single member: a majority can form, a third can mediate between two, coalitions can shift, and the group persists as a structure even as its members change or one departs. The dyad has none of this. There is no majority possible where there are only two; there is no third to mediate; there is no super-individual structure that could outlast either member. The consequences Simmel drew are exactly the ones that matter here. Neither member can hide behind a collectivity, because there is none: each stands fully exposed to the other, each bears the whole of the relation's existence, and each holds, in effect, a veto, since the withdrawal of either does not diminish the group but ends it. The dyad rests entirely on its two members and can appeal to nothing above them. It is the purest form of sociation and the least stable, intense in proportion to its exposure and fragile in proportion to its intensity.

The psychoanalytic translation: the big Other is vacant

Translated into the framework of this paper, Simmel's sociological observation becomes a claim about the register of the symbolic, and specifically about the big Other. In the generation of any culture, meaning must be fixed—a word must come to mean this and not that, a rite must count as performed or not—and the question is what fixes it, what stands as the authority to which meaning can appeal. In macro-culture the answer is the big Other in its ordinary form: the tradition, the institution, the majority, the accumulated weight of a symbolic order that precedes the individuals and stands above them, guaranteeing that a word means what it means and a rite is what it is. This is the full big Other, the third term to which any two members of a large culture can appeal over each other's heads. In the intimate dyad this third term is *vacant*. There is no tradition of the couple older than the couple, no institution of their private language, no majority of speakers to settle a disputed private meaning, no symbolic authority above the two to guarantee that the word they coined means what they take it to mean. The place of the big Other, which in macro-culture is filled, is in the dyad empty—or rather, it is filled only by the two themselves, who must serve, for each other, as the symbolic authority that no external order supplies. Each is, for the other, the only guarantor there is that the shared culture means what it means.

What the vacancy makes possible, and what it costs

This vacancy is the condition of both the possibility and the fragility of intimate culture, and the two follow from it together. It is the condition of *possibility* because it is exactly what frees the dyad to generate a culture wholly its own. Where a full big Other governs, the meanings available to a culture are constrained in advance by the symbolic order that guarantees them; one cannot simply coin a word or institute a rite, because meaning must answer to the standing authority. In the dyad, with no such authority above the two, the two are free to be their own authority, to make a word mean whatever they can bring each other to accept it as meaning, to institute a rite by the sole warrant of their mutual agreement. The endogeneity the paper has claimed for intimate culture—its capacity to generate forms genuinely its own, not drawn from an external stock—rests on precisely this vacancy: the couple can generate their own

culture because there is no big Other above them dictating what their culture may contain. They legislate their private symbolic order themselves, and can do so because the legislative seat is empty and theirs to occupy.

But the same vacancy is the condition of *fragility*, and this is where the pillar connects to the fifth. Because the meaning of the couple's culture is guaranteed by nothing above the two, it is guaranteed by the two alone, which is to say by the continued participation of both. A macro-culture's meanings survive the withdrawal of any individual, because the big Other that guarantees them stands above all individuals; the dyad's meanings have no such guarantor, and so the withdrawal of either member does not merely diminish the culture but removes the very authority that held its meanings in place. When one of the two ceases to participate, the private word does not become a word the other can still use with half its meaning intact; it loses its guarantor entirely, and reverts from meaning to mere sound, or worse, to a sound that now signifies only the absence of the one who gave it meaning. The vacancy of the big Other is thus a single structural fact with two faces: it is what lets the couple be the free authors of their own culture, and it is what makes that culture unable to survive either of them. The freedom and the fragility are not separable features to be weighed against each other; they are the same feature, the empty seat of the symbolic authority, seen from the side of generation and from the side of collapse.

This yields a second thesis of the paper's own, and one that reaches beyond the dyad to cultural generation at any scale. Call it the *vacancy thesis*: the more fully a system of cultural generation devolves its symbolic authority upon an external institution, the more its capacity to generate an endogenous culture is suppressed, and the more its culture is stabilized against the withdrawal of its members; the two move inversely with the same variable, so that endogeneity and stability stand in a tension that forbids their joint maximization. A macro-culture, with its full external big Other, sits near one pole: high stability, low endogeneity, its meanings guaranteed against any defection and, for that reason, not the couple's own to author. The intimate dyad sits near the other: high endogeneity, low stability, its meanings authored freely and, for that reason, guaranteed by nothing that outlasts the two. The thesis does not assert an equation between authority's externality and either quantity; it asserts a structural tension, in which a gain in the one is purchased at a cost in the other, and it is this tension, not a defect of the dyad, that the fragility of intimate culture expresses. A couple cannot have both the freedom to make a world wholly their own and the security of a world guaranteed to outlast them, because the very vacancy that grants the first denies the second.

This is the foundational mechanism, and the four pillars that follow specify how, within this vacancy, the couple's culture is woven, sedimented, configured across the registers, and finally exposed to ruin.

21. The Double Interweaving of Drive

The second pillar specifies what, within the vacancy the first established, is actually woven. The general account of Part One held that culture is the exteriorization of drive; the phenomenology

of the dyad now shows that in intimate relation the drive so exteriorized has a structure found in no other cultural formation, and that this structure is the mechanism behind the non-transferability the paper has claimed since its engagement with Bourdieu. The structure is a *double interweaving*: the two structures of desire are not exteriorized side by side, in parallel, but are mutually implicated, each entering into the other, so that the culture they generate is the sediment of a single interwoven fantasy rather than the sum of two private ones.

From parallel fantasies to an interwoven one

Orthodox psychoanalysis writes desire as the subject's relation to its object-cause, the objet petit a around which the drive turns and which veils the constitutive lack. Two people in proximity might, on a thin account, be imagined as two such structures running in parallel: each with a private fantasy, each pursuing a private object-cause, the relation a matter of two desires that happen to have taken each other as their occasion. This is not what an intimate relation is, and the difference is the pillar. In intimate relation each partner comes to occupy, for the other, the place of the object-cause itself, or a part of it: the other is not merely the occasion of a desire whose cause lies elsewhere but is woven into the cause, so that what each desires around is no longer a wholly private object but one in which the other is implicated. The fantasy that structures each one's desire has the other inside it. This is why the desires of two intimate partners cannot be cleanly separated and returned to each as private property: they have grown into each other at the level of the object-cause, and the culture they generate together is the exteriorization not of two adjacent desires but of one interwoven desiring, in which neither partner's drive can be specified without reference to the other.

The private culture as the sediment of the interweaving

The private forms catalogued earlier are the sediment of exactly this interweaving, and reading them through it explains features that would otherwise be merely charming. A private joke is the crystallization of a shared coordinate of desire: it discharges in laughter because it touches, in a compressed form, the interwoven fantasy the two have built, and it touches it for these two alone because the coordinate it touches exists only in their interweaving. A private name is a condensation-point of the interwoven fantasy: it names the other from within the place the other occupies in one's own object-cause, which is why it would be wrong, even faintly obscene, in a third mouth—the third has no standing in the fantasy the name arises from. A micro-rite is a channel the interwoven desire has cut for itself, a repeated form through which the shared drive circulates. The whole private culture, read this way, is not a collection of shared tastes or agreed conventions but the exteriorized, sedimented form of a fantasy that two people have woven into one, and its every element carries the charge of that interweaving. This is what the outsider cannot reach and the explanation cannot supply: not information about the forms, but a place in the interwoven desire that alone gives the forms their charge.

The mechanism of non-transferability

With this the paper can state precisely the mechanism of the non-transferability it claimed, against Bourdieu's cultural capital, in Part One. Cultural capital is transferable in principle—accruable, convertible, extractable—because its value is a position in an external field, and a position can, in principle, be occupied by another. The private culture of a couple is non-transferable in principle, and the reason is now exact: its value is lodged in an interweaving of drive that exists only in this relation and cannot be carried out of it. To transfer the culture would require transferring the interwoven fantasy that charges it, and the interwoven fantasy is not a portable content but a structure that came to be only in and as this relation. What can be transferred is the outward form—the sound of the word, the shape of the rite—and what cannot is the charge, because the charge is the interweaving, and the interweaving does not exist outside the two whose desire is interwoven. This is why a couple's private culture, copied by others, is a shell: the others can reproduce the form and cannot reproduce the interwoven desire that made the form a culture rather than a mannerism. Non-transferability is not a contingent privacy that better observation could breach; it is a structural consequence of the fact that the culture's substance is an interweaving of drive proper to one relation.

This can be stated as a thesis, the first of several the paper advances as its own, beyond its revision of Lacan. Call it the *non-transferability thesis*: the degree to which a relational cultural form resists transfer and extraction rises with the depth at which its charge is anchored in the interwoven structure of the participants' drive; and where that anchoring reaches into the unsymbolizable core of the bond, in the register of the Real, what a transfer can carry is the symbolic shell alone, the charge remaining behind because it was never a portable content but the interweaving itself. The thesis is not an identity between transferability and anchoring but a graded relation between them: forms anchored shallowly, in shared convention alone, can be carried off with much of their sense intact, as a borrowed idiom can; forms anchored in the interwoven Real cannot, because the transfer would have to carry an interweaving that exists only in and as the one relation. This is why the non-transferability of an intimate culture admits of degrees, and is most complete for exactly those forms—the private name, the inside joke, the charged silence—that reach deepest into the interwoven drive, and least complete for those that borrow most from the public stock.

The interweaving across the three registers

The interweaving is not confined to a single register, and marking its span connects this pillar to the fourth. It runs across all three. In the *imaginary*, it is the mutual identification, the way each comes to see themselves in and through the other's image of them, the specular circuit by which two self-images are woven into a shared imago of the couple. In the *symbolic*, it is the private lexicon and the shared references, the coded signs through which the interwoven desire is given a sayable form. In the *real*, it is the unsymbolizable core of the interweaving itself, the "us" that no private word quite captures and that is the relational Real of this particular bond. The double interweaving of drive is therefore not merely a symbolic-order phenomenon, a matter of shared signs, but a structure that runs through the imaginary body of identification

and down into the real of the unsymbolizable bond. This is why the account of it required the framework of the three registers and could not be given in the terms of the symbolic alone, and it is why the next pillar, having established that the interweaving is what sediments and that it spans the registers, must turn to the distinctive temporality of the sedimentation—the speed at which, in the dense medium of an intimate life, this interwoven drive deposits into the durable forms of a culture.

22. High-Density Sedimentation and Accelerated Time

The third pillar concerns the temporality of intimate culture: the speed at which it emerges. The previous pillars established what is woven, in the vacancy left by the absent big Other; this one establishes how fast the weaving sediments into durable form, and shows that the answer is peculiar to the dyad and has a consequence no other cultural formation affords—that the moment of cultural emergence is brought within the horizon of lived experience, so that the couple are not only the bearers of their culture but the witnesses of its birth.

The density of shared living

The rate at which a culture sediments is a function of the density of the shared living from which it precipitates, and the intimate dyad is the densest medium of shared living there is. The density has several dimensions, and they compound. There is the density of *time*: intimate partners share not scheduled intervals but the continuous duration of a shared life, mornings and nights and the unstructured hours between, a volume of shared time no other relation approaches. There is the density of *body*: intimate relation is carried on in bodily proximity, in touch, in the sharing of space and sleep and the physical routines of a life, so that its medium is not only spoken but corporeal. There is the density of *frequency*: the interactions are not occasional but constant, iterated many times a day, so that any form has abundant occasions to be repeated and confirmed. And there is the density of *stakes*: what passes between intimate partners matters to them as almost nothing else does, so that each interaction carries an affective charge that fixes it in memory and makes it a candidate for repetition. These densities together make the intimate dyad a medium in which the precipitation of shared living into cultural form occurs faster than anywhere else, because every condition that favors sedimentation—time, repetition, bodily co-presence, affective stakes—is present at its maximum.

Emergence brought within the horizon of experience

The consequence is the distinctive feature of this pillar: intimate culture emerges at a speed that brings the moment of emergence *within the horizon of lived experience*. In macro-culture the emergence of a cultural form is never witnessed; it occurs across generations, below the threshold of any individual's experience, so that the form is always already there when any given person meets it, and its origin is a matter for historical reconstruction rather than memory. No one witnessed the birth of a national idiom or the first performance of a folk rite; these emerged too slowly and too diffusely for emergence to be an object of experience. The intimate dyad

is different in kind. Because its culture sediments at the speed the density affords, the couple can often witness, and later recall, the very moment a form was born: the occasion on which a private word was coined and, in the same evening, accepted; the first time a gesture was made that would become a rite; the moment a shared glance was found to carry a meaning both had, without saying so, arrived at. The emergence of culture, which in every larger formation lies below the horizon of experience, rises in the dyad above it. This is why the intimate dyad is the privileged site for a phenomenology of cultural emergence: it is the one cultural formation in which emergence is not reconstructed but witnessed, the one place where one can watch a culture being born.

The moments of self-encoding

These witnessed moments have a structure worth describing, for they are the phenomenological appearance of the exteriorization the first part defined, caught in the act. What happens, in such a moment, is that something that occurred once—a contingent event, an accident, a joke that landed, a mistake, a shared perception—is, by both parties at once, taken up and marked as *significant*, as belonging to them, as a form to be kept and repeated rather than a happening to be let go. The moment has a double structure. First there is the contingent occurrence, which might have passed and been forgotten. Then there is the mutual, often silent, recognition—a look exchanged, a laugh that both know they will return to, a repetition offered by one and accepted by the other—in which the occurrence is lifted out of the flow of forgettable events and installed as a form. This second act is the moment of *self-encoding*: the relation, in it, encodes a piece of its own generative history into a form it can re-enact, and does so through the simultaneous recognition of both parties. It is the Hegelian exteriorization made visible: the relation goes out of itself into a form, in the very instant of the mutual recognition that constitutes the form, and one can see it happen. That the encoding requires both parties at once—that a private form cannot be instituted by one alone but only by the two together, in a recognition each reads in the other—is the trace, at the level of the emergence-moment, of the vacancy of the big Other established in the first pillar: with no external authority to institute the form, the two must institute it themselves, together, and the moment of self-encoding is the moment they do.

Speed and fragility

One consequence of this accelerated sedimentation must be marked, because it qualifies the pillar and connects it to the fifth. The same speed that lets intimate culture emerge within the horizon of experience also makes it, in a certain sense, thin in its foundations. A macro-culture's forms are sedimented over so long a time and through so many bearers that no single event and no single defection can unsettle them; they have the stability of the deeply laid. The dyad's forms are laid down fast, by two people, over a time short enough to remember, and what is deposited quickly can be disturbed quickly. The accelerated emergence that makes the dyad the privileged site of witnessed cultural birth is the same accelerated temporality that leaves its culture without the deep foundations time alone can give, and therefore exposed, as

the fifth pillar will show, to a reversibility no macro-culture faces. The speed is a gift and a vulnerability at once: it brings emergence within experience, and it denies the culture the ballast of slow sedimentation. Having established what is woven, that it spans the registers, and the speed at which it sediments, the phenomenology turns to the register in which all of this is most intensely configured, before it turns, finally, to the fragility the speed has already foreshadowed.

23. The Special Configuration of the Three Registers

The fourth pillar returns the three registers of the framework to the intimate dyad and shows that here, and nowhere else among cultural formations, they attain their fullest and most intense configuration. The meta-theoretical statement claimed that culture spans the imaginary, the symbolic, and the real, and that the three move in a materially driven dialectic; the intimate relation is the site where this claim is most completely embodied, because in no other cultural formation are the three registers configured with the closeness, the intensity, and the mutual pressure they have between two people who share a life. This pillar describes that configuration register by register, and then shows the dialectic among them running at a pitch the macro-scale never reaches.

The three registers at their most intense

The *imaginary* is, in intimate relation, unusually thick. The register of image and identification, of the body and the specular relation, is nowhere more charged than between two people bound by desire: each is an image for the other of extraordinary power, each sees themselves reflected and altered in the other's regard, and the bodily, visual, identificatory life of the couple—how they appear to each other, how each is formed by the other's image of them—is intense in a way no macro-culture's imaginary approaches. A nation's imaginary, its images and identifications, is diffuse and mediated; a couple's is concentrated in a single face.

The *symbolic* is, as the earlier pillars showed, the register of the private lexicon, the shared references, the names and rites and promises through which the interwoven desire is given sayable form. Here the intimate symbolic reaches its highest instance in the vow—the promise two people make to each other, which this series has treated at length as the non-binding vow whose whole force is that it appeals to no external enforcement but institutes, between the two, a symbolic order they legislate themselves [31]. The couple's symbolic is not a fragment of the public symbolic order but a private one, coined and instituted in the vacancy of the big Other, and the vow is its constitutional act.

The *real* is, in intimate relation, exposed as it is almost nowhere else. The register of the unsymbolizable is present in the couple's life in its most naked forms: in sexuality, where the drive meets what no signifier orders; in the traumatic, where the bond meets what cannot be assimilated; and above all in the “us” itself, the non-symbolizable core of the bond that no private word quite captures, which is the relational Real this paper has placed at the center of its ontology. Intimate relation is one of the few sites of human life where the Real is not held

at a distance by a thick symbolic mediation but is met closely, in the body and in the bond, so that the relational Real is not a theoretical postulate here but a lived and constant presence.

This grounds the fifth thesis the paper advances as its own, which gathers into a single claim what the earlier theses have each drawn on. Call it the *real-anchoring thesis*: the resistance a relational culture offers to power, to capital, and to time arises from its anchoring in the register of the Real, and the firmness of that anchoring rises with the thickness of what, in the participants' interwoven drive, exceeds symbolization. Resistance, on this thesis, is not an added property a culture might have or lack, a defensive feature bolted onto its forms; it is the persistence of the culture's root in the Real under the symbolic erosion that power and capital work. Where a culture is anchored only in the symbolic—in convention, in transferable form—it offers little resistance, because the symbolic is precisely the register in which power organizes and capital extracts; where it is anchored in an interwoven Real that exceeds symbolization, it resists, not by opposing a force to these operations but by lying, in part, outside the register on which they operate. The thesis does not equate resistance with anchoring depth as one quantity with another; it locates the source of the one in the other, and makes the degree of resistance vary with the thickness of the unsymbolizable rather than fixing it. The other four theses can be read through this one: non-transferability, decoherence, the vacancy's fragility, and the counter-power of persistence all turn on where, and how deeply, a culture is anchored in a Real that the symbolic operations of transfer, capture, guarantee, and entrenchment cannot reach.

The dialectic of the registers, at full intensity

Because the three registers are configured so closely and so intensely in the dyad, the dialectic among them—which the fourth revision set at the center of the framework—runs here at a pitch found nowhere else, and it can be watched in the couple's culture with unusual clarity. The dialectic, in its direct form, is the contest between the symbolic's drive to capture the real and the real's overflow of every symbolic capture. In intimate relation this contest is continuous and intense. Each private word, each name, each rite, each vow is an attempt by the couple's symbolic to capture the "us," to give the unsymbolizable bond a sayable and repeatable form—and each such capture is, necessarily, incomplete, because the relational Real of the bond overflows every form the couple can give it. The lovers name the bond and the name is precious and the name is not the bond; they institute a rite to hold what passes between them and the rite holds some of it and not all; they make a vow that says what they are to each other and the vow reaches toward but does not exhaust the real of their being-for-each-other. This incompleteness is not a failure to be corrected by a better word; it is the structural condition the fourth revision named, the Real's constitutive overflow of the symbolic, and in intimate relation it is felt directly, as the perpetual insufficiency of every expression to the bond it would express, and the perpetual generation of new expressions to chase what the last one could not hold. The couple's culture is never finished precisely because the relational Real it tries to capture overflows it, and this is why intimate culture develops, continually, generating new forms as the old ones prove unequal to the "us" they were made to hold.

Why the dyad embodies the framework most fully

This is the sense in which the intimate dyad is the fullest embodiment of the framework's central claim, and marking it completes the pillar. The three-register dialectic of the relational Real was stated in Part One as a general ontology of culture, holding of culture at any scale. But it holds of the intimate dyad with an intensity and a directness it has nowhere else, because in the dyad the three registers are configured at their maximum—the imaginary concentrated in a single face, the symbolic legislated privately in the vacancy of the big Other, the real met nakedly in body and bond—and the dialectic among them, the symbolic's capture and the real's overflow, runs at a pitch that makes it visible in the ordinary life of the couple. What in macro-culture is a slow and buried process is, in the dyad, an intense and nearly witnessable one: the perpetual chase of the symbolic after a relational Real that will not be caught, generating, in its perpetual insufficiency, the perpetual development of the couple's culture. The framework was built to be general; the dyad is where it is most fully true. And the same overflow that keeps the culture developing—the Real's refusal to be captured—is what will, in the register of loss, expose the culture to the collapse the final pillar must now describe.

24. Fragility and Reversibility

The fifth pillar names the price of the other four. Everything that makes intimate culture what it is—the vacancy of the big Other that lets the couple author their own world, the interweaving of drive that gives their culture its incommunicable charge, the accelerated sedimentation that brings its emergence within experience, the intensity of the three registers met at close range—every one of these is also a condition of a fragility that no macro-culture faces. Intimate culture can collapse entire. It can pass, and often does, from a living world to a field of ruins, and the passage is not a gradual erosion but a structural reversal that the preceding pillars fully explain. This pillar describes that reversal and its mechanism, and in doing so completes the phenomenology of the dyad.

The asymmetry with macro-culture

A macro-culture does not collapse when individuals leave it. Its forms are guaranteed by a big Other that stands above any individual—the tradition, the institution, the community of speakers—and the withdrawal or death of any member, or of many, leaves the culture's meanings in place, held by the super-individual structure that Simmel saw the dyad to lack. A language does not lose a word when a speaker dies; a rite does not cease to mean when a participant departs. The intimate dyad is, once again, different in kind, and the difference is the one the first pillar established. Because the couple's culture is guaranteed by no big Other above the two, but only by the two themselves, its entire existence is staked on the continued participation of both. The withdrawal of either member is not, as in macro-culture, the loss of one bearer among many; it is the removal of one of the only two guarantors there are, and since it takes both to hold the private meanings in place, the withdrawal of one does not halve the culture but ends it. This is Simmel's veto raised to the level of culture: as either member

can end the dyad, so either member can end the culture the dyad generated, and the culture has no existence that survives the relation whose culture it was.

The mechanism of collapse: from meaning back to the Real

The mechanism of the collapse can be stated precisely, in the terms the pillars have built, and it is more than the mere cessation of a shared activity. Recall that in the intimate dyad the place of the big Other, the authority that guarantees meaning, is occupied by the partner: each is, for the other, the guarantor of the private symbolic order they have built together. When one partner withdraws—through departure, betrayal, or death—the private symbolic order does not simply lose a user; it loses its guarantor, the very authority that held its signs in the position of signs. And a signifier that has lost the authority guaranteeing its meaning does not become a neutral, disused sign; it reverts. The private word, no longer guaranteed by the one who authorized it, falls from meaning back toward the Real: it becomes, first, a mere sound, emptied of the charge the interweaving gave it; and then, worse, a sound that signifies precisely the absence of the one who is gone, a marker of the void where the guarantor stood. The idioms that were the very substance of a shared world become, in the collapse, the sharpest instruments of grief, because each of them is now a private sign whose meaning was the bond and whose only remaining reference is the bond's destruction. This is why the ruins of an intimate culture are not neutral debris but actively painful: the private language does not fade into meaninglessness but is transformed, by the withdrawal of the partner who guaranteed it, into a language all of whose words now say the same thing, which is that the one who made them mean is gone. The collapse is a decoherence in the precise sense the framework gave the term: the symbolic forms remain, as sounds and gestures, while the real coherence that charged them is withdrawn, and what remains is the shell of a culture haunted by the bond it can no longer carry.

Exit costs and the asymmetry of collapse

The collapse need not be symmetrical, and here the pillar connects to an analysis the series has developed elsewhere. The withdrawal that collapses the culture is not always mutual, and the two partners are not always equally exposed to the ruin. Where the exit costs are asymmetric—where one partner can leave at less cost than the other, whether because the interweaving was less deep on one side, or because the material and social conditions of the two differ, or because one has alternatives the other lacks—the collapse falls harder on the one for whom the exit cost was higher, who is left holding a private culture whose guarantor has departed at less cost to himself [32]. The one who leaves at low cost may re-enter the wider symbolic order, where public meanings are guaranteed by a big Other no single defection can unsettle; the one who leaves at high cost, or who does not leave but is left, remains among the ruins of a private symbolic order whose meanings have reverted to the Real. This asymmetry of exposure to collapse is the dyadic-cultural form of the asymmetry of power the series has analyzed under the heading of exit costs, and it shows that the fragility of intimate culture is not only a structural fact about dyads in general but a site at which the power asymmetries between two

particular partners are registered and can be exploited.

Fragility as the price of endogeneity

The pillar closes by returning fragility to its source, for it is essential that the fragility not be read as an unfortunate defect that a better-built intimate culture might avoid. The fragility is the price of the endogeneity, and the two are inseparable. A culture that a couple authors themselves, in the vacancy of any external authority, is by that very fact a culture with no external authority to preserve it when they falter; a culture whose charge is an interweaving of drive proper to two people is by that very fact a culture that cannot survive the unweaving of that pair; a culture sedimented fast, by two, over a rememberable time, is by that very fact a culture without the deep foundations that would let it outlast its makers. The freedom to make a world of one's own with another and the exposure to losing that world entire are the same condition seen from two sides, exactly as the possibility and the fragility were one in the first pillar. There is no intimate culture rich enough to be worth having that is not, by the very features that make it rich, exposed to collapse; the endogenous world and its fragility are bought together or not at all. This completes the phenomenology of the dyad's mechanisms, and the phenomenology turns now from the mechanisms to the interpretation of what they generate—to the hermeneutics of intimate culture, and to the negotiation, at its edge, with the outer symbolic order that the final part will show to be the site of its capture.

25. The Hermeneutics of Private Culture

The mechanisms of intimate culture have been set out; the phenomenology closes with the question of how the meaning of what they generate is interpreted. This is the hermeneutic layer, and it is not a mere appendix to the account of mechanisms, for it discloses something the mechanisms alone do not: that the meaning of an intimate culture is not a content its forms contain but an activity its participants continually perform, and that this fact has consequences, ethical as much as epistemological, which the final part will take up. The section describes the interpretive life of intimate culture, the two ways it fails, and the recognition that its right interpretation is.

Meaning as an activity, not a content

The private forms of an intimate culture do not contain their meaning the way a vessel contains a liquid, such that the meaning would be there in the form to be extracted by anyone who opened it. Their meaning is generated, and continually regenerated, in the ongoing interpretive activity of the two who share them—in the living use, the re-enactment, the mutual reading by which a private word is again meant and again understood. A private idiom is meaningful only so long as it is actively meant and taken; the meaning is not stored in it between uses, waiting, but is remade each time the two enact the little circuit of address and understanding that the idiom serves. This is why the interpretation of intimate culture is not, in the end, separable from its generation: to interpret a private form rightly is to participate in the activity that

keeps it meaningful, and the interpretation is itself a continuation of the generating. It follows that intimate culture is meaning only in the present tense of its interpretation. When the interpretive activity stops—when the two no longer actively mean and take their shared forms—the meaning does not persist in the forms as a dormant content that might later be revived; it ceases, because it never was a content but only ever an activity, and an activity that has stopped is simply not occurring. This is the hermeneutic face of the fragility the previous pillar described: the culture dies when its interpretation stops, because its life *was* the interpreting.

The two misrecognitions

Against this account of meaning as living activity, two characteristic failures can be defined, and both are forms of *misrecognition*—the mistaking of a living, generated process for a finished thing. The first is *reification* in the direction of possession: the treatment of the shared culture as an object one *has*, a possession to be held and surveyed, rather than a process one *does* with the other. When a partner comes to regard the private culture as a thing they own—an inventory of idioms and rites that exists, complete, to be pointed at—the living interpretive activity has been replaced by the contemplation of a supposed object, and the culture begins to die in that partner's hands, for it lived only in the doing that the having has suspended. This is the failure the epistemological section already glimpsed, in which participatory knowing lapses into objectifying knowledge; here it is named as an interpretive failure with an ethical edge, for it is a way of ceasing to participate while appearing to honor the culture, a withdrawal disguised as possession.

The second misrecognition runs in the direction of exhibition, and it points directly toward the capture the final part will analyze: the treatment of the relation's internal meaning as a *capital* to be displayed and converted, an asset to be shown to others for recognition or advantage. When the private forms of a bond are taken outside the circuit that charges them and put on display—performed for an audience, exhibited as evidence of the relationship's quality, converted into a currency of social standing—they have been misrecognized as the very thing the paper argued they cannot be: transferable, extractable, a capital. This misrecognition is not merely a category error; it is the point of entry for the capture of intimate culture by forces outside the couple, for it is precisely by inducing the partners to treat their bond's meaning as an exhibit and convertible asset that the outer order draws that meaning out of the circuit where it lived and into a market where it can be valued and extracted. The two misrecognitions are thus the hermeneutic form of the two dangers the paper tracks: reification toward possession is the death of the culture from within, and reification toward exhibition is the door through which it is captured from without.

Interpretation as recognition

Set against these failures, the right interpretation of an intimate culture has, in the Hegelian line, a determinate character: it is a mutual recognition. To interpret the shared culture rightly is not to decode a content but to participate in the activity in which each, reading the shared form, recognizes again who they are to the other and who the other is to them. The private

idiom rightly interpreted is a mirror in which the relation knows itself: in meaning and taking the shared word, each affirms the bond the word arose from and re-cognizes the other as the one with whom the word is shared. Interpretation, in this sense, is the ongoing self-knowledge of the relation carried on through its exteriorized forms, the moment in the Hegelian circuit at which the relation, having gone out of itself into a culture, returns to itself in the reading of that culture and knows itself there. And the two misrecognitions are, correspondingly, the stalling of this movement: reification toward possession stops the return by freezing the exteriorized culture into a dead object that no longer reflects the relation back to itself, and reification toward exhibition diverts the return outward, into a display for others, so that the relation no longer knows itself in its culture but seeks to be known by others through it. Right interpretation keeps the circuit turning; misrecognition, in either direction, stops it. With this the interpretive life of intimate culture is described, and the phenomenology can take its final step, to the edge where the couple's culture meets, and must negotiate with, the outer symbolic order—the edge at which the second misrecognition becomes the doorway to capture, and at which the particular returns to the general the final part requires.

26. Emergence-Moments and the Outer Symbolic Order

The phenomenology closes at the edge where the couple's culture meets what lies outside it. Two things are treated here, and they are joined: first, the interpretive structure of the emergence-moment, the instant in which a private form is born and given its meaning; and second, the negotiation between the couple's endogenous culture and the outer symbolic order that surrounds and presses upon it. The first completes the account of how intimate culture is interpreted from within; the second opens the passage to the final part, for it is at this edge that the culture becomes vulnerable to the capture that the political economy of the last movement will analyze. The particular, having been developed in its irreducibility, is here returned to the general, and the return is not a retreat from the intimate case but the discovery, within it, of the point at which the outer world enters.

The co-signification of the emergence-moment

The moment in which a private form emerges, described earlier as a moment of mutual self-encoding, has an interpretive structure that deserves to be drawn out, because it is where the couple's authority over their own meaning is most concentrated and most exposed. When a contingent occurrence is lifted into a form—when a mistaken word, a chance gesture, a shared perception is taken up and kept—the lifting is an act of *co-signification*: the two, together, confer meaning on the occurrence, decide, usually without saying so, that this shall mean something and shall be kept. The co-signification is genuinely joint; it cannot be performed by one alone, for a form one party declared meaningful and the other did not take up would not be a shared form but a private wish. It requires the simultaneous assent of both, each reading in the other the recognition that the occurrence is to be kept, and this double assent is the couple exercising, at its purest, the authority the vacancy of the big Other left to them. In the emergence-moment the couple are their own big Other: they, and no external order, confer

the meaning, and the fact that they can do this—that two people can, between them, make a thing mean—is the endogeneity of intimate culture caught at its source. This is the couple's freedom at its most concentrated, and, for the same reason, the point at which the outer order, if it can insert itself into the co-signification, gains the deepest purchase on the culture.

Negotiation with the outer symbolic order

For the couple's culture does not emerge in a vacuum, and the endogeneity the paper has insisted on is never absolute. Around every intimate relation stands the outer symbolic order—the vast public stock of meanings, scripts, images, and expectations concerning what love is, how it is expressed, what a couple does, what a bond should look like—and the couple's culture is generated not in isolation from this order but in continual negotiation with it. The private forms a couple makes are made against a background of public forms they did not make: the culture supplies ready-made scripts for romance, for the marking of anniversaries, for the gestures of devotion, for the shape a shared life should take, and these press upon the couple's own generation, offering themselves as the forms the couple might adopt in place of generating their own. Every intimate culture is thus a mixture, in some proportion, of the endogenously generated and the externally supplied, and the proportion is not fixed but negotiated, continually, as the couple either takes up the public script or makes something of its own in its place. This negotiation is not in itself a corruption; a couple may take up a public form and make it genuinely theirs, charging the borrowed script with their own interwoven desire until it becomes, whatever its origin, a real part of their endogenous culture. The negotiation becomes corruption only when the public form is not appropriated but substituted—when the couple ceases to generate its own meaning and merely consumes the meaning the outer order supplies, so that the co-signification that should have been theirs is performed, in advance and elsewhere, by the market that made the script.

The doorway to capture

It is here, precisely, that the phenomenology hands over to the political economy of the final part, and naming the handover completes the second movement. The point of vulnerability is the co-signification. Because the couple's meaning is conferred in the joint act of co-signification, and because that act can be colonized—its ready-made materials supplied, its outcomes pre-scripted, its very sense of what is worth keeping shaped in advance—the outer order has a route into the heart of the endogenous culture. It does not capture the culture by force, from outside; it captures it by supplying the forms in which the couple's own co-signification is carried out, so that the couple, generating what they take to be their own culture, are in fact re-enacting a script written elsewhere and owned by another. This is the mechanism the final part will anatomize as the capture of intimate culture by capital: not a seizure of a finished culture but a colonization of its generation, an insertion into the co-signifying moment of materials the market supplies and from which it draws its return. The second misrecognition of the previous section—the treatment of the bond's meaning as an exhibitable, convertible capital—is the subjective face of this capture, the disposition the outer order cultivates in the partners so that

they will carry their own meaning out to the market; and the negotiation just described is the objective structure through which the capture operates.

The particular returned to the general

With this the phenomenology of the dyad reaches its limit and returns the particular to the general from which it descended. The intimate culture, developed through this part in its irreducible specificity—its vacant big Other, its interwoven drive, its accelerated sedimentation, its intense registers, its fragility, its participatory hermeneutics—is shown, at its edge, to be embedded in and negotiated with an outer symbolic order that is itself, as the first part established, produced under material conditions and traversed by power and capital. The couple’s private world is not a sanctuary outside the general history of culture but a particular site within it, connected to the whole at the point of negotiation, and therefore subject, at that point, to the forces the general account named. The third part takes up those forces directly. It asks how culture, including the intimate culture just described, is produced under the forces and relations of production; how capital, having exhausted its older frontiers, reaches through the negotiation just described into the couple’s generation itself to capture the value it produces; and on what, in the end, the just generation of an intimate culture depends. The phenomenology has shown what intimate culture is and how it lives and dies; the political economy and ethics must now show how it is produced, how it is captured, and how it might be defended.

Part Three Ethics and Praxis: Production, Capture, and Its Lessons

27. Family Ethos as a Middle-Scale Case: *Jiafeng*

The argument has established a general ontology of cultural emergence and a phenomenology of its most intimate instance, and it is about to turn to the political economy of production and capture. Between these stands a case worth examining in its own right, because it occupies a scale the paper has so far left empty: the scale between the intimate dyad and the macro-culture of a people. That case is the *family ethos*—in Chinese *jiafeng* (家风), the “wind” or manner of a household, the distinctive culture a family generates and transmits across generations. The family ethos is chosen not as an illustration of the theory but as an object through which two questions the theory has raised but not settled can be worked out: how a culture is to be *known* historically, which is a question of the epistemology of a dialectical view; and how power *constitutes* a culture without exhausting it, which is a question of what may be called the study of power in culture. The case is the thread; the epistemology and the power-analysis are drawn from it as they arise.

The family ethos as a middle-scale culture

The family ethos sits, in the terms of this paper, at a scale between the two the argument has treated. It is more durable and more transmissible than the culture of a dyad, for it passes across generations and outlives the particular members who bear it at any moment; and it is more endogenous than the culture of a people, for it is generated within a bounded relation—the family—that can author its own manner in a way a whole society cannot. It has both faces the paper’s opening set in tension: a *wen*, the sedimented pattern of transmissible forms, and a *hua*, the ongoing cultivation by which each generation is formed and forms the next. Its designs, across civilizations, fall into recognizable types. There is the *textual* type, which sediments the ethos into written instruction: the Chinese tradition of *jiaxun* (家训), family instructions, of which Yan Zhitui’s sixth-century *Family Instructions for the Yan Clan* is the earliest surviving and most influential, a book-length letter to his sons on conduct, learning, and the management of a household [35]. There is the *unwritten-exemplary* type, which transmits the ethos not by text but by modeled example and remembered saying: the Roman *mos maiorum*, the “way of the ancestors,” an unwritten code carried across generations through ritual, oratory, and the exemplary deeds of the *maiores*, in dynamic complement to written law rather than as a codification of it. And there is the *virtue-and-model* type, which sediments the ethos into a named set of dispositions embodied in the elder—diligence, frugality, honesty, the “farming-and-reading” ideal of the scholar household—transmitted less by precept than by the standing example of a life. These types are not exclusive, and most family ethical traditions mix them; they are named here to show the range of designs by which a family gives its manner a transmissible form.

The dialectical evaluation, and the epistemology it requires

The family ethos is the ideal case for the disciplined historical evaluation the synthesis required, because its forms are old enough to have changed their meaning as their conditions changed, and evaluating them tests what a dialectical view of culture actually demands of the one who holds it. Consider the “farming-and-reading” ethos, the ideal of the household that works the land and cultivates learning together. Under the material conditions that produced it—a smallholding agrarian economy with a channel of advancement through examination and letters—this ethos was a genuine advance: it encoded a real emancipatory impulse, the aspiration of a family to lift itself, through cultivation, beyond the bare necessity of the soil, and it generated, in those conditions, more than it foreclosed. To evaluate it only by a later standard, as a quaint or constraining traditionalism, would be to commit the error a dialectical view forbids. Consider, on the other side, an ethos organized around a strict hierarchy of elder over younger, of one generation’s authority over the next. Under the conditions of a lineage-based agrarian order, such an ethos stabilized the reproduction of the household and had, in its setting, a coordinating function that was not mere domination. Yet as the material conditions change—as economies industrialize, as households become mobile and nuclear, as the young acquire, through education and independent livelihood, a standing the old order did not grant them—the same ethos that once coordinated can become a fetter, its hierarchy losing the material basis

that once made it functional and persisting as bare constraint. The one ethos was progressive under its conditions and is to be criticized under changed ones; and to criticize it now and to acknowledge its former progressiveness are, as the framework held, two faces of one evaluation, not a contradiction.

This is the point at which the case yields its first theoretical moment, the *epistemology of a dialectical view*. To evaluate a family ethos as this evaluation requires is to occupy a difficult epistemic position, defined by its refusal of two easier ones. It refuses *presentism*, the judging of a past form by present standards as though its conditions were irrelevant, which would convict every old ethos of failing to be modern. And it refuses the *historicist relativism* that would say a form can be understood only within its own conditions and never evaluated across them, which would leave one unable to criticize any ethos at all and would collapse into the position that whatever was, under its conditions, was right. The dialectical view is the third position, and its possibility rests on a specific ground: that the standard of evaluation is neither an external absolute imported from the present nor the form's own self-image, but *generativity* itself—whether the ethos, under its conditions, let the family generate more than it foreclosed, and whether the power it carried was met by a force that kept it from entrenching. This standard is internal enough to respect the form's conditions and general enough to evaluate across them, and it is what lets the dialectical view avoid both presentism and relativism. The epistemology has a further requirement, which the debate over the fate of the Confucian tradition makes visible. Where one influential reading held the incongruity between Confucian traditionalism and modernity to be so clear-cut that the coming of the modern entailed the tradition's demise [24], another held that the tradition does not simply die but undergoes transformation, passing through epochs in which it is reinterpreted rather than abolished [27]. The dialectical view sides with neither the thesis of demise nor the thesis of an unchanging essence; it holds that a cultural form is known rightly only from the tension of two temporal positions at once—the position of its own moment, in which it was the negation its conditions required, and the position of the later moment, in which it becomes the negation to be negated. To know a family ethos historically is to hold both positions together, and the refusal to hold both is the epistemic error that produces, on one side, the verdict of mere demise, and on the other, the illusion of a timeless tradition.

One further epistemic point the case forces into view: the one who evaluates a family ethos is not outside it. The evaluator was formed by some family ethos, shaped in their very capacity to evaluate by a culture of the kind they now assess, and the dialectical view must include this reflexive recognition on pain of relapsing into the idealist fiction of a knower standing outside history. This connects the epistemology of the dialectical view to the account of participatory knowing given earlier: as intimate culture is known only from within its circuit, the historical knowing of a family ethos is carried on by a knower who is themselves a product of such cultures, and whose evaluation is therefore a moment in the very history it evaluates, not a view from beyond it.

Power in culture, and the force that re-orient it

The case yields its second theoretical moment when the same ethos is examined for how power runs through it, and this is the point at which the family ethos becomes a middle-scale test of the paper's central claim about power and culture. On one side, the family ethos confirms, with unusual clarity, the thesis that power is internal to culture: an ethos of generational hierarchy plainly encodes a power order, naturalizing an authority of elder over younger into the very manner of the household, so that the power tradition's insight is vindicated at this scale as much as at the scale of a people. A family ethos is, among other things, an encoding of who defers to whom. On the other side, the family ethos equally confirms the limit of that thesis, for an ethos is manifestly not reducible to its encoding of power: the same ethos carries real cultivation, genuine virtues, an actual formation of persons, and a real bond of familial love that belongs to the register of the relational Real, and no analysis that dissolved the ethos wholly into a power order would capture what it is. The family ethos thus stands as a middle-scale confirmation of both the power tradition and its sublation: power constitutes the ethos, and does not exhaust it, because the ethos spans registers a pure analysis of power cannot reach.

Between these, the case makes legible—more legible than the dyad could—the distinction between power that entrenches and power that is kept open, and it yields, in doing so, a generalizable proposition about power in culture. A family ethos that encodes only a hierarchy, only the question of who obeys whom, is an ethos of *power-over*: it fixes the young into a determined position and reproduces, generation upon generation, the authority it naturalizes, and such an ethos, absent any internal check, tends toward the pure reproduction of domination. But some family ethical traditions encode, alongside the authority they transmit, a *force that re-orient that authority*: the “reading” in the farming-and-reading ideal is exactly such a force, for the cultivation of learning gives the next generation the capacity to question, to exceed, and to re-orient the very ethos that formed them; and the place some traditions reserve for remonstrance—the recognized standing of the younger to admonish the elder—institutionalizes, within the ethos, a counter-power against the entrenchment of the authority the ethos also carries. Such an ethos is one of *power-to*: it transmits authority and, in the same transmission, transmits the means of that authority's own revision. And the historical observation the case supports is precise and generalizable beyond the family: the family ethical traditions that have persisted across changing conditions without hardening into mere oppression are not, on the whole, the most rigid, but those that encoded within themselves a mechanism of their own revision—a force by which each generation could re-orient the ethos to conditions its authors could not foresee. An ethos that transmits only its authority entrenches and, when conditions change, becomes the fetter that must be broken; an ethos that transmits also the power to revise it develops, bending to new conditions without breaking. This is the sublation of power, established in the synthesis for culture in general, confirmed at the scale of the family: the just and the durable ethos is not the one without power, which does not exist, but the one that carries, with its power, the counter-power that keeps that power from entrenching.

From this the general study of power in culture takes a methodological principle, which the case has earned rather than assumed. The task of a critical analysis of culture is not to seek a

culture free of power, which is a naivety the power tradition rightly dismisses, nor to conclude, from power's ubiquity, that all culture is equally and irredeemably domination, which is the opposite error. It is to discriminate, within a culture shot through with power as all culture is, between the entrenchment of power and its re-orientation—to ask, of any cultural form, not whether it contains power but whether it contains, with its power, the force that keeps that power open. The family ethos, examined at its own scale, is where this principle becomes visible, because in the family one can see, across generations, both the ethos that hardened into the reproduction of an authority outlived by its conditions, and the ethos that carried within it the means of its own generational revision. The middle scale is the scale at which the difference between power-over and power-to in culture is most clearly read, and reading it there confirms, for culture in general, that the presence of power is not the end of the analysis but its beginning.

The bridge to production and capture

The family ethos, finally, returns the argument to the scale question and hands it forward to the political economy that follows. It shows, against the weak analogy the paper has held to, that endogenous cultural generation does occur above the scale of the dyad—that a family, and not only a couple, can author a culture of its own, generated within its bounded relation and transmitted across its generations. It does not show that the same holds at the scale of a whole symbolic order, and the caution the paper has reserved for that further step remains in force; the family is a middle term, not a bridge all the way to the macro-scale. But it establishes that the endogenous is not confined to the smallest unit, and that the dialectic of power and counter-power the synthesis described operates wherever culture is generated, at the scale of the family as at the scale of the couple. And it hands the argument forward, for the family ethos is produced under material conditions, as the next section will insist of all culture, and is, in the present, as subject to capture as any other endogenous culture—its manner supplied ready-made by a market in family lifestyles, its cultivation outsourced to purchased instruction, its transmission mediated by platforms that own the means through which the generations now communicate. The production and capture of culture, to which the argument now turns, reach the family ethos as they reach the culture of the dyad, and the case just examined becomes, in the sections that follow, one more site at which the endogenous generation of culture meets the material conditions that constrain it and the capital that would draw its value off.

28. The Production of Culture

The third part turns from what intimate culture is and how it is lived to how it is produced and how it is captured, and it begins, as historical materialism requires, with production. The phenomenology treated the couple's culture largely from within, as it is generated and interpreted by the two; this part sets that internal life in the field of material forces that condition it from without, and asks the questions the first part's materialist line prepared: under what forces and relations of production is culture generated, who owns and transmits it, and how does it function in the reproduction of an order? The account proceeds through

three layers—the forces of production, the relations of production, and ideology—and closes on the sharp contrast between two ways a subject can be produced, which is where the political economy meets the ethics of the series.

The forces of production: the materiality of the medium

Culture is generated in a medium, and the medium is material. What forms a culture can take, how far they can travel, who can participate in making them, are set in the first instance by the forces of production—by the material means available for giving culture a body. The history of culture is inseparable from the history of its media: the passage from oral to written, from manuscript to print, from print to the electronic and the digital, is at each step a transformation of what culture can be, because each medium reconstitutes what can be recorded, how widely it can be shared, and who has access to the making. This is not a background fact but a condition internal to cultural production, and it bears on intimate culture as much as on the culture of a people. The forms a couple can generate and sustain are conditioned by the media through which they live and communicate: whether they share a household or are separated by distance, whether their communication passes through their own bodies and voices or through the platforms of others, whether the record of their shared life is kept in forms they control or in forms owned by another. The materiality of the medium is the first determinant of what an intimate culture can be, and it is, as the last sections of this part will show, the first point at which an external owner can insert itself into the couple's cultural production.

The relations of production: ownership and the position of the producer

Beyond the forces of production stand the relations of production, and they raise the questions of ownership and of the producer's position that are decisive for a political economy of culture. Who has the leisure to generate culture; whose cultural production is recognized and whose is not; to whom the products belong; who holds the authority to interpret and to license—these are questions of the relations within which culture is produced, and their answers vary with the mode of production as sharply as the answers to the corresponding questions about material goods. A culture produced under aristocratic patronage, a culture produced in the guild, a culture produced under the culture industry, differ not only in content but in their whole relation of production: in who owns the product, who is positioned as its producer, and who is excluded from production altogether. For intimate culture the question of ownership seems, at first, not to arise—the couple generate their culture and it is theirs—but the appearance is deceptive, and the deception is the theme of this part. The question of who owns the medium through which the couple's culture is produced and recorded, who owns the platforms on which their shared life is increasingly lived, who is positioned to draw value from the culture they generate, turns out to be as live for the intimate dyad as for any other cultural producer, and the illusion that intimate culture stands outside the relations of production is precisely the illusion under cover of which it is captured.

Ideology: interpellation and the production of the subject

The third layer is ideology, and it is the layer at which the production of culture becomes the production of subjects. Althusser gave this its sharpest form in the concept of *interpellation*. Ideology, for Althusser, is not a set of ideas floating above the economic base but a material practice, embodied in institutions he called ideological state apparatuses—among which he named, decisively for this paper, the family—and its fundamental operation is to constitute individuals as subjects by *hailing* them, calling to them in a way that, in the turning-to-answer, makes them the subject the hail addressed [1]. The one hailed becomes, in recognizing themselves as the one called, a subject fitted to the order that called them; and this interpellation is, at bottom, the mechanism by which the relations of production reproduce themselves, producing the subjects they require. Culture, seen through this layer, is not innocent even in its most intimate forms, for the scripts of love, of the couple, of the shared life are among the hailings by which individuals are constituted as the subjects a given order needs—the subjects who will desire what the order supplies, mark their bonds in the forms the market sells, and reproduce, in their most private world, the relations of production that produced them.

Two ways to produce a subject: interpellation and generation

Here the political economy meets the ethics of the series, at a contrast that must be drawn sharply, for it is the hinge on which the whole third part turns. There are two ways a subject can be produced in and through culture, and they are opposites. The first is interpellation in Althusser's sense: the production of a *fitted* subject, hailed into a pre-existing position, constituted from without to occupy a role the order requires, formed as the subject that the relations of production need. This is the production of a subject as an effect, a congealing of the individual into a determined position, and it is, in the terms the series has developed, an operation of *power-over*: the subject is produced by a power exercised upon it, fixed into the shape the order dictates. The second way is the one the whole of this paper has described: the generation of a subject within a relation, the coming-to-be of the relational subject through the culture it and its partner generate together. This is not the hailing of an individual into a fixed position but the generation of a subject that did not exist before, formed not from without by an order but from within by a relation, in the reciprocal movement by which the culture the couple generates comes back to constitute the couple. This is an operation of *power-to*: an enabling generation, not a fixing subjection. The distinction is the ethical center of the political economy that follows. Interpellation produces the subject the order needs, from outside, by power-over; endogenous intimate culture generates the subject the relation becomes, from within, by power-to. And the capture of intimate culture by capital, which the next sections analyze, is precisely the operation by which the second is bent into the service of the first—by which the couple's own endogenous generation is colonized and made to produce, under the appearance of a freely generated intimate world, the fitted subjects the order requires. The Hegelian line names the danger exactly: production is objectification, the going-out of the subject into a made world, and objectification becomes *alienation* when the made world is turned against its maker, when what the couple generates is owned by another and returns to

them as a power over them rather than a world of their own. It is to that alienation, in its specific form as the capture of intimate culture by capital, that the argument now turns.

29. The Capture of Intimate Culture by Capital

Production having been laid out, the argument turns to capture: to the means by which capital draws value from culture, and, in the end, from the intimate culture the second part described. The account proceeds through three historical stages, each a deeper reach of capital into culture, and the third is the one that touches intimate relation directly. The stages are not offered as a complete history but as a deepening, each stage taking as its raw material something the previous stage left untouched, until the last reaches the bond itself.

Stage one: the culture industry

The first stage is the commodification of culture as such, analyzed by Adorno and Horkheimer under the name of the *culture industry*. Culture, in their account, becomes an industry in the strict sense: its products are manufactured on the model of factory production, standardized and streamlined, and the individuality they appear to offer is a *pseudo-individuality*, a spurious uniqueness stamped onto a standardized product to simulate a diversity that the underlying standardization has abolished [18]. What is captured, in this stage, is the aesthetic longing itself: the desire that, in the terms of this paper, reaches toward the Real, toward the impossible object around which the drive turns, is intercepted and filled with a standardized commodity that offers itself as the object of that longing. In the terms the series has developed, this is a degradation at the level of value: a real value, oriented to the unsymbolizable, is forced into the form of a symbolic-commodity value that can be exchanged, and the longing is drawn off into the purchase. The culture industry captures culture by manufacturing its objects and selling them to a desire it has first standardized.

Stage two: the society of the spectacle

The second stage, analyzed by Debord as the *society of the spectacle*, is a deeper reach, for it captures not merely cultural objects but social relations themselves. In the spectacle, capital no longer only sells cultural commodities; it organizes the whole of social life into a vast accumulation of spectacles, so that the relation between people is mediated by images, and lived directly relations give way to relations between images of relations [8]. What is captured here is relation itself, in its represented form: the direct coupling that this paper places at the center of intimate culture is replaced, in the spectacle, by a mediated pseudo-relation, a relation to the image of a bond in place of the bond. This is a decisive step toward the capture of intimate culture, for it installs, between the two who would generate a culture of their own, the mediating image supplied by capital, and it teaches the couple to relate to the representation of their relation—to how their bond appears, to its image displayed and consumed—in place of the relation itself.

Stage three: affective and attentional capitalism

The third stage is the one that reaches intimate relation directly, and it is the living frontier of the present. Contemporary platform capitalism takes intimacy, companionship, and affective connection themselves as raw material to be extracted. The forms are familiar and multiplying: dating platforms that render the search for a bond into a monetized funnel, engineered to be entered and re-entered rather than concluded; social platforms that turn the display of intimacy into a stream of engagement to be harvested; the quantification of affective life into metrics of participation, likes, and attention, so that the bond itself becomes a source of data and revenue. In the terms of political economy, this is the *real subsumption* of the most private region of human life: the drive's interweaving in the couple, which the second part showed to be the very substance of intimate culture, is here taken up as the raw material of an extraction, drilled into as the richest available source of value precisely because it lies nearest the constitutive lack. This stage is the direct capture of the intimate, and it operates, as the phenomenology's final section showed, through the colonization of the couple's own co-signification: it supplies the scripts, owns the platforms, and shapes the sense of what a bond should be, so that the couple, generating what they take to be their own culture, generate value for the owner of the field.

The mechanism of capture, and an independent treatment

The precise mechanism by which capital captures relational value—the formal chain by which a relational property is stripped from its relation, reified into an attribute, bound to a commodity, and made to yield extraction through the necessary failure of the object of desire—has been analyzed at length by the present author in an independent work, to which the reader is referred and on which this section does not depend [34]. That work stands on its own and is not a part of the present argument; it is cited here because it anatomizes, in detail this section need not repeat, the psychoanalytic structure of the capture whose cultural form is here at issue. The point to be retained for the present argument is the one the psychoanalytic line has insisted on throughout: that the capture reaches its object through the drive. Capital captures intimate culture most powerfully because the interwoven drive that charges that culture lies nearest the constitutive lack, and to divert a desire that circles so near the empty place mobilizes far more than any surface preference; the intimate bond is thus the richest fuel for capture, and the most destroyed by it, since the ore is destroyed in the extracting.

Why the capture cannot be total

The section closes by marking the limit that the framework of Part One established and that the next sections will develop. The capture of intimate culture, however deep, cannot be total, and the reason is the one the second revision of the framework secured: the Real is not completely symbolizable, and the relational Real at the core of the bond therefore resists the symbolic capture that commodification is. What capital can capture is the symbolic surface of intimate culture—the forms, the scripts, the displays, the data—and what it cannot capture is the relational Real those forms served, because that Real is not a symbolizable content that could be extracted but the unsymbolizable core of the bond itself. The capture, at its most complete,

is therefore a *decoherence*: it preserves the sign of the bond and draws off its substance, keeping the outward cultural form while the real coherence that charged it is lost.

Here the paper advances a third thesis of its own, one that distinguishes its account of capture from the account of the capture of relational value given in the author's independent work. Call it *capture-as-decoherence*: capital's capture of a relational culture succeeds not by seizing the culture itself but by decohering it—by preserving the symbolizable symbolic form while drawing off its coherence in the register of the Real, so that what remains is a shell whose charge has been withdrawn. Where the independent treatment analyzed capture as a rerouting of desire toward a substitute object, the mechanism marked here is the extraction of coherence: the sign of the bond is kept in circulation and made to yield value, while the real coherence it once carried is dissolved in the keeping. This is why the capture can approach completeness in the symbolic register and yet meet, in the register of the Real, a limit it cannot pass: the symbolic form, being symbolizable, is available to be preserved and sold, and the real coherence, not being symbolizable, is not available to be extracted but only to be lost. Decoherence names exactly this asymmetry, that the capture takes everything of the culture that can be represented and destroys, rather than acquires, what cannot—so that the market ends holding the form of a bond whose substance its own operation has dissolved.

This is why the captured intimate culture is a shell, and why the capture, for all its power, meets a limit it cannot cross. The couple that has surrendered its culture to the market retains, in the relational Real that no market can reach, the possibility of generating again a culture of its own—a possibility the final sections must now examine, first in the constraint that bounds but does not determine, then in the ethics of a cultural practice that would reclaim what capture draws off.

30. The Closed Loop Back into Intimate Relation

The capture described in the previous section is not a process that occurs elsewhere and leaves intimate relation untouched. It closes a loop: the value drawn from culture returns, as a force, into the intimate relation from which, at the last stage, it was drawn, and it alters that relation, eroding the very capacity for endogenous cultural generation that the second part described. This section traces the closing of that loop, the feedback by which the capture of intimate culture reaches back into the couple and changes what they can generate and who they can become.

Mediation: the supplying of ready-made forms

The first moment of the feedback is *mediation*. Increasingly, the forms through which intimate relation is conducted—its idioms, its rites, its expectations, its very sense of what love is and how it is expressed—are supplied ready-made by the culture industry and its successors, rather than generated by the couple from within. What romance is, how a proposal is made, how devotion is shown, what an anniversary requires, what a shared life should look like: these are furnished as scripts, and the couple is invited, at every turn, to adopt the supplied form in place

of generating its own. The negotiation with the outer symbolic order that the phenomenology described has, under this feedback, tilted decisively toward substitution: the couple ceases to generate its own culture and instead consumes the culture supplied to it, so that the co-signification that should have been theirs is performed in advance, by the market that wrote the script. This is the colonization of intimate culture from within its own generation, and it is, in the terms of the previous part, the second misrecognition—the treatment of the bond’s meaning as an exhibitable, convertible asset—installed as the ordinary condition of intimate life. This connects the diagnosis to the analysis of the symbolic order’s colonization of the relational interior that the series has developed elsewhere, under the heading of the seepage of external regimes into the dyadic interior.

The deepening of the hollow subject

The second moment is the deepening of a hollowing the series has diagnosed from its beginning. When the meaning of intimate relation is outsourced to consumer symbols—when the couple no longer generates its own forms but consumes the forms supplied—the relation loses its capacity to generate its own meaning, and with it the subject loses one of the last sites in which it might have come to be through a generation genuinely its own. The mother paper of this series diagnosed the modern condition as a crisis of symbol and subject, an inflation of signs accompanied by a hollowing of the subject, and the capture of intimate culture is the reaching of that crisis into the last interior [29]. If the subject is generated in relation, as the whole of this paper has argued, and if the relation’s capacity to generate is colonized by a market that supplies its meanings ready-made, then the subject is hollowed at the very site where it might have been filled, generated as the fitted consumer of supplied meanings rather than as the relational subject of an endogenous generation. The hollow subject is not only a consumer of public culture; it is now a consumer of its own intimate culture, deprived of the generation through which it might have become someone in particular, with someone in particular.

The artificial intelligence turn

This deepening is redoubled by a development the mother paper marked and the present moment makes acute: the arrival of systems that can supply not only the forms of intimate culture but the generative act itself. Where the culture industry supplied the scripts and left the couple to perform them, there now arise systems that offer to perform the generation—to compose the message, to craft the endearment, to supply the words of devotion, to generate the very idiom that was to have been the couple’s own. The final interiority that even the culture industry left to the couple—the act of generating their own forms, however much the raw materials were supplied—can now be outsourced to a machine. This is the capture reaching its innermost point: not merely the supplying of the forms the couple adopts, but the supplying of the generative act by which forms are made, so that even the coining of a private word, the making of a private meaning, is delegated to a system that owns the process and returns the product. The danger is precise, and it is not that such systems produce nothing of worth; it is that they offer to perform the one act—the endogenous generation of a shared meaning—on

which, this paper has argued, the whole worth of intimate culture depends, and that a couple which delegates that act retains the form and loses exactly what made the form a culture rather than a purchase.

Alienation completed

Read through the Hegelian line, the closed loop is the completion of alienation, and naming it as such gathers the section. Production, the first line established, is objectification: the going-out of the subject into a made world, which is the necessary path of its self-knowledge. Alienation is what objectification becomes when the made world is taken from its maker and turned against them—when what the subject produced stands over against it as an alien power, owned by another, ruling the very subject whose activity produced it. The closed loop is exactly this. The couple generates intimate culture; the culture is captured, its forms supplied and owned by the market, its generation colonized, at the limit its generative act itself delegated to a machine; and the captured culture returns to the couple as an alien power, a set of forms they consume rather than make, ruling their intimate life from a position they no longer occupy. What was to have been the couple's exteriorization—their going-out into a shared world in which they would know themselves and return to themselves enriched—becomes, under capture, an alienation: the shared world is owned by another, and it returns to them not as their own work reflecting them back to themselves but as a foreign power shaping them to its ends. The exteriorized culture that should have been the couple's self-knowledge becomes the instrument of their subjection. This is the darkest point of the paper, and it is the point at which the argument must turn: for if the framework of Part One is right, the alienation cannot be total, and the turn from diagnosis to the conditions of recovery begins with the principle the next section states—that the material conditions constrain but do not determine, and that the capacity for endogenous generation, though colonized, is never wholly destroyed.

31. Constrained but Not Determined

The previous section reached the darkest point of the argument, the completion of alienation in the closed loop of capture. This section is the turn. It does not undo the diagnosis or soften it; it locates the diagnosis correctly, and the correct location is itself the ground of a recovery. The turn rests on the single dialectical principle the series has maintained throughout, and which the first part established for culture in general: that material conditions constrain but do not determine. Applied to the capture just described, this principle yields two consequences that together open the way from diagnosis to ethics, and it is the office of this brief but pivotal section to draw them.

The capture is a historical form, and its alienation is material

The first consequence is that the capture of intimate culture, however deep, is a *historical form* and not an eternal condition. It is the specific shape that the production and capture of intimate culture take under the present relations of production, and its alienation is therefore

material and historical—produced by a particular arrangement of ownership and medium, and, like every such arrangement, particular to its conditions rather than written into the nature of intimate relation as such. This is not a consolation offered against the diagnosis but a precise dating of it. The alienation the previous section described is real, and it is the real form of intimate culture under present conditions; but to see it as a historical form is to see that it is not the truth of intimate culture for all time, not a fate inscribed in the structure of the bond, but the effect of a determinate material arrangement that had a beginning and can have an end. The disciplined historical eye the fourth revision required is turned here upon the present itself: the capture is to be evaluated as a form produced under its conditions, which means it is neither to be mistaken for the permanent nature of intimacy nor to be treated as a doom against which nothing can be done, but understood as what it is, a historical form of alienation, material in its origin and therefore material in its possible supersession.

The capacity for endogenous generation is never wholly destroyed

The second consequence is the decisive one, and it follows from the framework's account of the Real. The capture colonizes the couple's generation, supplies its forms, at the limit delegates its generative act; but it cannot wholly destroy the capacity for endogenous generation, because that capacity is rooted in something the capture cannot reach. The second revision secured that the relational Real is not completely symbolizable, and the capture operates by symbolic means—by supplying symbolic forms, scripts, and now generative processes, all of which are of the order of the symbolic. What lies in the register of the Real—the unsymbolizable core of the bond, the “us” that no supplied script and no generative machine can compose, because it is not a symbolic content to be composed but the real coherence of a particular coupling—remains beyond the reach of a capture that works by symbolic supply. However completely the forms of a couple's intimate culture are colonized, the relational Real at the core of the bond is not colonized, because it is not of the order the colonization operates on; and so long as it remains, the couple retains the ground from which an endogenous generation could begin again, the anchor in the Real from which a new symbolic form, genuinely their own, could be generated in place of the supplied one. The capacity for endogenous generation is never wholly destroyed because its root is in a register the capture cannot symbolize and therefore cannot own.

The negation of the negation

Read through the Hegelian line, these two consequences are the second negation, and naming them as such completes the dialectical figure the paper has been building. Alienation was the first negation: the exteriorized culture, going out of the couple into a made world, was captured and turned against them, standing over against its makers as an alien power—the negation of the couple's generativity by its own product, seized by another. The turn of this section is the negation of that negation. It is not a return to an imagined state before capture, an innocence of intimate culture that never existed and could not be recovered; it is a determinate negation of the alienation, which carries the couple forward, not back, to a generation that has passed

through capture and reclaimed the generative act from it. The exteriorized culture that had become an alien power can be reclaimed, taken up again by the relation whose product it was, and returned to the movement of the couple's self-knowledge from which the capture had diverted it. This is why the diagnosis of alienation is not the paper's last word, and cannot be: because alienation, in the dialectical account, is a moment and not a terminus, the first negation that calls forth its own negation, and the reclamation of the captured culture is the second negation that the framework not only permits but requires. The material conditions constrain, and under present conditions the constraint takes the form of a deep capture; but the conditions do not determine, and the undetermined remainder—the relational Real the capture cannot reach, the endogenous capacity it cannot destroy—is the ground on which the negation of the negation stands. What that reclamation asks of the couple, in the way of a cultural practice and an ethics, is the subject of the section that follows, which turns from the conditions of recovery to the practice of it.

32. The Ethics of Cultural Cognition and Practice

The turn of the previous section, from the diagnosis of capture to the conditions of recovery, opens onto a normative question the paper must now face directly. If the capacity for endogenous generation is never wholly destroyed, and if the reclamation of a captured culture is possible, then the question arises what it would mean to know and to practise intimate culture rightly—what ethics attaches to the cognition and the practice of a culture once it is understood as the endogenous, generative sediment the paper has shown it to be. This section states that ethics, in two layers, the cognitive and the practical, and shows that they are, at bottom, one.

The cognitive layer: culture is not an object to be possessed

The ethics begins in cognition, because how one knows intimate culture already carries a normative weight. The paper has shown that intimate culture is not a content its forms contain but an activity its participants perform, known only from within, in the participatory circuit that its meaning consists in. From this it follows that to *know* an intimate culture rightly is not to objectify it—not to hold it at the distance of a thing surveyed, inventoried, possessed—but to participate in the generative activity that is its life. And this cognitive fact is already an ethical one, for the misrecognition that treats a living, generated culture as a possessable object is not merely an error but a failure of the right relation to the culture and to the other with whom it is shared. To treat the bond's culture as a thing one has is to have already withdrawn from the participation in which alone it lives; to treat it as an asset one can exhibit and convert is to have already delivered it toward the capture that draws its substance off. The cognitive error and the ethical failure are the same act seen twice: mistaking the generated for the given, the activity for the object, the participation for the possession. The first requirement of the ethics is therefore cognitive: to know intimate culture as what it is, a generation to be participated in, and not as what the misrecognitions would make it, a thing to be had or shown.

The practical layer: non-possessive generation

From the cognitive requirement follows the practical one, and it can be stated as a single principle: the practice proper to intimate culture is a *non-possessive generation*. The culture is to be generated and re-generated, continually, in the participatory activity that is its life; and it is to be generated without being possessed—without being seized by either party as a thing they own, without being extracted as an asset, without being turned into an instrument of one party's power over the other. Non-possessive generation is the practice in which the culture is made and kept alive precisely by not being grasped as a made thing: made continually, held by neither, owned by no one, because its mode of being is the activity of its generation and not the possession of its product. The classical tradition of this series offers, as one resource among others for naming this practice, the conception of a generation that does not possess what it generates—that produces without owning, acts without holding onto, brings to maturity without ruling over—and the reader familiar with that tradition will recognize the resonance; but the principle stands on the argument of this paper, and does not depend on the classical formulation, which is invoked here as an illumination and not as a ground. What the argument requires is only this: that intimate culture, being a generation and not a possession, is rightly practised only in a generation that refuses to possess, and that every grasping of it as a possession—whether toward private hoarding or toward public exhibition—is a lapse from the practice its being demands.

The power dimension: non-possession and non-entrenchment are one posture

This practical ethics joins, at its root, the ethics of power the synthesis established, and marking the junction shows that the paper's normative claims form a single posture rather than a list. The sublation of power held that a just intimate culture must generate, alongside the power its generation carries, the counter-power that prevents that power from entrenching—the friction against accumulation and the force of re-orientation. The ethics of non-possessive generation is the same requirement seen from another side. To possess an intimate culture—to grasp it as a thing one owns—is precisely to entrench a power in it, to fix the generative process into a possessed structure that one party holds and the other is held by; and to refuse possession, to keep the culture in the condition of ongoing generation owned by neither, is precisely to prevent that entrenchment, to keep the power in the culture in the condition of power-to rather than power-over. Non-possession and non-entrenchment are therefore not two requirements but one posture, seen in the register of ownership and in the register of power respectively: the refusal to possess the culture is the refusal to entrench the power, and the practice of non-possessive generation is the practice of a culture in which power remains enabling rather than dominating. The two ethical claims the paper has made, the one about ownership and the one about power, are one claim about the single posture proper to a generative intimacy.

Against cultural capital, once more

The ethics can be sharpened by setting it against the concept it has opposed since Part One. Bourdieu's cultural capital is the very type of a possessed and entrenched culture: it is accrued,

held, converted, deployed as an asset in a field of struggle, and its whole being is possession and the power that possession confers [5]. The ethics of non-possessive generation is the exact negation of this: a culture whose worth is not in its possession but in its generation, not in the advantage it confers on its holder but in the world it opens between its participants, not extractable because not possessable, not a capital because not a thing. The contrast is not merely conceptual but ethical, for it marks two ways of standing toward what one shares with another: the way of the asset, which holds, converts, and extracts, and the way of the generation, which makes, participates, and lets be. The whole of this paper's ethics can be compressed into the choice between these two, and the choice is not neutral. To practise intimate culture as cultural capital is to have already begun to capture it oneself, to stand toward one's own bond as the market stands toward it, holding its meaning as an asset to be converted; to practise it as non-possessive generation is to keep it in the register of the relational Real that no market can reach, generated and re-generated between two who own it by not owning it. The reclamation the previous section showed to be possible is, in practice, exactly this: the return, from the possession and exhibition that deliver intimate culture to capture, to the non-possessive generation in which it lives.

33. Cross-Scale Retrospect and Envoi

The argument has run its course, from the general ontology of cultural emergence, through the phenomenology of the intimate dyad, to the political economy and ethics of its production, capture, and reclamation. It remains to look back across the scales the paper has traversed, with the caution the paper has reserved for that looking, and then to close, as the series closes its papers, by returning to the word with which it began.

The cross-scale retrospect, as a weak analogy

The paper has held throughout to a weak analogy, not a structural identity, between the micro-culture of the intimate dyad and the macro-culture of a people or a symbolic order, and the retrospect must honor that restraint. What can be said is this: the endogenous generation of culture in the intimate dyad, described in this paper in its irreducible particularity, may *illuminate*, by analogy and not by identity, the question of how a wider symbolic order might be regenerated from below. The mother paper of this series diagnosed the present as a crisis of the symbolic, a hollowing of the shared meanings by which a world is held together [29]; and the account of intimate culture offered here suggests, cautiously, that the regeneration of meaning, if it is possible, has the form of an endogenous generation of the kind the dyad exhibits at its own scale—a making of shared meaning from within a relation, non-possessive and unentrenched, rather than a supply of meaning from above or a capture of it from without. This is offered as an illumination and not as a program, and the caution is not a formality. The features that make the dyad the paper's privileged site do not scale up: the vacancy of the big Other, which frees the couple to author their own culture, has no counterpart at the scale of a people, which possesses a full apparatus of traditions and institutions; the two-person structure, with its interweaving of drive and its particular fragility, is proper to the dyad and cannot be

enlarged into a model of collective culture without distortion. The analogy illuminates and must not be pressed. What the intimate dyad shows is that culture can be generated endogenously, non-possessively, from within a relation, against the supply from above and the capture from without; whether and how anything of this holds at the scale of a symbolic order is a question this paper raises by its analogy and leaves, deliberately, open.

Return to *Hua*

The paper began with the tension in its word, between the *wen* that is pattern and deposit and the *hua* that is transformation and generation, and it can now return to that tension as to a thing resolved in the only way it admits of resolution, which is not by choosing one term but by rightly ordering the two. Culture is both *wen* and *hua*, both the sedimented pattern and the ongoing transformation; the error the paper has fought is the error of taking the *wen* for the whole, of mistaking the deposited pattern for the being of culture and forgetting the *hua* that generates it and that the pattern is only the trace of. The whole argument may be read as the restoration of the *hua* to its priority: as the demonstration that culture is not, in its being, a pattern deposited and possessed, but a transformation ongoing and generated, of which the pattern is the residue and the record. *Huacheng*, the bringing-to-form, the ongoing cultivation of a shared world, which is what two people do when they generate between them a culture that is theirs. The word held the thesis from the beginning, in the verbal force of its second character, and the paper has been the unfolding of what that character already knew.

Envoi

It remains only to say, in closing, what the whole has been about, and to say it plainly, as an envoi rather than an argument. Between two people who turn toward a shared world there emerges, over time, a culture: a private language, a set of rites, a store of references, a way of understanding that belongs to them and to no one else. This paper has tried to say what that culture is—not a possession they acquire but a world they generate, exteriorized from an interweaving of their desire, sedimented across the registers of image and word and the unsayable bond, generated under the conditions of their material life and yet not determined by them, carrying a power that a just love keeps from entrenching, and vulnerable, by the very features that make it precious, to a capture that would draw its substance off and to a loss that would return it to ruin. And this paper has tried to say what such a culture asks of the two who make it: that they know it for what it is, a generation and not a possession; that they practise it as a generation, made continually and grasped by neither; that they keep it in the register of the Real that no market can reach, where alone it is safe, because there alone it is not a thing. The truth of such a culture is not in what it has deposited but in that it is still being generated; its life is the generating, and its death is the moment the generating stops. Spirit completes itself, the philosopher said, in returning to itself from its own exteriorization; and a shared culture completes itself, if it does, in the same way—in the return of the two, through the world they have made, to a knowledge of themselves and of each other that the making alone could give. The culture is not the monument they leave. It is the world they are

still, so long as they are turned toward each other, in the act of making. 化而未成—forming, and not yet finished; which is to say, alive.

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