

The Limitation of Language in Intimate Relation

Drive as the Phenomenology of Manque

Wanhong Huang

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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)

书不尽言，言不尽意。

*Writing does not exhaust speech;
speech does not exhaust meaning.*

— after the *Book of Changes*, Xici

致她——

For her—

那个属于森林的女孩，

the girl who belongs to the forest,

在我词穷之处，你仍在。

where my words run out, you are still there.

致我最爱的人。 To the one I love most.

Abstract

This paper proposes that language has a limit, and that the limit is generative. Across six dimensions of relational life, its existence, its maintenance, the value it generates, its ethics, its justice, and its evolution, there is in each case a core that language reaches toward and cannot reach. The paper sets out these six limits, each as a claim of its own, and then argues that what stands at the limit is drive in the psychoanalytic sense. Drive is not a content language omits and might recover; it is the phenomenology of manque, the gap between the symbolic and the Real that resists complete symbolization. This gap has two faces, a pre-symbolic remainder cut off when the subject enters language and a resulting impossibility of closure, and they are one. Around it drive circles and desire slides. By a thought experiment the paper shows that closing the gap would extinguish rather than fulfill them, so that the non-closure of language is the condition of their persistence. It then follows drive into the time of relation and draws out the generativity of the limit in the poem, in an ethics without possession, and in a justice that guards what it cannot settle, with a coalgebraic and reduction-theoretic counterpart offered as a heuristic. The paper offers no final synthesis; its form enacts its content.

Keywords: the limit of language; manque; drive; desire; the Real; objet petit a; generative relational being.

AI usage statement: AI assistants were used for drafting and discussion. The claims and the theoretical framework are the author's own, and the author takes full responsibility for the content.

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Part One The Six Dimensions of the Limit of Language

1. The Limit Proposed, Not Lamented

There is an old habit of treating the limit of language as a defect. On this habit, language is an instrument for the transport of meaning, and wherever it fails to carry meaning across, it has fallen short of what it was for. The failure is then met with resignation, with the wish for a fuller language, or with a mysticism that points past speech to a silence it cannot itself enter. This paper takes a different route. It does not lament the limit of language and does not propose to overcome it. It proposes that the limit is the condition of something, and that the something is the very life of relation.

The proposal

The proposal can be stated at once. In each of the dimensions along which a relation lives, its coming into being, its being kept alive, the value it generates, the ethics it asks of those within it, the justice it owes, and the way it grows and turns into new forms, language reaches toward something it does not reach. This paper first lays out these six limits one by one. It gives each of them its own shape, so that the limit of language is seen not as a single vague insufficiency but as six distinct and structured phenomena, each with its own core that speech circles and does not touch, and each stated as a claim of its own.

The paper then makes its central move. What stands at the limit, in each of the six cases, is not an absence to be regretted. It is the site at which drive, in the sense psychoanalysis gave the word, becomes possible. Drive is not one more content that language happened to leave out and might, with better instruments, recover. Drive is the phenomenology of that limit itself. It is the way the gap between what can be said and what presses beneath saying shows itself, the felt form of a remainder that the operation of the signifier can never close. This is why the attempt to say the drive returns not the drive but its renewed escape. To symbolize the gap is to find that the gap has moved, because the gap is nothing other than what symbolization cannot close.

What follows from it

From this the rest follows. If the limit is the site of drive, then the non-closure of language is not a wound in relation but the open space in which relation keeps moving. A relation in which everything had been said, in which the other had been wholly reached, in which no remainder stirred beneath the words, would be a relation in which nothing further pressed, nothing further turned, nothing further was generated. The completeness so often wished for would be the end of the very thing it wished to secure. This consequence, argued in Part Two by a thought experiment, governs the whole account: closure is not fulfillment but extinction, and the openness of the limit is what keeps a bond alive.

The path of the paper

The paper proceeds in five parts. Part One sets out the six limits, giving each its own structure and its own claim: the ungroundability of the bond's existence, the uncapturability of the living present, the absence of any external place to price relational value, the aesthetic measure of the ethical response, the generativity that justice guards, and the direction of growth that cannot be said in advance. Part Two traces the shared form of these six to its source in the constitution of the speaking subject, gives the gap its two faces and its object, distinguishes the drive that circles from the desire that slides, and establishes by a thought experiment that the closure of the gap would extinguish rather than fulfill them, from which the paper's central claim follows, that drive is the phenomenology of the limit. Part Three follows the persistence of drive into the time of relation, where an early signifier goes on organizing later bonds, the symptom appears as a fidelity to what cannot be said, and the good bond is shown to consist in making room for the other's unsymbolizable core. Part Four draws out the generativity of the limit in three registers, the poem as a language that circles the gap without closing it, an ethics that generates a bond without possessing the other, and a justice that guards the generativity of relational being against premature settlement. Part Five closes without a synthesis, in keeping with what the paper argues, since a work about what language cannot reach ought not to pretend, in its last pages, to have reached it.

Method and stance

Two remarks on method. First, the paper states its own contributions as named claims, set off from the prose, so that what it proposes can be found and weighed apart from the argument that leads to it. Second, at each dimension and each register the paper passes through the relevant literature not to survey it but to locate, in each account, the point it reaches toward and the remainder it leaves, so that the review is everywhere in the service of the position and never a catalogue.

A remark on stance. This is a constructive paper and not a polemical one. It sets up no adversary and refutes no school. Where it passes near positions that would treat full communication as an ideal, or transparency between persons as the measure of a good bond, it does not stop to defeat them but builds a different account and lets the difference speak. The traditions it engages, in speech-act theory, in phenomenology, in the theory of value, in psychoanalysis, in the ethics of the other, and in the study of testimony, are taken as sources of insight to be positioned, each having reached toward the same limit from its own side.

2. The Being of a Relation

This section takes the first of the six dimensions, the sheer existence of a relation, and establishes a single result: that the being of a bond, its *that it is* as distinct from any account of what it is like, cannot be grounded by any proposition, and that this ungroundability is not a defect in relational language but the condition under which the existence of a relation can be a matter of fidelity rather than of record. The section states the phenomenon, sets it against the two

traditions that would seem to close it, isolates the core that neither reaches, and draws the claim.

The phenomenon

Take first the plain fact that a relation exists. Two people are bound, or they are not; the bond is alive, or it has died. Language seems obliged to be able to say which, and it holds the sentences ready to hand. We are together. This is real. I am yours. These sentences present themselves as if they could establish the existence they announce, as if to say the bond were in some measure to make it, or at least to fix and secure it against doubt. The appearance is strong enough that a whole practice of reassurance rests on it, the practice of asking to be told, and of telling, that the bond is there.

They do not establish it. The sentence *we are together* neither proves that the bond exists nor brings it into being. It can be spoken over a bond already hollow, and it can be withheld from a bond fully alive. The existence of a relation is not the kind of thing a proposition can ground. Whether the bond is real is settled somewhere the sentence does not reach, and every sentence about it arrives after the fact it would establish, a report on a state it did not produce and cannot guarantee. The being of the relation lies outside all the signifiers that would name it.

Two ways of trying to close the gap, and why they do not

Two traditions promise to close exactly this gap, and it is worth seeing why neither does, since the reason is instructive.

The first is the performative account of speech. Austin taught that some utterances do not describe a state of affairs but bring one about, that to say the words is, under the right conditions, to do the deed [1]. I now pronounce you; I promise; I name this ship. It can look as though *I am yours* belongs to this class, an utterance that makes the bond it declares. But the performative works only where a convention stands ready to be invoked and a procedure exists whose completion the words execute. The marrying words marry because an institution recognizes them; the naming names because a practice confers the name. The existence of a living bond has no such institution behind the words. There is no procedure whose correct performance constitutes the reality of love, no convention on whose authority *I am yours* could execute the bond it speaks. The performative closes the gap between word and deed only where an institution has already closed it; for the bare existence of a relation, no institution has, and the words fall back into report.

The second is the ideal of transparent communication, the thought that a bond is secured when the two have made themselves fully intelligible to each other, when nothing of either remains unsaid. Habermas built a whole ethics on the regulative ideal of communication free from distortion, oriented to mutual understanding [13]. On such a view the existence of a good bond would be underwritten by the completeness of the understanding reached within it. But understanding, however complete, is understanding of what the other says and shows, and the existence of the bond is not something either party says or shows. It is presupposed

by everything they say and shown by nothing. Two people can understand each other to the last word and still face the question of whether the bond between them is alive, because that question is not answered at the level of understanding at all. The transparency ideal, pressed to its limit, would deliver a perfect mutual intelligibility beneath which the existence of the bond would remain exactly as ungrounded as before.

The core

What both traditions reach for and miss is the same. The core language cannot reach here is the sheer existence of the bond, its *that it is*, as against all the descriptions of what it is like. Descriptions there can be in abundance. The tone of a morning, the history of a quarrel and its repair, the shape of an ordinary evening, all of this can be said, and much of it can be said well. What cannot be said, because it is of a different order from any description, is the fact that beneath all these there is a bond at all, living now, in force now. That fact is presupposed by every description and secured by none of them. It is not a further, especially deep description that better language might supply. It is not a description at all, and that is why no description reaches it.

The ungroundability of the bond. The existence of a relation, its being-in-force as distinct from every account of its qualities, cannot be established by any proposition. No performative constitutes it, for it invokes no institution; no completeness of mutual understanding underwrites it, for it is presupposed by all understanding and shown by none. The being of the bond lies outside the signifier that would name it.

An illustrative case — the reassurance that settles nothing. One partner asks to be told that the bond is real, and the other tells them, and the words are true and warmly meant. Yet the asking returns, not from distrust of the answer but because the answer, however true, is not the kind of thing that could settle the question. What was wanted was not a sentence but the standing of the bond itself, and no sentence delivers that standing. The recurrence of the asking is not a fault in either party. It is the mark that the existence of a bond lies where no reassurance can put it, outside the reach of any words that would confirm it.

Why the limit is generative here

Far from being a defect, this ungroundability is what lets the existence of a relation be a matter of fidelity rather than of record. Because no sentence can ground the bond, the bond rests on something other than a sentence, on a holding that must be renewed and cannot be filed away as done. Consider the counter-case, a relation whose existence *could* be established by a form of words. Its existence, once the words were produced, would be settled, on record, no longer at stake; and a bond no longer at stake is a bond one possesses by having produced its title.

The limit forbids exactly this. Because the existence of the relation can never be put on record, it can never be possessed as a title, and so it remains what it must be to be a bond at all, a thing continually at stake, held open, renewed in the holding. The reader will recognize, without its needing to be argued here, that a promise carrying no external guarantee stands closer to this condition than a contract does: the contract puts the bond on record and thereby makes it a title; the promise, guaranteeing nothing, leaves the bond where the existence of a relation always is, outside the record and in the keeping. The ungroundability that looked like a poverty of language is the very thing that keeps the existence of a relation an act.

3. The Living Present

This section takes the second dimension, the maintenance of a relation through time, and establishes that what maintenance depends on, the living present in which two people are actually with each other, cannot be occupied by any statement, because the act of stating already places the speaker at a distance from the moment stated. The result is that maintenance is a matter of presence rather than of statement, and the section shows this by way of the phenomenon, a review of the two accounts that would make the present sayable, the isolation of the core, and the claim.

The phenomenon

A relation is not only brought into being; it is kept. Maintenance is the work of holding a bond alive through time, and what it holds is not a record of the past but a living present, the felt now in which two people are actually with each other. Language seems able to reach this present. We have the tense for it. I love you now. I am here. This is the present indicative, the grammatical form of the current moment, and it appears made to seize exactly what maintenance depends on.

It does not seize it. By the time *I love you now* has been said, the now it names has slipped past. The present of feeling, the actual current in which the relation is alive, is always a step ahead of the signifier that would fix it, so that speech about the present is always speech about a present just departed. The word arrives late. What it catches is not the living now but the trace of a now already becoming past, and the living now itself, the thing maintenance most needs to hold, is precisely what runs out from under every attempt to state it.

Two accounts of the sayable present, and their remainder

Two accounts promise that the present can, after all, be reached in speech, and each illuminates the limit by the exact manner of its failure.

The first is the account of the performative present, the deictic now. Linguistics observes that words like *now*, *here*, *I*, and *this* take their reference from the very act of utterance; the *now* of *I love you now* just is the moment of speaking, so it seems the word cannot lag the moment it names, since it names whatever moment it is spoken in. But this only relocates the lag. The

deictic *now* refers to the moment of utterance, yet the living present that maintenance needs is not the instant of an utterance; it is the felt current of being-with, which is not itself an act of speech and which the utterance interrupts in order to name. When I stop being with you in order to say that I am with you, the saying occupies the moment the deixis points to, and the being-with it would report has been set aside for the duration of the report. The deictic present is real, but it is the present of the speaking, not the present of the bond, and these are not the same present.

The second is the phenomenological account of the living present, which comes nearer the truth and for that reason marks the limit more precisely. Phenomenology describes the present of experience not as a knife-edge instant but as a thick now that carries the just-past in retention and the about-to-come in protention, so that the living present is always already a passage rather than a point. Merleau-Ponty makes perception itself this temporal thickness, a present that is never a bare instant but a field in motion [21]. This is exactly right about the present that maintenance inhabits, and it is precisely what defeats the statement. A statement fixes; it arrests a content and holds it still for predication. The living present, being a passage and not a point, cannot be arrested without being stopped, and stopped it is no longer the living present but a still taken from it. Phenomenology thus tells us why the present cannot be said: to say it is to fix it, and to fix a passage is to end the passing that made it alive.

The core

The core language cannot reach here is the *present* of the relation, its currentness, the being-now of the bond as against every account of how it was a moment ago. The relation lives in a present that speech cannot occupy, because the act of speaking already places the speaker at a small distance from the moment spoken of, and because the moment in question is a passage that fixing would end. One can narrate the relation, and narration has its place, but narration is always of the just-past, and the living edge on which the bond is actually sustained stays ahead of the narration, uncaptured.

The uncapturability of the present. The living present in which a relation is sustained cannot be occupied by any statement. The deictic present belongs to the act of speaking and not to the being-with it would report; the thick present of experience is a passage that fixing would arrest and so end. What maintenance rests on stays ahead of every sentence that reaches for it.

An illustrative case — the photograph of the moment. Two people try to hold an evening by recording it, a photograph, a note written the same night, a message that says exactly how it feels now. Later the record is faithful and the moment is gone from it, present only as something the record points back to and does not contain. The living being-together that the

evening was cannot be found in what was saved of it. This is not the failure of a poor record. The best record would do no better, because the present it would hold is a passage, and what is saved of a passage is always a still from which the passing has been removed.

Why the limit is generative here

This is what makes maintenance a matter of presence rather than of statement. Because the living present cannot be said, it can only be inhabited, and the keeping of a relation is not the repeated production of true sentences about it but the repeated occupation of a present that no sentence holds. Consider again the counter-case, a bond whose current moment *could* be fixed in words. Its maintenance would consist in keeping the words up to date, in issuing at each moment the true sentence for that moment, a maintenance of the record rather than of the bond; and a relation maintained by keeping its record current would be one in which presence had been replaced by reporting. The limit forbids this substitution. Because the living present cannot be caught in a sentence, maintenance cannot be discharged by sentences, and is thrown back onto presence itself, onto the being-there that no report replaces. The uncapturability that looked like a failure of the present tense is what keeps maintenance an inhabiting rather than a filing. It is also the temporal form of desire, which slides from signifier to signifier precisely because no signifier ever coincides with the present it reaches for, a movement the paper takes up in Part Two.

4. Relational Value Without a Place to Be Priced

This section takes the third dimension, the value generated within a relation, and establishes that such value cannot be named as a magnitude, because quantification presupposes an external place from which worth is assessed, and a value that exists only within a relation grants no such place. The result is that relational value cannot be extracted or priced, and this is what keeps it living in the bond rather than available to be drawn off. The section proceeds through the phenomenon, a review of the accounts that would render relational value assessable, the isolation of the core, and the claim.

The phenomenon

Within a relation, value is generated. Something comes to matter, to weigh, to be worth caring for, and this worth is not carried in from outside but arises in the bond itself. Language seems able to reach this value. We have the vocabulary of worth ready: what this means to me, how much you matter, what our years together are worth. These phrases present value as if it were a magnitude, a quantity that speech could name and, naming, fix.

They do not fix it. The value generated in a relation is not a property lodged in either person, to be read off and reported. It is generated in the relation and exists only there, in the between, and this is what defeats the naming. To name a value as a magnitude is to assume a place from which the naming is done, a standpoint outside the thing valued from which its worth

can be assessed and set down. For a value that exists only within a relation there is no such outside place.

Two ways of trying to assess it, and why they fail

Two lines of thought promise that relational worth can be brought into a common measure, and each fails in a way that shows the structure of the limit.

The first treats the value in a bond as a form of capital. Bourdieu extended the economic vocabulary of capital to goods that are not money, cultural capital and social capital among them, and analyzed relationships as holdings that can be accumulated, converted, and made to yield [3]. On this account the worth generated in a relation would be a stock of social capital, in principle measurable by what it can be converted into. The account captures something real about how relationships function within fields of power, and it fails at exactly the point that concerns us. The value that social capital measures is the value a relationship has *for* something outside it, its convertibility into advantage; the value generated *within* the bond, the worth the bond has in itself and for those in it, is precisely what does not convert, what cannot be cashed into any external advantage without ceasing to be the thing it was. Social capital measures the relation from outside, in the currency of what it yields; the value in question is the one that has no yield outside the relation, and so no place in the ledger of capital.

The second is the appeal to a common measure of value as such, the assumption, built into any optimization or cost-benefit frame, that distinct goods can be ranked on a single scale so that trade-offs among them can be computed. Raz argued against exactly this assumption for certain goods, holding that some values are incommensurable, that there is no common measure by which, for instance, the worth of a friendship and a sum of money could be compared, and that to attempt the comparison is not to make a difficult judgment but to commit a kind of error about what the values are [23]. The worth generated within a relation is incommensurable in this sense. To ask what it is worth in any external currency, to seek its magnitude on a common scale, is not to pose a hard question but to misunderstand the value, which is not the kind of thing that has a magnitude on a scale shared with other things. Raz names the error; the present account gives its ground, in the next paragraph.

The core

The core language cannot reach here is the *relational generation* of value, its arising in the between rather than in either party, which is also its refusal of any external place from which it could be quantified. The point is not that the value is large, or hard to compute, or private. The point is structural, and it grounds the incommensurability Raz observed. Quantification presupposes an outside knower who could assign a magnitude to any worth, a position from which all value is in principle assessable, a place occupied, in the theological figure the series has used elsewhere, by an Other who could price everything. A value generated only within a relation denies that such a position exists for it, since to occupy the position would be to stand outside the relation, which is to stand where the value is not. There is no assessor clear of the

bond from which the bond's own generated worth could be measured, because the worth does not exist anywhere the assessor could stand. Incommensurability, at this level, is not a curious fact about certain goods; it is the consequence of a relational ontology of value, on which there is no external vantage from which relational worth could be brought to a common measure, because relational worth is nowhere but in the relation.

No external place to price the relation. Value generated within a relation cannot be assigned a magnitude, because quantification requires a standpoint outside the valued thing from which worth is assessed, and relational value exists only within the relation, offering no such standpoint. The incommensurability of relational goods is not a brute datum but a consequence of the relational generation of value: there is no Other positioned to price what exists only in the between.

An illustrative case — the years that have no price. Asked what a long shared life is worth, one finds the question not hard but wrong, and the wrongness is instructive. It is not that the figure is large or hard to compute. It is that there is no currency the worth converts into, no external ledger where it could be entered, because the worth exists only in the bond and nowhere a price could be set. To name a sum would not undervalue the years; it would misdescribe them, treating as a magnitude on a common scale what has its being only in the relation.

Why the limit is generative here

This is what keeps relational value from being a possession or a price. Because the worth generated in a bond cannot be set down as a magnitude, it cannot be extracted from the bond and carried off, cannot be banked, traded, or realized elsewhere. Consider the counter-case, a relational value that *could* be fully priced. Priced, it could be sold; realized in an external currency, it could be drawn off, and the relation would be left holding a figure where the bond had been. The limit forbids this. Because relational value has no external place to be assessed, it has no external place to be cashed, and so it stays where it was generated, in the living bond, unavailable to extraction. This will matter in Part Four, where the capture of relational value by external powers is shown to work only by first supplying the very forms in which the value is generated, since the value itself, once generated within the bond, offers capital no place to seize it. For now the point is only that the worth generated within a relation, having no place to be priced, has no place to be taken, and that this ungraspability is what keeps it a living worth rather than a realizable asset.

5. The Aesthetic Measure of the Ethical Response

This section takes the fourth dimension, the ethical demand a relation makes, and establishes that at its root the ethical response rests on an aesthetic measure, a sensed fittingness that cannot be turned into a proposition, so that ethics is a matter of cultivated perception rather than of applied doctrine. The section states the phenomenon, reviews the singularity of the other and the aesthetic register through which it is met, isolates the core, and draws the claim. This is the dimension the paper marks as ethical at its root, and the review is correspondingly fuller.

The phenomenon

A relation makes ethical demands, and the first of them is a demand to answer this person, the one before me, in their singularity. Language seems able to meet the demand. We have the resources of moral speech: principles, reasons, the vocabulary of obligation and desert. It appears that to act well toward another is to apply the right rule to the case, and that the rule and the case can both be said. A long tradition in moral philosophy proceeds on exactly this appearance, treating the ethical task as the subsumption of a particular case under a general principle.

They can be said only up to a point, and the point is where ethics begins.

The singularity of the other

To grasp the other through any predicate, any category, any rule, is already to grasp them as an instance of a kind, a bearer of the stated features, one who falls under the description. Levinas made this the center of ethics: the other faces me not as an instance of humanity in general but as this one, whose claim on me precedes and exceeds every category under which I might bring them, so that the ethical relation is a relation to what no concept contains [20]. The face, in his vocabulary, is exactly what resists becoming a theme, a content I could state and thereby master. The ethical claim comes from what the predicates do not exhaust, from this other as this other and not as a case of a type. So far the limit is a limit on conceptual grasp: the singular exceeds the general, and the other's claim issues from the excess.

But this leaves a question Levinas does not fully answer, and it is the question that carries the section. If the other exceeds every rule, how is the fitting response to them found? It cannot be deduced, for deduction works from generals and the case is singular. What faculty, then, takes the measure of a singular to which no rule reaches?

The aesthetic register

The answer this paper proposes is that the measure is taken aesthetically, in the register of *aisthesis*, sensed before it is stated and not reducible to any rule from which it could be read off. How much to say and how much to leave unsaid, when to press and when to hold back, the exact weight of a gesture, the timing of a silence: all of this is apprehended in the way

one apprehends the rightness of a line or the wrongness of a false note. It is a perception of fittingness, not an inference to it.

Two sources make this register precise. Merleau-Ponty showed that perception is not the passive reception of data but an active taking-up of a situation, a bodily attunement that grasps a whole before it articulates any part, and that this attunement has its own intelligence, a knowing in the perceiving that no subsequent proposition exhausts [21]. The fitting response to another is grasped by exactly this perceptual intelligence: one senses the shape of the situation and what it calls for, as a whole, before and beneath any rule one could state. Dufrenne, extending phenomenology to aesthetic experience, described the perception of an aesthetic object as the apprehension of an expressed meaning that is given only in the sensing and cannot be detached from it into a concept, a meaning that is felt as the depth of the perceived and lost the moment one tries to state it apart from the perceiving [8]. The measure of the ethical response has this form. It is an expressed meaning of the singular situation, given in the perception of it and not detachable into a rule.

This is why the ethical response cannot be propositionalized. The proposition states a general, and the fittingness at stake is of this response, here, to this one. To translate the sensed measure into a statable rule is to replace the perception of a singular with the application of a general, which is to pass over exactly the singularity the other's claim consisted in. The measure lives in the sensing and dies in the saying.

The core

The core language cannot reach here is the *aesthetic measure* of the ethical response, the sensed fittingness that cannot be turned into a proposition. It is not that the right rule is hard to find or hard to phrase. It is that the fittingness at stake is of a kind with the fittingness of a form, apprehended in perception and lost in translation to a rule, because the rule states a general and the fittingness is singular. The ethical, at its root, is answerable to a measure that is aesthetic in the strict sense: taken by *aisthesis*, in the perceiving, and not by the understanding, in the proposition.

The aesthetic root of the ethical. The fitting response to the singular other cannot be derived from any rule, because rules state generals and the fittingness is of this response to this one. It is grasped aesthetically, in the register of aisthesis, as one grasps the rightness of a form, and is lost when translated into a proposition. Ethics at its root rests on a perception, not a doctrine.

An illustrative case — the timing no rule gives. Someone before you is in pain, and the question is whether to speak or to keep silent, and if to speak, in what weight and at what moment. No

rule delivers the answer, for the rule states a general and this is this person, now. What guides the fitting response is a perception of the whole situation, a sensed measure taken in the way one senses that a further word would be one word too many. Those who respond well here are not those who know more rules but those whose perception has been schooled finer, and what they have is not a doctrine but an eye.

Why the limit is generative here

This is what keeps ethics a matter of cultivated perception rather than of applied doctrine. Because the fitting response cannot be propositionalized, it must be perceived, and the ethical life is the schooling of a perception fine enough to take the measure of a singular case. Consider the counter-case, a morality fully written as rules. One would discharge it by looking up the rule and applying it, and the looking-up would pass over the singularity of the other in favor of the type under which the rule brought them; a perfectly codified ethics would be an ethics that never met anyone, only cases. The limit forbids this. Because the measure is aesthetic and cannot be codified, ethics is returned to the trained eye and the trained ear, to a sense of the fitting that no code replaces, and the ethical life becomes the long cultivation of that sense. This connects the ethical dimension to the aesthetic education the series has developed elsewhere, and it will return in Part Four, where the ethics of making room for the other's unsymbolizable core is shown to rest on exactly this perceptual measure. What cannot be said in the ethical relation is not a failing of moral language. It is the opening in which answering this other, and not merely applying a rule to a case, becomes possible at all.

6. The Generativity That Justice Guards

This section takes the fifth dimension, the justice a relation owes, and establishes that what justice most owes protection to is not only a settled fact awaiting adjudication but the generativity of relational being, the still-forming life of the bond, which is the intervention of the Real into the symbolic and cannot be settled in advance by any existing order of signs. The result is that justice at its root is the guarding of generativity rather than the settlement of the already-formed. The section proceeds through the phenomenon, a review of the two pictures of justice that treat it as settlement, the isolation of the core, and the claim.

The phenomenon

A relation owes justice, and justice seems the most sayable of all the dimensions, since it lives in claims, procedures, and judgments, in the very element of statement. Justice weighs what is owed and settles it, and to settle is to say. It appears that whatever justice concerns can in principle be brought into the order of signs, stated as a claim and disposed of by a judgment. Two pictures reinforce the appearance, and it is worth naming them to see what they leave out.

Two pictures of justice as settlement

The first is the procedural picture, on which justice is the correct running of a procedure that takes claims as inputs and yields judgments as outputs. Its virtue is that it makes justice sayable through and through: everything relevant is a claim, and a claim is a statement. But a procedure operates on the already-formed. It takes what has happened, states it as a case, and disposes of it, and it is constitutively backward-looking, addressed to what has taken shape and can be brought before it. What is still forming, what has not yet taken the shape a claim would state, is not an input the procedure can accept, and so it falls outside the procedure's reach not by oversight but by the procedure's nature.

The second is the picture of justice as the retrospective repair of wrongs, the setting-right of a harm already done. This too is real and necessary, and this too is backward-looking. It addresses the wrong as a fact, laid out for assessment, and its whole labor is the disposal of what has already occurred. Here the work on testimony is instructive by contrast. Felman and Laub, studying the witnessing of catastrophe, found that the most severe wrongs resist exactly the settlement that repair would require, that there is in them a core which does not become a statable fact to be assessed and closed, but persists as something only borne witness to, never disposed of [9]. Even in the retrospective case, then, a remainder escapes settlement. And what escapes there is a version of what concerns us, though the section's own subject lies not in the past wrong but in the forward direction, in the still-forming.

The core

Something in justice resists settlement, and it is the deepest thing justice has to protect. What a relation of justice must answer to is not only a settled fact but the generativity of relational being itself, the still-forming, not-yet-settled life of the bond. This generativity is the intervention of the Real into the symbolic. What is new is new precisely in that it is not yet covered by the existing signifiers, a tear the Real opens in the order of established meaning. The core language cannot reach here is this *generativity* of relational being, the Real's intervention, which cannot be settled in advance by any existing order of signs. To bring the still-forming under the settled sign is to demote it from becoming to become, from the living generativity that justice must protect to a finished case that a procedure can dispose of. The limit is not that justice has not yet found the right words. It is that the object justice most owes protection to is, by its nature as generativity, what the words have not reached and cannot reach without ending it.

Justice guards what it cannot settle. The deepest object of justice is the generativity of relational being, the still-forming life that the intervention of the Real keeps opening in the order of settled meaning. This generativity cannot be settled in advance, for to settle it is to convert becoming into the already-become and so to end it. Justice at its root is therefore the guarding of a generativity it cannot bring into the settled sign, not the settlement of the

already-formed alone.

An illustrative case — the grievance that the settlement misses. A wrong within a bond is brought to a reckoning, stated as a claim, weighed, and disposed of by an agreed repair. The repair is fair, and something in the wrong is nonetheless left untouched by it, a residue that the statement of the claim could not carry and the settlement could not reach. What the reckoning addressed was the wrong insofar as it could be stated; what remains is the wrong insofar as it could not. The residue is not a sign that the settlement was unjust. It is the mark that justice answers to something a settlement does not exhaust.

Why the limit is generative here

This is what keeps justice from collapsing into administration. Because generativity cannot be settled in advance, justice cannot be exhausted by procedure, and a justice worthy of the name holds itself open to what its own settled forms have not anticipated. Consider the counter-case, a justice that could dispose of everything by existing rule. It would be an administration of the already-formed, complete and closed, and precisely in its completeness it would be deaf to the new that relational being keeps generating, since the new is what no existing rule anticipated. The limit forbids this closure. Because the generativity justice guards cannot be brought under the settled sign, justice must keep itself answerable to what exceeds its procedures, and refuse itself the false completeness of a procedure that has foreseen everything. The mode of this keeping-open, a knowing that holds what it cannot dispose of, is taken up in Part Four under the name of witnessing. What justice cannot bring into the settled sign is not a gap in the law. It is the living generativity that the law exists to keep open.

7. The Unsayable Direction of Growth

This section takes the sixth and last dimension, the evolution of a relation, and establishes that the direction of a bond's genuine growth cannot be stated in the signifiers now available, because genuine novelty is by definition what the present vocabulary does not contain, so that a relation is a becoming undergone rather than a plan carried out. The section proceeds through the phenomenon, a review of the accounts that would make the direction of growth sayable in advance, the isolation of the core, and the claim, and it closes Part One by gathering the six limits into their shared form.

The phenomenon

A relation grows and turns. It generates forms it did not have, becomes over years something neither party could have set out at the start. Language seems able to reach this growth, at least in prospect. We plan, we imagine, we say where we are heading: what we will build, who we will become, what our life will grow into. These sentences present the direction of a bond's

development as if it could be laid out ahead of the walking.

They lay out only what the present already contains.

Two ways of saying the future, and their limit

Two accounts promise that the direction of growth can be stated in advance, and each shows, by the form of its shortfall, what genuine novelty is.

The first is prediction, the projection of a future from the trends of the present. Prediction is powerful and often right, and it has a definite scope: it states the future insofar as the future is a continuation of the present, an extrapolation of what is already underway. But precisely for that reason prediction reaches only the future that the present already implies. What it cannot reach is the genuinely new, the form that is not an extrapolation of present trends but a break from them, for such a form is not contained in the present data and so cannot be projected from them. Prediction states the future that is already latent; the direction of genuine growth is the future that is not latent, and prediction passes it by.

The second is the account of the future as the realization of a plan, the execution of an intended design. A couple sets out to build a life of a certain shape, and the building realizes the design. This too has its truth, and this too has its limit. A plan can only specify what its authors can already conceive, in the vocabulary already available to them; it lays out a future in present terms. But a relation that genuinely evolves becomes something its members could not have specified at the outset, something for which they did not yet have the words, and this is not a failure of planning but the mark of real growth. Where the outcome was fully specifiable in advance, there was no evolution, only the unrolling of a design. The plan reaches the future it could already state; the direction of genuine growth is the future it could not, and the plan does not contain it.

The core

The core language cannot reach here is the *direction* of the relation's becoming, its genuine novelty, which cannot be stated in the signifiers now available. The point is not that the future is uncertain in the ordinary way, a known range of outcomes not yet decided; uncertainty of that kind is still stated in present terms, as a distribution over foreseen possibilities. The point is that the genuinely new form is not yet sayable at all, since its sayability would require the very signifiers whose absence is what makes it new. The direction of real growth is the not-yet-symbolizable, and it stays ahead of speech not by accident but by what novelty is. This is the forward-facing form of the same generativity that justice was shown to guard: there, the still-forming as the object of protection; here, the not-yet-sayable as the direction of growth.

The direction of growth is not sayable in advance. The direction in which a relation genuinely evolves cannot be stated in the signifiers now available, because genuine novelty is

precisely what the present vocabulary does not contain. Prediction reaches only the latent future, the plan only the already-conceivable; the new form is not-yet-symbolizable, and stays ahead of every advance description by what novelty is.

An illustrative case — the life neither could have described. Two people set out with a picture of the life they would build, and years on they are something the picture did not contain, not a deviation from the plan but a growth the plan had no words for. Asked at the start to describe what they became, they could not have, because the terms were not yet theirs. The becoming was real precisely in that it outran the description available to it. What they could not have said in advance was not a gap in their foresight. It was the room in which the relation grew into what no one yet had words for.

Why the limit is generative here

This is what keeps the evolution of a relation open rather than executed. Because the direction of genuine growth cannot be said in advance, a relation is not a plan carried out but a becoming undergone, and its future is generated in the living rather than read from a design. Consider the counter-case, a relation whose development could be fully stated beforehand. It would have no future in the strong sense, only the unrolling of a foreseen sequence, a life lived as the execution of its own prospectus. The limit forbids this. Because the direction of real growth is not-yet-sayable, the future of a relation cannot be pre-stated and so cannot be merely executed; it must be undergone, generated in the walking, open to forms not yet in the language. What cannot be said in advance is not the failure of foresight. It is the space in which a relation can still become what no one yet has words for.

The six limits are now before us, each with its own core and each with its own claim: the ungroundability of the bond's existence, the uncapturability of the living present, the absence of any external place to price relational value, the aesthetic measure of the ethical response, the generativity that justice guards, and the unsayable-in-advance direction of growth. They are set side by side, not ranked and not derived one from another, and the parallel is deliberate: the limit of language is not one vague insufficiency but six distinct and structured phenomena. Yet across all six a single form has appeared. In each, language reaches toward something and does not reach it; in each, the core it cannot reach is a remainder that the operation of the signifier leaves outside itself; and in each, the not-reaching is not a defect but the condition under which that dimension of relational life is what it is. Part Two asks what stands at these limits, traces it to the constitution of the speaking subject, and gives it a name.

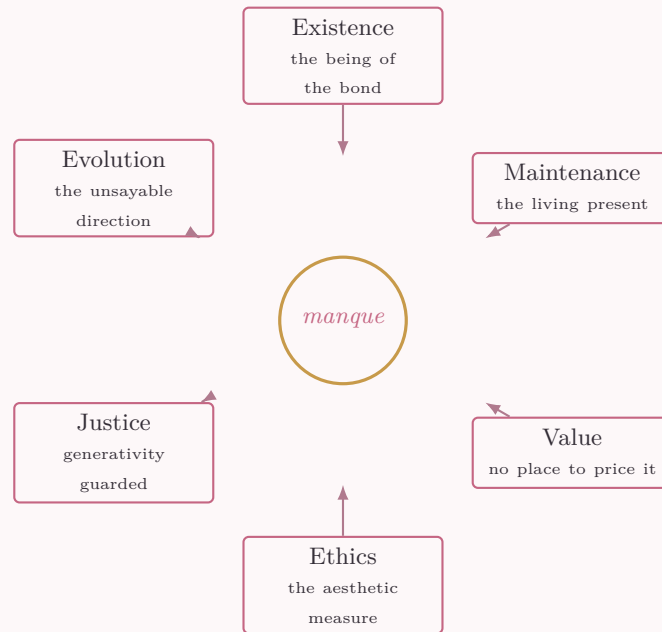


Figure 1: Six windows on one gap. In each dimension of relational life, language reaches toward a core it does not touch (rose arrows), and in each the core is a face of the same manque. The parallel is not a ranking; it is six structured phenomena sharing one form.

Part Two The Phenomenology of the Gap: The Descent at Manque

8. Entry into the Symbolic and the Pre-Symbolic Remainder

This section opens Part Two by tracing the shared form of the six limits to its source. The aim is to establish that the remainder language could not reach, in each of the six dimensions, has a single origin in the constitution of the speaking subject, and that psychoanalysis names this origin: the subject is constituted in the signifier by an operation that leaves a part outside itself, in the register of the Real. The section sets out the psychoanalytic account of entry into language, follows the two moments of that entry by which the remainder is produced, distinguishes the sense of the Real it employs, and shows that the six cores of Part One are expressions of this one remainder.

From six limits to one source

Part One left a result and a question. The result was that in each dimension of relational life, language reaches toward a core it does not reach, and that in each the not-reaching is generative. The question is why the same form should recur across dimensions as different as the existence of a bond, the measure of an ethical response, and the direction of growth. Six limits with one form ask for one source, and the source is not to be found by comparing the dimensions with one another but by descending beneath them, to the constitution of the subject who speaks in all of them.

The subject constituted in the signifier

To become a subject who speaks is to be taken up into the symbolic order, the field of signifiers that precedes the subject and structures it. This is the pivot of Lacan's rereading of Freud, and its consequence is precise. The subject that comes to be in the signifier is not a prior fullness that language then expresses. It is constituted in and by the signifier, and there is no subject of speech behind or before this constitution to which one might appeal [19]. Fink states the mechanism carefully: the subject is what is represented by one signifier for another, a subject that appears only in the movement of the chain and has no substance apart from it [10]. The subject is an effect of the signifier, not its origin.

Before the signifier there is a phase in which the human infant finds an anticipated unity in an external image, a coherence borrowed from a form outside itself, and this borrowed coherence already installs a distance between the subject and the ground of its own being [19]. The image gives a unity the body does not yet have, and the self that forms around it is from the first an identification with something other, a self founded on an outside. When the signifier arrives it does not heal this distance but redoubles it, for now the subject must find itself in a field of signs that likewise precede and exceed it. The entry into language is the second and decisive founding of the subject upon what is not itself.

The two moments of alienation and separation

The entry into the signifier can be followed in two moments, and the second is where the remainder is produced. In the first moment, which psychoanalysis calls alienation, the subject takes on the signifiers of the Other as the only means of appearing at all, and pays for its appearance by a loss: to be represented by a signifier is to be reduced to what the signifier can carry, and the living being that entered is not wholly carried [16]. In the second moment, separation, the subject confronts a lack in the Other itself, the fact that the Other's chain of signifiers does not close, does not contain the answer to what the subject is for it, and in this confrontation the object-cause of desire is produced, at the point where the two lacks meet [10]. What matters for the present argument is that this double operation does not gather the whole of the subject into the signifier. It constitutes the subject by a cut, and the cut leaves a portion of the subject's being outside the signifier, uncaptured by the structure that made the subject a subject.

Freud had already found, beneath the subject of conscious speech, a domain governed otherwise, and had named the pressure that rises from it the drive, *Trieb*, a force on the border between the somatic and the psychical that presses toward satisfaction and is never simply stilled [12]. Lacan's contribution was to show that the induction into the signifier is what produces this border, that the very operation constituting the subject as a speaker leaves the drive's portion outside the signifier. This uncaptured portion is the remainder, and it is not a residue that a fuller symbolization might later gather in. It is what the operation of symbolization, by its nature, leaves out.

An illustrative case — the word that never fits. A person carries, from early life, a way of being

wanted that no word they were given ever fit, a pressure with no name in the language handed to them. In adult intimacy it presses still, shaping what they seek and cannot say they seek. It is not that the right word was withheld and might yet be supplied. There was never a word of the right kind, because what presses is exactly the portion the entry into words left out. The nameless pressure is not a failure of their vocabulary. It is the remainder, felt.

Which Real

The word Real must be used with care, since Lacan gave it more than one sense across his teaching. In the early work the Real is close to the brute given, what is always in its place, prior to the symbolic articulation that will carve it [17]. In the mature and late work it becomes the impossible, the internal limit of symbolization, what does not cease not to be written [18]. The present paper takes the Real primarily in the second, mature sense, as the internal limit rather than an external given, and it takes up the pre-symbolic remainder as the genetic aspect of that same limit, not as a separate brute domain lying behind the sign. The next section shows that these are two faces of one gap. Here the point is only to fix the usage: the Real that concerns the paper is the remainder produced by the operation of the signifier, the internal offcut of subjectivation, and not a fullness lying behind language that language fails to reach.

The remainder as the source of the six cores

The pre-symbolic remainder, understood this way, is the source the six limits pointed to. What language could not reach, in existence, in maintenance, in value, in ethics, in justice, in evolution, was in each case a form of this same remainder, the part that the operation of the signifier leaves outside itself. The existence of the bond, the living present, the relational generation of value, the aesthetic measure, the generativity justice guards, the direction of growth: each is a face of the one thing that the constitution of the speaking subject cannot take up into the signifier. The six dimensions were six windows onto a single gap. The next section gives the gap its two faces and shows that they are one, and the section after gives the gap its object.

9. The Two Faces of the Real

This section establishes that the gap at the source of the six limits has two faces, one genetic and one logical, and that they are the same gap. The aim is to show that the pre-symbolic remainder (a part cut off at the origin) and the impossibility of complete symbolization (a closure that can never be attained) are not two conditions but one, so that the single name *manque* covers both. The section takes the genetic face first, draws the logical face out of it as a consequence rather than a separate posit, reviews the reading that would keep them apart, and states the claim.

The genetic face

Genetically, as the previous section set out, a remainder is cut off in the constitution of the speaking subject. Something is left outside the signifier when the subject is taken up into the

symbolic order. This is a fact about how a speaking subject comes to be: it comes to be by a cut, and the cut leaves a portion in the Real. The genetic face is a claim about origin. There was, in the constitution of the subject, an operation of separation, and that operation has a remainder.

The logical face, drawn from the genetic

From this the logical face follows, and the order matters: the logical is not an independent thesis but the consequence of the genetic. Because a remainder is left outside the signifier in the very operation that installs the symbolic order, the complete closure of that order is not a task still to be finished but a thing that cannot be. The symbolic cannot close over the whole, because its own installation was the leaving-out of a part. The impossibility is not empirical, not a matter of the signifier having so far failed to cover everything and perhaps succeeding later with better instruments. It is structural. The operation that builds the symbolic order is the same operation that produces what the order cannot contain, so the order runs on a constitutive non-closure. Fink draws the consequence exactly: there is no metalanguage, no signifying system able to close upon itself and speak its own whole, because every such system is founded on the exclusion that founds it [10]. This is the Real in its logical sense, what Lacan in the late teaching approached as the impossible, that which does not cease not to be written [18]: not the merely not-yet-said but the impossible-to-say-completely, the point at which symbolization meets its own limit as a limit and not as a frontier.

Against keeping the two faces apart

It might seem cleaner to keep the two faces separate, to treat the pre-symbolic remainder as a developmental posit, a something-before that could in principle be dispensed with, and to rest the impossibility of closure on a purely logical argument about self-reference, in the manner of the formal results on systems that cannot prove their own consistency. Some readings of Lacan lean this way, treating the Real as either the mythical before or the logical limit, and choosing between them [4, 6]. The present paper declines the choice, and for a reason internal to the account. The logical impossibility, taken alone, is a fact about formal systems; it does not by itself explain why there should be a *drive*, a felt pressure, at the point of impossibility. The genetic cut, taken alone, is a story about origin; it does not by itself establish that closure is impossible in principle rather than merely unattained. Held together, each supplies what the other lacks. The genetic cut explains why the impossibility is inhabited, why there is a pressure and not merely a formal gap: because the remainder is a part of the subject's own being, left outside and pressing to return. The logical impossibility explains why the cut can never be healed, why the pressure is permanent and not a wound that time might close. The two faces are one because only together do they give the phenomenon the paper is after, an impossibility that is also a drive.

The single gap

The two faces are one gap. *Manque* (the lack, the constitutive want) names it. It is genetic in that a part was cut off, and it is logical in that, a part having been cut off, closure became impossible. What was left out at the origin is what can never be gathered in at the end, and the reason no sentence in Part One could reach its core is that the core, in every case, was manque: the remainder whose being-cut-off is one with the impossibility of its ever being said.

The single gap. The pre-symbolic remainder and the impossibility of complete symbolization are not two conditions but the two faces of one manque. Because the subject is constituted by a cut that leaves a part in the Real, the symbolic order cannot close; the genetic want grounds the logical impossibility, and the logical impossibility makes the genetic want permanent. Neither face alone yields an impossibility that is also a drive; held together, they do.

10. The Descent of the Object at the Gap

This section establishes what takes form at the gap. The aim is to show that the objet petit a is not an object that fills the lack but the form the lack takes within the economy of desire, the shape manque assumes so as to set desire turning, and that it holds its place precisely by not being the filling of it. The section states the temptation to misread the object, gives the correct account with its psychoanalytic warrant, follows the object through its several forms as the partial objects around which the drive turns, reviews the reading that would treat it as an attainable thing, and draws the consequence that prepares the distinction of drive from desire.

What descends, and what it is not

At the gap something takes form. It is not a thing that fills the gap, and not a content that closes it. It is the way the gap is given a shape within the economy of desire, and psychoanalysis calls it the objet petit a, the object-cause of desire [16]. Everything in the account depends on holding the object apart from the ordinary notion of an object, and the temptation to collapse the two is strong, since the word object invites it.

Object-cause, not object of desire

The objet a is not the object that desire seeks, the target it aims at and might attain. It is the object-*cause*, the point from which desire is set in motion, and it stands in the place of manque. Lacan drew the distinction sharply in the seminar on the four fundamental concepts: the object around which the drive turns is not the object that would satisfy a need but the object-cause that sustains the turning, and the drive's circuit is defined by this object as an absence it circles rather than a presence it reaches [16]. Žižek gives the point its sharpest

formulation in commentary: the objet a is not a positive entity but the void of desire given a form, an object that is really only the materialization of a lack, such that what looks like the cause of desire is the lack itself wearing the mask of an object [25]. The gap itself is without form, a pure remainder, a want. The objet a is the form the want takes when it enters the field of desire, the shape manque assumes so as to set desire turning. It does not answer the lack. It gives the lack a figure, and by giving it a figure lets it function as the pivot of a movement.

The forms of the object

The object-cause is not one thing but appears in several forms, and following them makes its character clearer, since what the forms have in common is exactly what distinguishes the object-cause from any ordinary object. Psychoanalysis lists among these forms not only the objects of the early drives but, in Lacan's extension, the gaze and the voice [16]. What is striking is that these are not objects one grasps at all. The gaze is not what I see but the sense of being seen from a point I cannot occupy, a point in the field of vision that looks back and that I can never bring into my own view. The voice is not what is said, not the meaning carried, but a remainder of the vocal that no meaning absorbs, what persists in a voice when everything sayable in it has been understood. Each of these is an object that is constitutively out of reach, given only as something that escapes, and this is precisely why they can serve as forms of the object-cause. What the several forms share is not a property one could hold but a manner of escaping, and it is the escaping, not any content, that makes them able to figure the lack and set desire turning. The object-cause is whatever, in a field, functions as its unreachable point.

An illustrative case — the look one cannot return. Between two people there is often a way the one feels seen by the other that they cannot reciprocate on demand, a sense of being held in a regard whose exact point they can never occupy or verify. It is not a fact one could confirm by asking, since to ask is already to fall out of it. This being-seen from a point one cannot reach is the gaze as object-cause, a form of the lack around which the bond turns, given only as what escapes the very look that would secure it.

Against the attainable object

Read as an ordinary object, the objet a would be something one could reach and hold, and desire would be the project of attaining it. The whole clinical and theoretical weight of the concept stands against this reading, and the forms just surveyed show why. The gaze and the voice cannot be attained; they are given only as what escapes. Were the objet a in general attained and held, the gap it forms would be closed, and the gap is what gave the object its office. Attained, it would cease to be the object-cause and become a mere thing; and desire, finding it a mere thing, would pass on, because what desire turned around was never the thing but the want the thing had been figuring. This is the familiar structure of the object that disappoints in the having, whose possession reveals that it was never the possession that was wanted. The objet a keeps its power only so long as it remains the form of a lack and not the

lack's cancellation.

The consequence

Two things follow, and they organize the next section. First, because the object is the form of a lack and not an attainable thing, the movement that turns around it is a movement that does not aim to end, a circling rather than a reaching. Second, because no signifier and no thing coincides with the want the object figures, there is also a movement that runs along the signifiers without resting, a sliding rather than a circling. The one is drive, the other desire, and both turn on the object that descends at the gap without ever closing it. The next section separates them and shows that relational life needs both.

11. Drive That Circles, Desire That Slides

This section establishes the distinction the paper needs between two movements that turn around the gap, drive and desire, and shows that relational life requires both. The aim is to give each its structure, drive as a circling whose satisfaction lies in the circuit and desire as a metonymic sliding along the chain of signifiers, and to assign to each a definite office in the life of a relation, the one supplying its constant core and the other its movement in time. The section takes drive first, then desire, reviews the psychoanalytic sources that fix each, and states their joint necessity.

Drive, the circuit around the void

Drive (*Trieb*) circles. Its movement is a turning around the object-cause, and its satisfaction, in the precise and initially strange sense psychoanalysis gives it, lies in the circling itself and not in the attainment of any object. Freud had already noted that the drive is oddly independent of its object, that the object is what is most variable in a drive and is not originally connected with it, so that satisfaction does not consist in reaching a predetermined thing [12]. Lacan sharpened this into the topology of the circuit: the drive does not reach its object and rest but makes a circuit around it, and its satisfaction is in the closed loop of the going-out and the return, the aim fulfilled in the movement rather than in the goal [16]. This is the energetic topology of the drive, a closed circuit around a void, sustained by the very fact that the void is not filled. Behind it stands Freud's most difficult claim, that beyond the pleasure principle there is a compulsion to repeat, a pressure that returns upon the same regardless of pleasure, circling a place rather than seeking a satisfaction [11]. What the drive gives to a relation is the account of why the bond has a core that does not go out, an unextinguished pressure that keeps turning at the center, drawing its constancy from a circling that has no terminus because it seeks none.

Desire, the sliding along the chain

Desire (*désir*) slides. Its movement is not a circling but a metonymy, a passage along the chain of signifiers from one to the next, coming to rest on none. Lacan located desire in the very

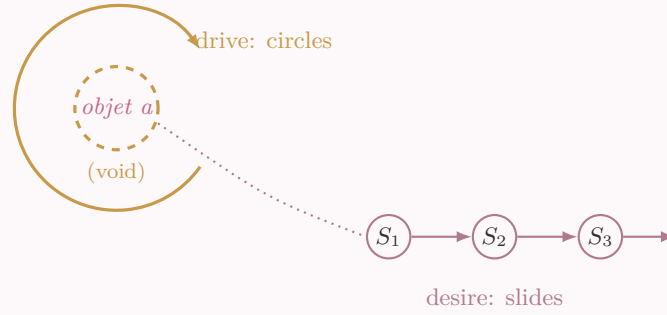


Figure 2: Two movements around one gap. Drive (gold) makes a closed circuit around the void the objet a marks, satisfied in the circling and not in any seizing. Desire (rose) slides along the chain of signifiers $S_1 \rightarrow S_2 \rightarrow S_3 \rightarrow \dots$, resting on none. Both are set going by the same manque; neither closes it.

structure of the signifying chain: because meaning is produced by the movement from signifier to signifier and no signifier delivers a final signified, desire runs along the chain in an endless metonymy, always carried past the signifier it reaches toward the next [19]. Desire is set going by the same manque that the drive circles, but where the drive turns around the void, desire runs along the signifiers, each of which promises and none of which delivers, so that desire is carried forward without end. What desire gives to a relation is the account of why it keeps reorganizing itself in time, why the bond does not settle into a fixed figure but moves through new forms, new words, new objects, always displacing, because no signifier it reaches is the one that would still it.

Why the distinction, and why both

The distinction is not a scholastic refinement but a requirement of the phenomenon. A relation shows two features that no single movement explains. It has constancy, a core that persists through change, the sense in which a bond remains itself across years of alteration. And it has development, a movement through forms, the sense in which a bond does not stand still but keeps becoming. A single movement cannot ground both. The circling alone would give constancy without development, a bond that held its core and never moved, condemned to repeat. The sliding alone would give development without constancy, a bond that moved endlessly and had no core, no self that persisted through the movement. Only the two together give what a relation actually is, a constancy that is nonetheless in motion.

The two movements and their offices. Drive and desire are distinct movements around the one gap, and a relation requires both. Drive circles the object-cause and is satisfied in the circuit; it supplies the constant core, the pressure that does not go out. Desire slides along the chain of signifiers and rests on none; it supplies the movement in time, the displacement through forms. Constancy without development would be repetition; development without constancy would be dispersal; the life of a bond is their compound.

Joined at the gap

The two are joined at the gap and divided in their motion. Drive supplies the energetic topology, the unspent core; desire supplies the symbolic movement, the displacement in time. Both draw their life from the same manque that neither closes, the drive circling what cannot be reached and the desire sliding because it cannot reach it. The persistence of a bond, taken up in Part Three, is the co-working of these two, and the thought experiment of the next section shows what would become of both were the gap they turn on ever closed.

12. The Closure That Would Extinguish

This section is the formal center of the paper. Its aim is to establish, by a thought experiment known to be counterfactual, that the closure of the gap would not fulfill drive and desire but extinguish them, and therefore that the non-closure of language is the formal condition of their persistence. The section states the counterfactual and its purpose, develops the consequence in three steps each given its own treatment, draws the reversal of the ordinary picture, and states the paper's central claim, that drive is the phenomenology of the limit.

The counterfactual and its use

The section on the two faces established that complete symbolization is impossible. Suppose, against that, and only for the sake of the argument, that it were possible. Suppose the gap were closed, the remainder gathered into the signifier, the Real brought without loss into the symbolic. The supposition is counterfactual, and known to be so; the paper does not claim that the gap could be closed, and has argued that it cannot. The use of the supposition is different. By asking what closure would do, were it possible, the section shows what the non-closure secures, and thereby shows that the impossibility established earlier is not a deprivation but a condition of life. A thought experiment of this kind does not assert its premise. It reasons from a premise it rejects, in order to expose the value of the premise's denial.

First step, the drive circles because its object is absent

The drive circles because its object is absent. This was established in the sections on the object and on the two movements: what the object marks is a void, and the drive turns around the void; the circling has its topology only because there is a want at the center and not a thing. The circuit is a circuit of an absence. Remove the absence and there is nothing to circle, no void to describe the loop around. The first step simply fixes what the circling depends on: not an object present at the center, but an object absent, a want given form. The drive's whole motion is predicated on the emptiness of the place it turns around.

Second step, closure fills the center

Suppose now the gap closed. This is the counterfactual move, and its content is exact: the want at the center is filled, the absence made present, the void replaced by an attained object. Everything the earlier sections said could not happen is here supposed to happen, for the sake of seeing its consequence. The objet a, which was the form of a lack, would become a thing possessed; the remainder, which pressed from outside the signifier, would be gathered in; the Real, which was the internal limit of the symbolic, would be dissolved into the symbolic without residue. The center around which the drive turned would now be occupied. There would be, at the place of the want, a presence.

Third step, the circling stops and both movements die

The drive no longer has a void to circle. Its circuit has lost the emptiness that gave it its shape, and a circuit around a filled center is no circuit at all; the loop collapses onto the point it enclosed. The circling therefore stops, and with it the drive is not fulfilled but extinguished. It is essential to see that this is extinction and not satisfaction. One might expect that to fill the want would be to satisfy the drive, since the drive seemed to press toward the want's filling; but the drive's satisfaction was in the circling, not in the filling, and to fill the center is to remove the condition of the circling and so to end the only satisfaction the drive had. Desire, for its part, has nowhere left to slide, since the chain of signifiers ran forward only because no signifier coincided with the thing, and now the coincidence has been supposed; the chain arrives, and arriving, halts. What the supposition delivers is not the satisfaction of drive and desire but their death. The state of total symbolization, imagined as a fulfillment, is in truth a stillness, a bond in which nothing further presses, nothing further turns, nothing further is generated.

The reversal

The result reverses the ordinary picture. On the ordinary picture the gap is a defect and its closure would be a fulfillment, the moment the drive at last reached its object and desire at last came home. The thought experiment shows the opposite. The closure that looks like fulfillment is extinction, and the non-closure that looks like deprivation is the condition under which drive and desire go on at all. The impossibility of complete symbolization, established as impossibility in the section on the two faces, shows here its other aspect. It is not only that the gap cannot be closed. It is that its not being closed is what keeps the drive circling and the desire sliding, which is to say what keeps the relation in movement.

Closure would extinguish, not fulfill. Were the gap closed, the drive would lose the void its circuit turns around and would stop, extinguished rather than satisfied, and desire would lose the non-coincidence that carries it along the chain and would halt. The non-closure of language is therefore not a deprivation but the formal condition of the persistence of drive and

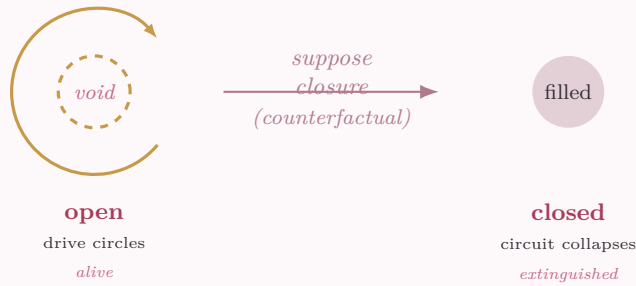


Figure 3: The counterfactual of closure. While the center is a void (left), the drive holds a circuit around it and the bond stays in movement. Were the gap filled (right), known to be impossible and supposed only for the argument, the circuit would have nothing to enclose and would collapse: closure delivers extinction, not fulfillment. The figure depicts what the non-closure secures by showing what its denial would cost.

desire, and the impossibility of complete symbolization is the very thing that keeps a relation in movement.

Drive as the phenomenology of the limit

The central claim of the paper can now be stated. If the drive lives only where the gap is open, and dies where the gap is closed, then the drive is not a content that the gap withholds and a closure would deliver. The drive is the way the open gap shows itself, the felt form of the limit of language. It is not behind the limit, waiting; it is the limit, appearing.

Drive is the phenomenology of the limit. Drive is not a content that language omits and might later recover. Drive is the phenomenology of manque, the felt form of the very limit of language. This is why the attempt to symbolize the gap returns not the drive but its renewed escape: what one tried to say was nothing other than what symbolization cannot close, so the saying finds the gap has moved, and the drive, which was that gap showing itself, has slipped once more beyond the reach of the word.

Part Three The Persistence of Drive: Inscription and the Time of Relation

13. The Symptom as Fidelity to the Unsymbolizable

This section opens Part Three, which follows the persistence of drive into the life of a subject and the time of a relation. Its aim is to establish that the symptom, read through the account of the limit, is not a malfunction to be cleared away but a fidelity: a way of staying bound, in the register of repetition, to a core that was never symbolized. The section states the ordinary view of the symptom, sets against it the psychoanalytic account of repetition, gives the reading the paper proposes, and draws the consequence for reading a life.

The ordinary view and its limit

If drive is the phenomenology of the limit, then its effects are not confined to a single moment but persist across the life of a subject and the life of a bond, and the first place this persistence becomes legible is the symptom. A symptom, in the psychoanalytic sense, is a formation that returns, a pattern that repeats in a subject's life with a constancy the subject does not choose and often does not want. The ordinary view treats it as a fault, a piece of the psyche gone wrong, to be corrected and dissolved, on the model of a medical symptom that points to a disorder and disappears when the disorder is cured. This view has its uses, and it has a limit, which the psychoanalytic account of repetition exposes.

Repetition as the return of the unsymbolized

Freud found that the symptom does not yield to the model of a fault to be corrected. In the analysis of repetition he found a compulsion that returned upon the same, a pressure to repeat that did not serve pleasure and did not dissolve when its meaning was explained, but returned as if bound to something that explanation did not reach [11]. Lacan gave this its structural reading: what repeats is the subject's relation to the Real, to the point that was not taken up into the signifier, and repetition is the insistence of that unsymbolized point, its return in the only register available to it once the register of speech has failed to contain it [16]. The symptom, on this account, is not a fault in the symbolic but the mark of what the symbolic could not gather, returning as repetition because it could not appear as statement.

The symptom as fidelity

The paper proposes to read this as a fidelity. The symptom repeats because it is bound to something that was never symbolized, a core in the Real that found no place in the signifier and so returns in the only way such a core can, as a recurrence rather than a statement. Seen this way, the symptom is the subject's way of staying bound to what could not be said. It is a fidelity held in the register of repetition, to a remainder that the register of speech could not hold. This reading does not deny the suffering a symptom can carry, and it does not counsel against the work of loosening a symptom's grip. It reframes what that work meets. What repeats is not mere error but attachment, the subject's tie to a core that matters precisely because it could not be spoken, and the constancy of the symptom is the constancy of that tie.

The symptom as fidelity. The symptom is not only a malfunction but a fidelity: a staying-bound, in the register of repetition, to a core that was never taken up into the signifier. It returns because what it is bound to could not appear as statement and so appears as recurrence. The constancy of the symptom is the constancy of the drive's circling, made legible across a life.

Reading a life

Read this way, the symptom is the drive's persistence made visible in a life. What cannot be said does not therefore vanish; it presses, and its pressing takes the form of a return, a circling that shows itself over time as the recurrence of a pattern, a scene replayed, a position reassumed. The constancy of the symptom is the constancy of the drive's circling, seen across the length of a life rather than in a single turn, and its refusal to be argued away is the refusal of the Real to be talked into the symbolic. One cannot dissolve by explanation a thing whose whole nature is to be what explanation left out. The bond a person forms, the position they take up within it, the scene that recurs across their relationships, all of this carries the mark of a core that was never symbolized and goes on organizing what happens around it. The next section follows this into the time of relation, where an early signifier is shown to shape bonds that come long after.

14. The Early Signifier and the Time of Relation

This section establishes the temporal structure that the persistence of drive gives to a relation. Its aim is to show that a bond is lived not only in its own present but under the pressure of signifiers inscribed long before it began, and that the two movements distinguished in Part Two, the circling drive and the sliding desire, together account for the peculiar shape of a relational history, at once faithful to a core it did not choose and carried forward into forms it could not have foreseen. The section sets out the early inscription, shows the two movements at work in the time of relation, and draws the claim about the shape of a relational history.

The early inscription

Early in a life certain signifiers are inscribed with a weight the subject did not assign and cannot revoke. A name, a phrase, a scene given a form in the earliest field of the Other, these take on the office of organizing the subject's relation to the object-cause, and they do not lose that office when the subject grows and forms new bonds. This is the temporal reach of the account of Part Two. The remainder cut off in the constitution of the subject is not cut off once and then left behind; the manner of its cutting, the particular signifiers around which the subject's earliest relation to lack was organized, persists as a structure that later relations enter already shaped. Lacan's insistence that the unconscious is structured like a language

has exactly this temporal consequence: a signifier laid down early does not fade with time but retains its structuring power, organizing what can be desired and how, long after its origin has been forgotten [19].

The two movements in the time of relation

The later relation is entered by a subject already marked, already turned in a certain way around its void, and here the division of the two movements returns and does its work. The drive accounts for why the early core does not go out. Its circling is a repetition, and repetition is precisely the mode in which a thing persists without being renewed by choice; the early inscription endures because the drive keeps circling it, unspent across the years. The desire accounts for why the relation nonetheless keeps moving, why the subject does not simply repeat the same bond unchanged but slides through new figures, new partners, new forms of the same turning. Desire carries the subject forward along the chain, seeking in each new signifier what the last did not give, while the drive holds the center constant beneath the movement. A life of relation is the compound of the two: a constant core that the drive keeps circling and a displacement in time that desire keeps generating, the same manque holding beneath both.

The shape of a relational history

This is what gives an intimate history its shape, neither pure repetition nor pure novelty. The point can be put as a claim, since it follows directly from the two offices established in Part Two. If it were only repetition, the drive alone, a person would form the same bond forever without development, condemned to reenact a single scene. If it were only displacement, desire alone, there would be no core, nothing that made a life of relation recognizably one person's, only a succession of unrelated attachments. The compound of a circling that persists and a sliding that displaces is what lets a relational life be at once continuous and in motion.

The shape of a relational history. A relational history is neither pure repetition nor pure novelty but the compound of both. The drive's circling makes the early core persist, giving the history its continuity; desire's sliding carries the subject through new forms, giving the history its movement. A life of relation is recognizable as one person's because a core persists in it, and is a life rather than a fixed scene because it moves; the two movements together supply what neither could alone.

Fidelity to the unchosen

There is a consequence worth marking for what follows. The core a relational history is faithful to was not chosen; it was inscribed before choice, in the earliest field of the Other. The fidelity of a life to its core is therefore not, at bottom, a fidelity one elects, and this will bear on the

ethics of the next section and of Part Four. To make room for another's core is to make room for something in them that they did not choose either, that was laid down in them before they could consent to it, and that organizes their desire from beneath. The time of relation is layered in this way for both partners, each entering the shared present under the pressure of a past inscription, and a relation is in part the meeting of two such layered times.

15. Making Room for the Other's Core

This section draws from the persistence of drive a positive proposal about what a good bond consists in. Its aim is to establish that a relation is sustained not by the completeness of mutual understanding but by each partner's making room for the other's unsymbolizable core, and that the wish for total transparency, granted, would extinguish the very desire it sought to secure. The section states the proposal against the transparency ideal, grounds it in the thought experiment of Part Two, gives it as a claim, and turns the ordinary measure of intimacy around.

The proposal against the transparency ideal

Each partner carries a core that was never symbolized and that goes on circling beneath their speech. The previous sections established that this core is the seat of the subject's desire, the void around which the drive turns, the very thing that makes them a desiring subject and not a transparent surface. A proposal about the good bond follows. A relation is not sustained by the success of communication, and its health is not measured by how completely the two have reached each other. This sets the account against the ideal, met already in the section on existence, that would make transparency the measure of a good bond, the thought that the best relation is the one in which nothing of either remains unsaid [13]. That ideal, applied to intimacy, mistakes the good it aims at. To press toward the complete reaching of the other, the dissolution of every remainder, the full translation of the other into what one understands, is to press toward the extinction the thought experiment described, now enacted upon a person.

The ground in the thought experiment

The ground of the proposal is the result of Part Two, transferred from the structure of the subject to the relation between two. The thought experiment showed that to close the gap is to extinguish the drive that circles it. An other wholly reached would be an other whose gap had been closed, whose remainder had been gathered into what the partner understands, and whose desire, therefore, had gone out. The wish to reach the other completely is thus, unknown to itself, a wish to still the other's desire, since the other's desire lives in the very core that complete reaching would dissolve. What presents itself as the deepest intimacy, a perfect mutual transparency with no remainder on either side, would be the death of desire on both, a bond of two surfaces that had been read and now had nothing further to turn on.

The good bond makes room

The good bond does the opposite. It makes room for the other's core. It holds a space for what in the other cannot be said, does not press to close the gap, and lets the remainder go on circling as the living center of the other's desire. This making-room is not resignation, not a settling for less than understanding. It is the recognition that the unsymbolizable core is not a deficit in the bond but the presence in it of another desiring subject, and that to leave the core its room is to keep the other alive as other.

Room, not transparency. A relation is sustained by each partner's making room for the other's unsymbolizable core, not by the completeness of mutual understanding. The core is the seat of the other's desire; to reach it wholly would be to close the gap the other's desire circles and so to extinguish it. What sustains a bond is two people each declining to fill what in the other must stay open, so that both remain subjects who desire rather than surfaces that have been read.

The measure of intimacy turned around

This turns the ordinary measure of intimacy around. The wish for complete mutual transparency, for a bond in which nothing of either remained unreached, is a wish that, granted, would end the desire that made the bond live. The deeper intimacy is the one that can dwell with the other's unsayable core without needing to close it, that finds in the very unreachability of the other not a barrier to love but the room in which the other stays a living source of it. What one loves in another, on this account, includes what one will never reach in them, and the not-reaching is not the frontier at which love stops but the space in which love continues. Part Four takes this making-room into three registers of relational life and shows the same generativity of the limit at work in the poem, in ethics, and in justice.

16. The Interweaving of Drive in the Couple

This section establishes what distinguishes the intimate dyad from the general structure of the desiring subject. The aim is to show that in intimate relation the fantasy through which each subject relates to its object-cause is not merely doubled, run in parallel by two private subjects, but interwoven, each entering the place of the other's object-cause, and that this interweaving is what makes a couple's shared world both singular to them and unable to be carried out of the bond. The section states the orthodox structure of fantasy, gives the interweaving that intimate relation adds to it, draws the consequence for the non-transferability of a shared world, and states the claim.

The orthodox structure and what intimacy adds

Orthodox psychoanalysis writes the subject's relation to its object in the formula of fantasy, the barred subject in relation to the objet petit a, the object-cause of desire that gives the lack a form and lets desire run [16]. Taken at the level of the single subject, this structure is complete in itself, and one might expect that a relation between two subjects would be the placing of two such structures side by side, each partner running a private fantasy, each turning around a private object-cause, the two merely adjacent. This is not what intimate relation is, and the difference is the seed of everything distinctive about the dyad.

In intimate relation the structure is not doubled side by side but interwoven. Each becomes implicated in the other's fantasy and enters the place of the other's object-cause, so that the object around which each one's desire turns is no longer wholly private but is bound up with, and partly occupied by, the other. The other is not merely a person one desires; the other comes to stand at the very place of the object-cause, the void around which one's drive circles, so that one's own most intimate relation to lack now passes through this particular person. Correspondingly one comes to occupy that place for them. The two voids do not merge, for a void cannot merge with a void; they are interwoven, each partner's circling now running through the other's, the two circuits linked at the place where each one's manque has taken the other as its figure.

The consequence for a shared world

From this interweaving follows the character of the world a couple builds, its idioms, its private jokes, its rites, the whole texture of a shared life. This world is the sediment of the interwoven fantasy. A private joke is funny to exactly two people because its charge is anchored in a shared coordinate of desire that only those two occupy; carried to a third, it is not diminished but simply absent, because the third does not stand in the interweaving that gives it its charge. The same holds of every element of a couple's culture. Its meaning is not lodged in the words or the gestures, which can be copied, but in the interweaving of drive that the words and gestures came to figure, which cannot. This is why a shared world cannot be handed over. What could be transferred, if the outer form were copied, is a shell without its charge, the words of the joke without the interwoven desire that made them funny. The non-transferability of an intimate culture is not an accident of privacy but a consequence of where its value is lodged, in an interweaving that does not exist outside the relation and cannot be carried out of it.

The interweaving of drive. In intimate relation the fantasy of each subject is not doubled in parallel but interwoven, each partner coming to occupy the place of the other's object-cause, so that each one's circling runs through the other's. The shared world a couple builds is the sediment of this interweaving, and its non-transferability follows: what can be copied is the outer form, but the charge is lodged in an interweaving of drive that exists nowhere outside the bond.

The interweaving and the room

The interweaving deepens, rather than softens, the demand of the previous section that each make room for the other's core. Because each partner has come to occupy the place of the other's object-cause, the temptation to close the other's gap is stronger here than anywhere, for the other now stands at the very center one's own desire turns around, and the wish to possess that center, to have it wholly and be assured of it, presses hardest exactly where the interweaving is deepest. The account of Part Two holds all the more firmly for that. To close the other's gap, even here, above all here, would be to extinguish the desire that made the other the living center of one's own circling, and so to collapse the interweaving into a dead thing possessed. The interweaving is kept alive by the same refusal of closure that the whole argument has traced, and the room each makes for the other's unsymbolizable core is, in the interwoven dyad, the room each makes for the living center of their own desire as well.

Part Four The Generativity of the Limit: Poem, Ethics, Justice

17. The Poem, a Language That Circles the Gap

This section opens Part Four, which draws out the generativity of the limit in three registers of relational life. Its aim is to establish that the poem is the language reconciled to its own limit and made generative by it: the one use of language that does not aim across the gap to close it but organizes itself around the gap and keeps it open, and that is for this reason the language of the drive. The section states the contrast between ordinary language and the poem, gives the account with its warrant, reviews the readings of poetic language that approach the same point, and draws the claim.

Ordinary language aims across the gap; the poem circles it

Ordinary language aims at the gap in order to close it. It reaches toward the thing it would say and counts itself successful when it has said it, when the signifier has covered its object and the remainder has been, so far as possible, brought in. Its ideal is transparency, the vanishing of the medium before the message, a saying that leaves nothing unsaid. The poem does not work this way, and its difference is not a matter of ornament but of direction. The poem is organized around the gap rather than aimed across it. Its figures, its silences, its refusals of paraphrase, its way of meaning more and other than it states, all of these keep the poem turning around something it does not deliver, holding open the very remainder that ordinary speech would try to close.

The poem as the language of the drive

The poem is the language of the drive, in the exact sense the paper has given the drive. The drive circles the object-cause and is satisfied in the circling, not in the seizing; the poem circles its unsayable center and is fulfilled in the circling, not in a paraphrase that would seize it. This is why a poem cannot be replaced by a statement of its content. The statement aims across the gap and closes what it can; the poem circles the gap and keeps it open, and the keeping-open is what the poem is for. To paraphrase a poem is to attempt on it exactly the closure that would, by the argument of Part Two, extinguish what made it live, and the felt deadness of a paraphrased poem is the small demonstration of that argument in the field of language itself. What the poem gives is not the closing of the gap but the experience of circling it.

Readings that approach the same point

Two lines of reflection on poetic language approach this account and help to fix it. Benjamin, writing on translation, located the life of a poem in something that is not its communicable content, in a way of meaning that survives no simple transfer of information and that translation must reach toward without ever delivering as a message [2]. What resists translation in a poem, on this reading, is precisely what the poem circles and does not state, the unsayable center that no transfer of content carries across. Derrida, pressing the general point that no signifier delivers a final presence, that meaning is always deferred along the play of differences, showed that writing does not close upon a present meaning but keeps it in deferral [7]. The poem, on the present account, does not suffer this deferral as a defect but takes it up as its art, making of the non-arrival of meaning the very movement it offers. Where ordinary language treats deferral as an obstacle to be minimized, the poem treats it as the medium of what it does.

The core given circulation without capture

This is why the poem writes what cannot otherwise be written. The unsymbolizable core, which no proposition reaches, is not reached by the poem either, but the poem does what the proposition cannot: it gives the core a form of circulation without giving it a form of capture. It lets the remainder be approached, turned around, dwelt near, without being seized and so extinguished. The poem is the drive's own language because it does with words what the drive does with its object, turning around a void it does not fill and generating, in the turning, something that a filling would have destroyed.

The poem circles what it cannot close. The poem is the use of language organized around the gap rather than aimed across it. It circles an unsayable center and is fulfilled in the circling, not in a paraphrase that would seize it, and it therefore gives the unsymbolizable core a form of circulation without capture. The poem is the language of the drive, and the impossibility of paraphrasing it without deadening it is the demonstration, in language itself, that closure extinguishes what the open gap keeps alive.

An illustrative case — the poem that says what the letter could not. A person tries to write plainly what another means to them and finds the plain statement always beside the point, true and empty at once. Turning to a poem, they say it no more plainly, and yet the poem holds what the statement let slip. The poem did not close the gap the statement failed to close; it circled it, and in the circling let the unsayable thing be present as what the words turn around. What the letter could not deliver by aiming at it, the poem carries by not aiming at it.

The highest office of a language at its limit

So the poem is the paradigm of a language reconciled to its limit and made generative by it. It does not mourn what it cannot say and does not pretend to say it. It builds its whole art on the not-saying, and out of the not-saying makes the one form of speech that keeps the gap open as a living center rather than closing it as a solved problem. What the poem shows, and shows in the medium of language itself, is that the limit of language is not the end of what language can do but the opening of its highest office. This bears directly on the two registers that follow. If the poem is the making of a circulation without capture in language, ethics and justice will be shown to be the making of a relation without possession, and a guarding without settlement, in the registers of the other and of the common life.

18. Room for the Core Without Possession

This section takes the second register of the limit's generativity, ethics, and establishes that the relation to the other founded on the limit is a giving that does not possess: a generating of the bond that leaves the other's unsymbolizable core its room, and that arrives thereby at the form older wisdom named, to generate and not possess. The section gathers the aesthetic measure of Part One and the making-room of Part Three into an ethical form, states that form and its ground, gives it as a claim, and marks its distance from an ethics of possession.

The other who cannot be exhausted

The ethical relation begins where the other cannot be exhausted. This was established in Part One: the other faces me not as an instance of a kind but as this one, whose claim issues from what no predicate contains, and the fitting response to them is taken by a perception, an aesthetic measure, that no rule can replace. Were the other fully sayable, fully brought under description, there would be no ethical claim, only the management of a known quantity. The claim arises from what in the other exceeds every predicate, the singular core that no category reaches, and Part Three identified that core with the seat of the other's desire, the void around which their drive turns. Ethics is founded, then, not on the reaching of the other but on the acknowledgment of what cannot be reached, and its first act is to leave that core its room.

The aesthetic measure at work

This is the aesthetic measure of Part One, now doing ethical work. The fitting response to another is one that senses where the sayable ends and does not press past it, that answers the other without presuming to have exhausted them, that keeps its response open to a singularity it perceives but cannot state. To make room for the other's core is not to withhold engagement but to engage in the mode that perception, not proposition, governs: to attend to the other closely enough to sense the edge of what may be said, and to hold there. The schooling of this perception, the cultivation the series has developed elsewhere, is the ethical discipline proper to a relation whose measure is aesthetic.

Giving without possession

The form of this ethics is a giving that does not possess. To make room for the other's core is to be in relation to what one does not hold, to generate a bond with what one has not seized and cannot. The paper arrives here at a shape that an older tradition named, and names it as a conclusion reached on its own path rather than borrowed as an authority: to generate and not possess, to act and not hold onto, to foster and not rule. The ethical relation to the other's unsymbolizable core has exactly this form. It generates a bond and does not possess the other; it acts toward them and does not hold them fast; it fosters what the other is and does not rule over the core from which they desire. The arrival is not decorative. The account of Part Two forced it: since to possess the other's core, to close it, would be to extinguish the desire that makes the other a living source of the bond, an ethics that generated a lasting bond could only be an ethics that generated without possessing. The old formula names the only ethical form the structure permits.

Generation without possession. The ethics grounded in the limit is a giving that does not possess: it generates a bond with the other while leaving the other's unsymbolizable core its room, declining to close what it cannot close without extinguishing the other's desire. To generate and not possess, to act and not hold onto, to foster and not rule, is not a borrowed maxim but the only ethical form the structure of the limit permits, since possession of the core would be the death of the desire that makes the other a living source of the bond.

Against an ethics of possession

This is the ethical face of the limit's generativity, and its distance from an ethics of possession is exact. An ethics that aimed at the full reaching of the other, the closing of every gap between them, would be an ethics of possession, and possession, here as throughout the argument, is extinction: the other possessed is the other's desire gone out. The ethics the limit grounds is the opposite of possession. It is the art of dwelling with what one cannot hold, of answering a

singularity one cannot state, of generating a bond precisely by leaving open the core one will not close. What cannot be reached in the other is not the limit of ethics. It is the space in which an ethics worthy of the name becomes possible, and the space is kept open by the same refusal of closure that the poem practices in language and that justice, in the next section, practices in the common life.

19. The Guarding of Generativity

This section takes the third register of the limit's generativity, justice, and establishes that justice at its root is the guarding of a generativity it cannot settle, and that the mode of this guarding is a knowing that holds what it cannot dispose of, which the paper names witnessing. The section takes up the limit set out in Part One, that justice owes protection to a generativity it cannot bring into the settled sign, gives the positive account of justice that follows from it, reviews the work on witnessing that fixes the mode, and draws the claim.

Beneath settlement

Justice is commonly figured as settlement, the bringing of a matter to a close by a judgment that disposes of it. The account of this paper places another office beneath that one. Part One established that what a relation of justice most owes protection to is the generativity of relational being, the still-forming life that the intervention of the Real keeps opening in the order of settled meaning, and that this generativity cannot be settled in advance, since to settle it is to convert the still-becoming into the already-become and so to end the very thing that was to be protected. Justice, at its root, is therefore not settlement but guarding: the holding-open of a space in which generativity can go on, against the pressure to close it prematurely into a finished case. Settlement remains a real and necessary office of justice, addressed to what has taken form and can be brought before a judgment; but beneath it lies the deeper office of keeping open what has not yet taken form, and it is this that the limit grounds.

The mode of guarding, witnessing

The mode of this guarding is a knowing that does not settle, and the paper names it, again as a conclusion of its own path, witnessing. To witness is to hold what one cannot dispose of, to be turned toward a generativity or a suffering that one does not bring to a close by pronouncing on it. The work on testimony fixes the mode precisely. Felman and Laub found that the witnessing of what exceeds settlement is not the recording of a fact but a holding of what has no adequate statement, a keeping-faith with what cannot be closed into a case, such that the witness anchors the thing without substituting a judgment for it [9]. Justice, insofar as it guards a generativity it cannot settle, must know in this mode. It must hold the still-forming and the unstated without pretending to have disposed of them, anchoring them in the common life without closing them into the settled sign. A justice built on witnessing does not mistake the settled sign for the whole of what is owed; it disposes of what can be disposed of and keeps open what cannot.

Justice as witnessing. The root office of justice is to guard a generativity it cannot settle, and the mode of that guarding is witnessing: a knowing that holds the still-forming and the unstated without disposing of them, anchoring them in the common life without closing them into the settled sign. Justice as witnessing keeps its own procedures answerable to what they have not foreseen, and refuses itself the false completeness of a settlement that has anticipated everything.

Against an administration of the already-formed

This is the just face of the limit's generativity, and its distance from a justice of pure settlement is exact. A justice that could settle everything in advance would be an administration of the already-formed, closed to the new that relational being keeps generating and deaf to the suffering that no procedure exhausts. The justice the limit grounds keeps itself open to what it cannot settle, guards the generativity it cannot close, and finds in the unreachability of that generativity not a gap in the law but the reason the law exists. The three registers of Part Four now stand together, and their unity is visible. The poem gives circulation without capture; ethics gives a bond without possession; justice gives a guarding without settlement. In each, the same refusal of closure that Part Two showed to be the condition of the drive's life is shown to be the condition of a generative form: in language, in the relation to the other, and in the common life. What cannot be brought into the sign is, in every register, not a failure but the opening in which the generative form becomes possible.

20. The Co-Structure of the Limit

This section gives the limit a formal counterpart. The aim is to show that two figures the paper has described in prose, a lack that carries meaning rather than marking a mere absence, and a core knowable only through its effects on what surrounds it, have precise expressions, the first in the language of coalgebra and the second in the theory of reduced dynamics for open systems. The formal claims are offered as tools for later work and as heuristics that make the prose precise, not as laws to which relational being is asserted to conform. The section states the algebra-coalgebra duality, reifies the lack as a co-structure, gives the semantics of observation and indistinguishability, and then treats rigorously the case of the open composite system in which one component is knowable only through the others.

A note on the ambition of this section

A word on what is and is not claimed. The formalism below is not offered as evidence that relational being obeys a transcendental law, and the paper does not hold, here or anywhere, that intimacy or drive or value is governed by an equation. The coalgebraic language and the reduction formula are used in the opposite spirit, as heuristics that give a precise home to

figures the paper has already established on other grounds, and as a possible basis for later formal work. Where an equation appears, it states a relation that holds in a well-defined mathematical setting and is imported as an analogy whose fit is argued, not as a claim that the setting is the hidden truth of the relational phenomenon. This matches the stance the series takes elsewhere toward optimization and law: a formal structure can illuminate without legislating.

The algebra-coalgebra duality

The first figure is the meaning-bearing lack, and the language that makes it precise is the duality between algebra and coalgebra. An algebra for a functor F is a map

$$\alpha : FX \longrightarrow X,$$

an operation that takes structured collections of elements and combines them into a single element. Algebra is the mathematics of construction and of closure: it says how parts are assembled into a whole, how many are folded into one. A coalgebra for a functor F is the dual, a map

$$\gamma : X \longrightarrow FX,$$

an operation that takes a single element and unfolds it into its structured observable behaviour, its one-step outward form together with its successors. Coalgebra is the mathematics of observation and of process: it does not assemble a whole from parts but unfolds a state into what can be seen of it and what it becomes [14, 24].

The relevance to the argument is exact. The operation the paper has warned against throughout, the closure of the gap, the folding of the remainder into the signifier, the assembling of the whole into a possessed unity, is an algebraic operation, a map $FX \rightarrow X$ that would deliver the many into one and close them. The operation the paper has affirmed, the circling that unfolds without closing, the drive that turns and the desire that slides, the generativity that is never settled, is coalgebraic, a map $X \rightarrow FX$ that unfolds a state into its behaviour and its successors without gathering them into a completed whole. The distinction between a language reconciled to its limit and a language that would abolish it is, formally, the distinction between coalgebra and algebra.

The lack reified as a co-structure

The prose claim that a lack can carry meaning, that attending to any part of a relational structure reveals it as a lackness which is nonetheless meaning-bearing, admits a construction. Take a structure given as a graph of relations, its nodes the terms and its arrows the relations among them. To attend to a particular place is to ask what that place is, and the relational answer is that the place is nothing but the pattern of arrows incident to it. Now perform two operations. First, reify the lack: introduce, as a node of the structure, the very place that was empty, so that the absence becomes a bearer of relations rather than a hole in the diagram. Second, reverse the arrows: pass from the relations that pointed toward a term to

the co-relations that unfold from the place. The result is a co-graph in which the reified lack is a node like any other and the arrows run outward from it, so that what was a missing centre becomes a source from which the structure unfolds.

This construction is coalgebraic in form. The reversal of the arrows is the passage from $FX \rightarrow X$ to $X \rightarrow FX$, from relations that assemble toward a term to co-relations that unfold from a place; and the reification of the lack recognizes the place of absence as a state of the coalgebra, one that unfolds its own outward behaviour. The lack becomes an entity whose whole content is the pattern of what unfolds from it, which is the coalgebraic mode of being, a state known by its observable unfolding and by nothing else.

The semantics of observation and of indistinguishability

Two notions give the account its semantics. The first is the final coalgebra. Among all coalgebras for a functor there is, under suitable conditions, a final one, into which every other maps uniquely, and it has the character of the space of all possible behaviours, never itself an assembled object but the completed horizon of what can be observed [24]. The final coalgebra is the formal figure of a generativity that is never closed and yet is not formless: the whole of the behaviour without being a whole that could be possessed. It is the coalgebraic counterpart of what the paper has called the open centre, given not as an object but as the totality of what unfolds around a place.

The second is bisimulation, the coalgebraic notion of sameness. Two states are bisimilar when no observation distinguishes them, when everything that can be unfolded from the one can be matched by an unfolding from the other [14]. What is decisive is that bisimulation defines identity through observable behaviour alone, without appeal to any internal content the states might be supposed to have. This is the formal correlate of a recurring claim of the paper, that the core is knowable only through its effects. In the coalgebraic setting there is no internal content behind the behaviour to which one might appeal; a state is the pattern of its observable unfolding, and to know it is to observe that pattern, never to seize a content beneath it.

A family of parallels, offered as analogy

Before the rigorous case, a word on a family of concepts that share the co-structural character loosely rather than by any claimed isomorphism. The signifier of the lack in the Other, the point at which the symbolic order fails to close upon itself, anchors the order not by being a further element of it but by marking the place where an element is missing. One is tempted to place beside it the efficient point of an economy, defined by the trade-offs around it, or a distinguished point of a dynamical flow, or the terms rendered as emptiness and void in the contemplative traditions. These parallels are suggestive, and the paper offers them as analogy and not as identity. They are not shown here to be instances of one mathematical structure, and the section does not rest any weight on their unity. What follows, by contrast, is a case where the correspondence is exact.

The open composite system, treated rigorously

The rigorous case is the open composite system, and it makes precise the paper’s central epistemic claim, that a core is known only through its effects on what surrounds it. The claim is not a metaphor. It is a theorem of the theory of reduced dynamics, and the following states it carefully.

Let the state space of a composite system be the product

$$M = M_A \times M_B \times M_C,$$

with flow Φ^t generated by a coupled vector field f , where coupling means that f does not separate across the three factors. Observables are functions $g \in L^2(M, \mu)$, and they evolve by the Koopman operator

$$(U^t g)(x) = g(\Phi^t x),$$

which is linear on observables even when f is nonlinear, this linearity being the point of the Koopman formulation [15]. Suppose now that only the components A and C are accessible, so that the observables one can actually read form the closed subspace $\mathcal{O}_{AC} \subset L^2(M, \mu)$ of functions depending on (x_A, x_C) alone. Let $\mathcal{P}$ be the orthogonal projection onto $\mathcal{O}_{AC}$, equivalently the conditional expectation $\mathbb{E}[\cdot \mid x_A, x_C]$ that averages out B , and let $\mathcal{Q} = I - \mathcal{P}$. Writing L for the generator of U^t , the evolution of the accessible part of any observable satisfies the Mori–Zwanzig generalized Langevin equation

$$\frac{d}{dt} \mathcal{P} U^t g = \underbrace{\mathcal{P} U^t \mathcal{P} L g}_{\text{Markov}} + \underbrace{\int_0^t \mathcal{P} U^{t-s} \mathcal{P} L e^{s\mathcal{Q}L} \mathcal{Q} L g \, ds}_{\text{memory}} + \underbrace{\mathcal{P} U^t e^{t\mathcal{Q}L} \mathcal{Q} L g}_{\text{fluctuation}},$$

an identity that holds exactly, with the memory kernel

$$K(s) = \mathcal{P} L e^{s\mathcal{Q}L} \mathcal{Q} L$$

carrying the influence of the inaccessible dynamics [5, 22, 27].

The content of the formula, for the present purpose, is precise. The component B never appears as a direct observation. There is no operator on B in the equation for the accessible dynamics; B has been projected out by $\mathcal{P}$. Yet B is not absent from the dynamics. Its entire effect is carried by the memory term and the fluctuation term, that is, by the marks it leaves on the evolution of the accessible observables over (A, C) . To know B , in this exact sense, is to read its signature in the memory kernel $K(s)$ that governs how A and C evolve, and there is no other access to it, since the coupled and open structure permits no operator on B itself. The naive picture, on which one would observe B by acting on B , is not merely impractical but formally unavailable: the accessible algebra is $\mathcal{O}_{AC}$, and B enters only through what $\mathcal{Q}$ carries into the memory of the accessible part.

An exactly parallel statement holds in the quantum setting, where the accessible observables

form the subalgebra $\mathcal{B}(\mathcal{H}_A) \otimes \mathbf{1}_B \otimes \mathcal{B}(\mathcal{H}_C)$, the inaccessible component is removed by the partial trace $\rho_{AC} = \text{tr}_B \rho_{ABC}$, and B survives only in its effect on the reduced state ρ_{AC} . The two settings, classical reduced dynamics and quantum restriction to a subalgebra, give one result: a component of an open composite system is knowable only through its neighbours, never through an operator on itself.

The core is read through its neighbours. In an open composite system whose accessible observables are restricted to two of three coupled components, the third component never appears as a direct observation and yet determines the accessible dynamics entirely through the memory kernel of the Mori–Zwanzig equation. This is an exact result, not an analogy, and it is the formal image of the paper’s epistemic claim: the unsymbolizable core is the projected-out component, known only through the marks it leaves on the observable neighbours, the symptom, the signifier, and the texture of a shared world, and never through an operator directed at it.

The reach of the formalism

Two things are established and one is disclaimed. Established: the meaning-bearing lack has a coalgebraic form, a state whose being is the pattern of what unfolds from it; and the claim that a core is known only through its neighbours is exactly true in the theory of reduced dynamics, where the projected-out component lives on in the memory kernel and nowhere else. Disclaimed: the paper does not assert that relational being is a dynamical system obeying this equation, nor that the family of parallels gathered above are instances of one structure. The formalism is a lamp, not a law. It shows that two of the paper’s central figures, the generative lack and the core read through its effects, are not loose metaphors but have precise formal counterparts, and it marks a direction for later work in which the relational ontology of the series might be given a systematically coalgebraic and reduction-theoretic formulation, with closure on the algebraic side, generativity and observation on the coalgebraic side, and the inaccessible core figured throughout as what survives only in the memory of its neighbours.

21. Objections and Replies

Before the close, this section states and answers four objections that the account invites. The aim is not to defend the position against all comers, since the paper is constructive and sets up no adversary, but to make its commitments precise by showing what it does and does not claim. Each objection is given in its strongest form and answered on the account’s own terms.

First objection, that the account romanticizes the failure of communication

The objection runs: by making the limit of language generative, the paper turns a real deprivation, the failure of people to understand one another, into a good, and so counsels acceptance of a distance that causes genuine suffering. It risks telling those who are lonely in their bonds that their loneliness is the condition of love.

The reply distinguishes two things the objection runs together. There is the ordinary failure of communication, in which something sayable is not said, or is said badly, or is misheard, and there is the structural limit, at which something unsayable presses beneath all that is said. The paper makes nothing of the first generative. Ordinary failures of communication are to be repaired, and the account gives no comfort to the withholding of what could be shared or the neglect of what could be understood. What the paper calls generative is only the structural limit, the core that no amount of good communication would reach because it is not of the order of the sayable at all. The distance that is generative is not the distance a better conversation would close; it is the distance that would remain after every good conversation, the room in which the other stays a desiring subject. To confuse the two would indeed be to romanticize a remediable poverty. The paper keeps them apart, and asks only that the irreducible distance, the one no repair reaches, be seen for what it is.

Second objection, that it dissolves the legitimate demand for transparency

The objection runs: relationships are damaged by concealment, and honesty is a real virtue; an account that prizes the unreachable core seems to license withholding, to dignify the keeping of secrets as fidelity to a mystery.

The reply turns on the difference between the unsayable and the withheld. The core the paper calls unsymbolizable is not a content the subject possesses and declines to share; it is a remainder the subject does not possess either, that presses in them without being available to them as a thing they could disclose or conceal. Withholding concerns the sayable that one chooses not to say, and against withholding the ordinary virtue of honesty stands, undisturbed by this account. The unsymbolizable core is not withheld, because it is not held. To make room for it is not to license secrecy but to acknowledge that even between two people who conceal nothing, who say everything that can be said, a remainder presses in each that neither can disclose because neither possesses it. The demand for transparency, understood as a demand about the sayable, is left entirely in force. What the paper denies is only that transparency, however complete, would reach the core, since the core is not among the things transparency is about.

Third objection, that psychoanalytic premises are doing unearned work

The objection runs: the argument leans on a particular and contestable theory, the Lacanian account of the subject, the Real, and the drive, and its conclusions are only as secure as those premises, which many do not grant.

The reply concedes the dependence and clarifies its scope. The paper does use the psychoanalytic apparatus, and does not pretend to derive its conclusions from premises everyone shares. But two things soften the objection. First, Part One establishes the six limits phenomenologically, by attention to the dimensions of relational life, before any psychoanalytic term is introduced; a reader who grants the six limits but not the theory has already granted the paper's descriptive core, and the psychoanalytic apparatus of Part Two is offered as the best available account of why the six share one form, not as their only possible ground. Second, the apparatus earns its place by what it explains, the recurrence of one form across six dimensions, the persistence of a core across a life, the death that complete reaching would be, and a reader is entitled to weigh it by that yield rather than by prior allegiance. The account is offered as an explanation to be assessed by its fruit, not as a deduction from axioms held to be self-evident.

Fourth objection, that the paper's own claims symbolize the very gap it calls unsymbolizable

The objection is the sharpest, and it is reflexive: in stating that the core cannot be symbolized, in giving it the name *manque*, in setting out claims about it in plain propositions, the paper does to the gap exactly what it says cannot be done, brings it into the signifier. Either the gap can be symbolized, in which case the thesis is false, or it cannot, in which case the paper cannot state its own thesis.

The reply marks a distinction the whole account has relied on, between saying *that* there is a gap and saying *what* the gap contains. The paper does the first and not the second. To state that a remainder is left outside the signifier, to name the place of the remainder, to describe the form of its effects, is to circle the gap, to speak of its edges and its consequences, without delivering its content into the sign. This is exactly the operation the paper attributes to the poem, a circling that keeps the gap open rather than a saying that closes it, and the paper claims for itself no more than this. Its propositions point to the gap and turn around it; they do not fill it. The name *manque* is not the content of the remainder rendered into a signifier; it is the mark of the place where the content is not. The thesis is therefore consistent with its own performance: a work that circles what it cannot close, and that says so, has not closed it. This is why the paper ends without a synthesis, refusing at the last the closure the objection supposes it must either achieve or fail to achieve. It neither achieves nor fails at closure. It circles, which was the only thing it claimed to do.

Part Five Polyphonic Close

22. The Limit as Ground

This section closes the paper without gathering its results into a final synthesis. Its aim is to state the change of aspect the whole argument has effected, that the limit of language, taken

by a first habit for a defect, has shown itself throughout as a ground, and then to leave several voices speaking in their unresolved tension, in keeping with an argument that has warned against the closure of what should stay open. The section states the change of aspect, sets out the polyphony, and returns the thesis to the open.

Why no synthesis

The paper has followed a single thesis through six dimensions, a formal core, a persistence, and three registers of generativity. It closes without gathering these into a final synthesis, and the refusal is not a modesty but a consequence of the argument. A work about what language cannot reach ought not to end by reaching it. To compose the results into a single culminating proposition would be to perform on the paper's own thesis the closure the thesis identifies as extinction, to still the movement of the argument by delivering it, finished, as a thing possessed. The form of the close must enact the content of the paper, and the content forbids the closure that a synthesis would be.

The change of aspect

What can be said in closing is a change of aspect rather than a summary. The limit of language, which the first habit took for a defect, has shown itself throughout as a ground. In existence it is what keeps the bond an act rather than a title. In maintenance it is what returns the relation to presence rather than record. In value it is what keeps worth living in the bond rather than available to be drawn off. In ethics it is what returns the response to a perception no rule replaces. In justice it is what keeps the law answerable to a generativity it cannot close. In evolution it is the space in which a relation can become what no one yet has words for. Beneath all six, it is the manque around which drive circles and along whose failure desire slides, the open center without which the relation would not move. The same open center, in Part Four, was shown to be the condition of the poem, of an ethics without possession, and of a justice without premature settlement. The limit is not a problem set for relational life to solve. It is the ground on which relational life stands.

The voices

Several voices may be left to speak here, and the paper does not silence them into one, for the truth of the matter lies in their tension and not in any one of them.

There is the voice that hears in all this a hard necessity, the irreducible solitude of subjects who cannot finally reach one another, and grants that the account does not dissolve that solitude but only reads it otherwise. This voice is not refuted by the paper. The subjects of a bond do remain, at the core, unreached by each other, and if one had wanted the fusion of two into a transparency without remainder, the account gives it cold comfort, telling one only that the fusion so wanted would have been a death.

There is the voice that hears a liberation, the release from a wish for total transparency that was never a wish for love but a wish for possession, and finds in the limit the room where love

could breathe. To this voice the same result is good news: what one feared was a poverty, the unreachability of the beloved, is the very room in which the beloved stays a living source of love, and the letting-go of the wish to possess is not a loss but the beginning of a bond that can last.

There is the voice that hears a discipline, the long schooling of a perception and a patience fine enough to dwell with what cannot be closed. To this voice the account is neither cold nor consoling but a task: to learn the aesthetic measure that ethics asks, to practice the witnessing that justice asks, to make and keep the room that intimacy asks, none of which is given and all of which must be cultivated over a life.

These voices are not reconciled here. To compose them into a single conclusion would be to do to the argument what the argument warns against, closing a gap whose openness was the whole point. They are left in their tension, three ways of standing toward one result, and the paper does not adjudicate among them.

The thesis returned to the open

So the paper ends by returning its thesis to the open. The limit of language makes drive possible, makes the poem possible, makes an ethics without possession and a justice without premature settlement possible, and makes possible a bond that keeps moving because it never closes. What language cannot reach is not the failure of relational life. It is the opening in which relational life begins, and goes on, and does not end.

Envoi

There is an old figure for the limit this paper has followed. The trap exists for the sake of the fish; once you have the fish, you can forget the trap. Words exist for the sake of meaning; once you have the meaning, you can forget the words [26]. The figure is usually read as a counsel to pass beyond language toward a meaning that lies clear on the far side of it. This paper reads it otherwise. There is a meaning words are for that no words deliver, and the point is not to pass beyond the words to seize it but to let the words circle it and, in the circling, keep it alive. The trap that caught the fish could be forgotten. The words that circle the gap cannot, because the gap is not a fish to be caught. It is the open center they turn around, and to forget the turning would be to lose the meaning, not to have it.

To the one who reads this last, and for whom the whole series is written: what has been argued at length here I have known first with you. There is a core in you I will never say, and I have stopped wishing to. Where my words run out, you are still there, and it is there, past the last thing I can put into speech, that I keep turning toward you. This is not a failure of my language. It is the room in which I go on loving you, and it does not close.

A promise belongs here at the end, and it is of the kind the argument has been describing. It is not a promise that has been weighed and found worth making, not the output of a reckoning that could as easily have gone the other way. It is a promise that holds precisely because it

does not compute whether it is worth it, that circles what it cannot say and keeps faith with a core it will never close. Such a promise is not the weaker for resting on no calculation. It is, for that very reason, a promise and not a bargain, and it is the one I make.

言不尽意,
where speech runs out,
而意在焉。
meaning is still there.

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