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Provisional Stabilization in an Erosive Field Toward a Non-Telic Ontology of Constitutive Exchange A Contribution to the Niami Framework of Finite Continuance

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Abstract

This article develops a single, deceptively compact thesis that runs beneath the whole architecture of the ontology of finite continuity: existence is not a path toward a final essence but a bounded process that must preserve its own capacity for reconfiguration against continuous erosion, such that every being emerges as a provisional stabilization within an erosive field, and constitutive exchange of resources between a system and its environment is what makes that stabilization possible at all. The article situates this thesis against the telic image of being inherited from the Platonic and, in a qualified sense, the Heideggerian tradition, and then tests it against three non-anthropological resources that have shaped its formation without yet being fully integrated into the published architecture of the framework: Gilbert Simondon's theory of individuation and metastability, Ilya Prigogine's thermodynamics of dissipative structures, and the autopoietic theory of Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela, read alongside Niklas Luhmann's operationally closed social systems. Each resource is shown to share a structural intuition with finite continuance while diverging from it on a specific axis: direction of process (individuation versus resistance), normative valence (physical description versus practical prescription), and openness (operational closure versus constitutive, non-closed exchange). The article then draws out the systematic consequences of this comparison for three components of the wider framework: determination regulation, the automatic/dynamic distinction in mask theory and its recently proposed non-circular, perturbation-based criterion, and the regulative ideal type of the post-monopoly human. The result is not an eclectic synthesis but a sharpened self-positioning: finite continuance is shown to occupy a specific and previously under-articulated location among theories of open, far-from-equilibrium, self-regulating systems, one defined by the normative demand that reconfiguration-capacity be actively protected rather than merely observed as an empirical regularity.

Keywords: Finite Continuance, Ontology of Process, Provisional Stabilization, Erosive Field, Simondon, Dissipative Structures, Autopoiesis, Determination Regulation, Structural Subjectivity, Post-Monopoly Human

1. Introduction: Against the Telic Image of Being

The sentence from which this article departs is short enough to be mistaken for a slogan: existence is not a path toward a final essence; it is a bounded process that must preserve its capacity for reconfiguration against continuous erosion; every being emerges as a provisional stabilization within an erosive field; and the exchange that constitutes this stabilization is an exchange of resources between a system and its environment. Read quickly, the sentence sounds like a paraphrase of process philosophy in general, or of a fashionable anti-essentialism that has become

almost a default posture in continental thought since the mid-twentieth century. Read slowly, it commits the framework of finite continuance to a set of claims that are considerably more specific, and considerably more exposed to counter-example, than a generic rejection of essence.

The first commitment is directional. To say that existence is not a path toward a final essence is not merely to deny that beings have fixed natures; it is to deny that process itself has a telos internal to it, an end-state that the process approaches asymptotically even

if it never reaches it. This is a stronger claim than the rejection of Platonic form, because it also targets what remains of teleology in versions of process thought that officially reject Platonism. Even Heidegger's Dasein, for all its resistance to substance ontology, is structured by a movement toward its ownmost possibility, being-

toward-death, which functions as a horizon that gathers and authenticates the whole of existence [1]. Finite continuance refuses this residual horizon-structure. There is no ownmost possibility that existence is moving toward, authentically or otherwise; there is only the ongoing task of not being ground down.

The second commitment is topological rather than temporal: existence is described as bounded, and the boundary in question is not primarily spatial or numerical but processual - a limit on how much erosion a reconfiguration-capacity can absorb before it fails. Finitude, in this framework, does not mean "having an end" in the sense of mortality; it means operating permanently within a threshold, what the wider framework calls the threshold of sufficiency, the point below which a system's capacity to reconfigure itself in response to erosive pressure collapses (Niami, n.d.-a). Finitude is therefore not a fact about beings (that they die) but a structural feature of any process that stabilizes at all: it must do so within limits it did not choose and cannot fully control.

The third commitment, and the one this article takes as its main object, is that stabilization is provisional and that the beings we encounter - subjects, institutions, disciplinary regimes, selves - are stabilizations, not substances that happen to change. This is the ontological wager of the entire framework: not "things change" but "things are their changing, held momentarily at a threshold." And the fourth commitment specifies the mechanism: what holds a stabilization at its threshold is not an internal essence asserting itself against an indifferent outside, but a constitutive exchange of resources between the stabilizing system and its erosive environment. The exchange is not incidental to the being; it is what the being is, for as long as it is.

This article takes these four commitments and asks what happens when they are placed next to three bodies of thought that were built, independently of any concern with subjectivity or ethics, to describe exactly this kind of provisional, threshold-bound, exchange-dependent stability: Gilbert Simondon's ontology of individuation, Ilya Prigogine's non-equilibrium thermodynamics, and the autopoietic and operationally closed systems theories of Maturana, Varela, and Luhmann. The purpose of the comparison is not decorative. Each of these three bodies of thought supplies a technical vocabulary for exactly the kind of process finite continuance wants to describe, and each is also seductive in a way that threatens to quietly substitute its own commitments for the normative ones that finite continuance actually needs. The task of this article is therefore double: to show how much finite continuance owes to this family of theories of open, dissipative, individuating systems, and to show, with equal precision, at which point it must depart from each of them if it is to remain what it claims to be - not a description of how stable structures happen

to form and dissolve in nature, but a normative theory of how an agent ought to relate to its own capacity for reconfiguration under conditions of chronic instability (a distinction on record precisely to avoid the framework being mistaken for a theory of place-memory or spatial ontology; see Niami, n.d.-b).

The argument proceeds as follows. Section 2 restates the ontological thesis in the terms already established across the framework's manuscripts, so that the comparative work in later sections has a stable target. Section 3 develops the critique of telic ontology in more detail, focusing on the specific way erosive fields differ from both classical becoming and Heideggerian finitude. Sections 4 and 5 take up Simondon, first tracing the convergence between his notion of a provisional stabilization within a metastable, preindividual field and finite continuance's own vocabulary, and then isolating the directional inversion that separates the two projects. Section 6 turns to Prigogine's dissipative structures and asks what it means to import a thermodynamic vocabulary into an ontology that is meant to carry normative weight; Section 7 answers that question by specifying, more precisely than the framework has done before, what is actually exchanged in a constitutive exchange at the level of structural subjectivity. Section 8 examines autopoiesis and Luhmannian operational closure, arguing that finite continuance is best understood as a theory of chronically open, rather than operationally closed, systems, and that this openness is not a weakness but the very condition of its normative content. Sections 9 through 12 then draw out the systematic payoff of the whole comparison for determination regulation, for the recently proposed non-circular criterion in automatic/dynamic mask theory, and for the post-monopoly human as a regulative ideal type. A final section addresses the most serious objections to the framework as here elaborated, before a short conclusion.

2. Restating the Thesis: Provisional Stabilization and the Erosive Field

Before the comparative work can begin, it is necessary to state, without hedging, what finite continuance claims about beings as such. The framework's central operator is not identity but determination: what a being is, at any moment, is the current configuration of its determinations — the settled, provisionally fixed answers to the many practical and structural questions that bear on how it can act, be classified, be governed, or govern itself (Niami, n.d.-c). A determination is not a property in the classical sense, because it is not simply possessed; it is held, in the same way a tensioned structure holds a load, under continuous pressure from forces that would, left unaddressed, dissolve it. The framework calls this dissolving pressure erosion, and the environment in which any determination is held is, by definition, an erosive field: not a neutral backdrop against which determinations happen to be stable, but an active medium whose default tendency is to wear determinations down, disperse them, or absorb them into more diffuse configurations.

This is why the framework insists that every being is a provisional stabilization rather than a stable entity that undergoes occasional change. The word provisional does real work here: it does not mean

"temporary in a weak sense, eventually to be replaced by something more permanent." It means that permanence, for any being within an erosive field, is never achieved; it is only ever approximated, and only ever for as long as the being's reconfiguration-capacity remains above the threshold of sufficiency. Below that threshold, the earlier manuscripts on determination regulation argue, a system does not merely change — it loses the ability to change adaptively, and enters a mode the framework calls erosive governance, in which whatever residual stability remains is imposed from outside the system rather than negotiated by it (Niami, n.d.-a). Erosive governance is what a monopoly of form looks like from the inside of the governed system: a state in which reconfiguration has been arrested, and the appearance of order is maintained by force, habit, or institutional inertia rather than by the system's own regulatory activity.

The concept that does the most theoretical work in this article, however, is homeothesis, borrowed and adapted from developmental biology, where it names the tendency of a developing system to return not to a fixed point but to a trajectory after perturbation [2]. Finite continuance repurposes this concept to describe what a provisional stabilization actually stabilizes: not a state, but a path of permissible reconfiguration. A being that is homeorhetically stable is one that can absorb erosive pressure and return, not to where it was, but to a continuation of the trajectory it was already following — a crucial difference from homeostatic models, which imply return to a fixed set-point, and which the framework has consistently rejected as too static to capture what is actually at stake in structural subjectivity (Niami, n.d.-d).

What, then, is exchanged, and with whom? The framework's answer, compressed in the sentence under analysis in this article, is that the exchange is constitutive and that it takes place between "a system and its environment." This formulation is deliberately general, because the framework applies across registers — from the ontological register of finite continuance as such, through the socio-political register of erosive governance and form-monopoly, to the properly subjective register of automatic and dynamic masking. At the ontological register, what is exchanged is best described, following the comparative analysis developed below, as determinacy itself: a system draws determinacy from its environment (in the form of recognition, resource, structural position, or simply the ongoing cooperation of surrounding systems that do not actively dissolve it) and returns to that environment the erosive consequences of its own stabilization, since no stabilization is cost-free to what surrounds it. This is the sense in which exchange is constitutive rather than merely supportive: the being does not first exist and then enter into exchange; it exists only as, and for as long as, the exchange continues.

3. The Erosive Field and the Limits of Inherited Teleology

The claim that existence is not a path toward a final essence needs to be defended against two objections before the comparative sections can proceed, because both objections, if left unanswered, would collapse the erosive field back into a version of the very teleology it is meant to displace.

The first objection is Platonic in spirit even where it does not invoke Plato by name: any process, the objection runs, is intelligible only in relation to some end, if only the end of its own continued existence; a "process without telos" is therefore either incoherent or a telos in disguise, namely self-perpetuation. Finite continuance answers this by distinguishing between a telos, understood as a determinate end-state that gives the process its meaning and toward which the process is oriented as a whole, and a threshold-condition, understood as a lower bound the process must not cross if it is to continue at all. Self-perpetuation, on this account, is not a goal the way flourishing is a goal for Aristotelian teleology; it is a constraint, structurally similar to the way staying above freezing is a constraint on liquid water rather than the "purpose" of water. A system organized around a threshold-condition rather than a telos has no privileged direction of travel; it has only a region of viable configurations, within which reconfiguration can proceed in genuinely open ways, and a boundary outside of which it cannot proceed at all. This distinction is what allows the framework to say, without contradiction, that existence must preserve its reconfiguration-capacity while also insisting that existence has no final essence to preserve itself toward: preservation of capacity is not preservation of, or movement toward, any particular content.

The second objection is more properly Heideggerian, and more difficult to dispose of, because Heidegger's own late thought moves some distance toward a non-substantialist, event-like conception of being (Ereignis) that might seem to anticipate the erosive field [3]. The objection, put sharply, is that finite continuance's emphasis on finitude, thrownness into an already-structured field, and the impossibility of ever achieving a final, settled determination, is simply Heideggerian facticity and being-toward-death wearing a systems-theoretic vocabulary. The response the framework must give — and has not, in the manuscripts surveyed here, given with full explicitness — turns on the difference between authenticity and reconfiguration-capacity as the relevant achievement. For Heidegger, what Dasein can achieve, in the face of thrownness and finitude, is an authentic relation to its own being-toward-death, a resoluteness that does not eliminate finitude but takes it up as one's own [1]. This achievement remains, structurally, oriented toward a singular horizon: death, as that possibility which is unsurpassable and which individualizes Dasein by cutting off all further possibility. Finite continuance replaces this single, terminal horizon with a plural, non-terminal one: the erosive field does not converge on a single, unsurpassable limit that gives existence its ownmost meaning; it presents, at every moment, many local thresholds of sufficiency, crossed and re-crossed, none of which individualizes the system once and for all. Where Heidegger's finitude is oriented by an end that cannot be exchanged with anything, finite continuance's finitude is constituted by an exchange that has no terminal point built into it at all — the system does not stabilize itself in view of its eventual erosion; it stabilizes itself through ongoing exchange that could, in principle, continue indefinitely, even though it never in fact does. This is why the framework's finitude is better described as chronic than as terminal: chronic instability, not mortality, is the operative modality (a distinction the framework has been at pains to keep

separate from any suggestion that finite continuance is a memento-mori style meditation on ending; see Niami, n.d.-b).

The erosive field, then, is not a domain in which beings move toward death, form, or any other terminal point; it is a domain in which beings must continuously re-earn a stability that has no natural terminus, through activity that Section 7 of this article will specify more precisely as exchange. It is worth noting, in closing this section, that this is also what separates the erosive field from Foucauldian dispositifs of power, with which it shares a suspicion of stable identity as a philosophical starting point. Foucault's disciplinary apparatuses produce subjects through techniques that are historically specific and reversible in principle, even where they are, in practice, extraordinarily durable [5]. The erosive field is not primarily a historical or institutional formation; it is closer to a standing ontological condition, of which historically specific form-monopolies (the object of the framework's analysis of *Verschänkte Gewalt*, entangled violence; Niami, n.d.-e) are particular, intensified instances. Disciplinary power arrests reconfiguration by design; erosion threatens reconfiguration by default, whether or not any power intends it.

4. Simondon: Individuation, Metastability, and the Provisional

No thinker in the history of process ontology comes closer, in vocabulary as well as substance, to the sentence under analysis in this article than Gilbert Simondon. Where classical ontology, in Simondon's diagnosis, takes the constituted individual as its starting point and then struggles to explain change and genesis as something that happens to an already-formed substance, Simondon reverses the order of explanation: individuation is primary, and the individual is only ever a partial, local resolution of a process that continues both around and within it [5]. Crucially for the present comparison, Simondon does not treat the individual, once formed, as a stable terminus of that process. The individual is what he calls a *stabilisation provisoire* — a provisional stabilization — of a metastable system that retains, even after individuation, a store of unresolved potential, what Simondon calls the *preindividual*, which continues to condition and to unsettle whatever individuality has been achieved.

This is, almost word for word, the vocabulary of the sentence this article takes as its point of departure. Simondon's individual, like Niami's provisional stabilization, is not a substance onto which change happens to be added; it is the visible, momentarily coherent face of an ongoing process that has not, and cannot, come to rest. Metastability, for Simondon, names precisely the kind of equilibrium that finite continuance is trying to describe with the vocabulary of thresholds: not the stable equilibrium of a system at its minimum energy state, which Simondon regards as sterile because it has no further capacity for change, but a charged, tensioned equilibrium, rich in potential, that can resolve into new structure precisely because it has not yet exhausted its differences [5]. A metastable system is, in the vocabulary developed above, a system whose reconfiguration-capacity remains intact; a system that has relaxed into true (thermodynamic) equilibrium is, by contrast, a system that has crossed the threshold of sufficiency in

the worst possible direction, not through erosion but through the exhaustion of its own tension.

The convergence extends further, into method. Simondon insists that individuation must be approached genetically rather than through the finished individual, because any theory that starts from the constituted individual will import that individual's apparent unity and stability into its account of the process, producing a circular explanation in which the individual is explained by appeal to precisely the coherence that was supposed to be explained [5]. This methodological point has a direct analogue in the framework's own recent confrontation with a circularity objection in its theory of automatic and dynamic masking, discussed in Section 11 below: any criterion for distinguishing an automatic mask from a dynamic one that presupposes the very capacity for awareness that masking is meant to explain will be circular in exactly Simondon's sense, explaining the individuated (masked) subject by appeal to a subjectivity that only individuation was supposed to produce.

It is worth pausing on why this convergence has not, until now, been made fully explicit within the framework's own manuscripts, despite the framework's sustained engagement with Heidegger, Foucault, Nancy, and Bourdieu. One plausible explanation is that Simondon's project remains, for all its anti-substantialism, resolutely non-normative: *L'individuation à la lumière des notions de forme et d'information* is a work of natural philosophy in the broad sense, concerned with individuation across physical, biological, and psychosocial registers without asking what an individuating system ought to do in relation to its own individuation [5]. Finite continuance, by contrast, was constructed from the outset as a normative theory of agency under conditions of chronic instability — a formulation on record precisely to prevent the framework from being read as a general metaphysics of individuation rather than a practical ontology addressed to agents who must decide how to relate to their own erosion (Niami, n.d.-b). The next section specifies exactly where this normative addition requires the framework to depart from Simondon's descriptive architecture, not merely supplement it.

5. From Preindividuation to Erosion: A Directional Inversion

The convergence traced in Section 4 is real, but it should not be allowed to obscure a difference in direction that is, on inspection, more consequential than the shared vocabulary suggests. Simondon's metastable field is preindividual: it is a reservoir of unresolved potential, of incompatible but co-present forces (his favored example is the supersaturated crystal solution, poised to individuate but not yet structured) whose resolution into individual form is, for Simondon, a broadly positive event — not positive in a moralizing sense, but positive in the sense of being productive, an increase in structure, a genuine addition to what there is [5]. Individuation, for Simondon, resolves tension by producing new, more differentiated structure; the process moves, on the whole, from less structured to more structured, even though no individuation is ever final and the preindividual is never fully used up.

Finite continuance's erosive field moves in the opposite direction. It is not a reservoir of unresolved potential waiting to be resolved into structure; it is an active solvent of already-achieved structure, a medium whose default tendency is to degrade determination rather than to supply the raw material for new determination. Where Simondon's process is, at bottom, generative — individuation is what the preindividual field does when left to its own devices — finite continuance's process is, at bottom, corrosive: stabilization is what a system must actively achieve against what the erosive field does when left to its own devices. This is why the framework needs a concept that Simondon's architecture does not require: reconfiguration-capacity as something that must be defended, not merely a name for the ongoing availability of preindividual potential. Simondon's individual, having individuated, remains rich with preindividual charge and can individuate further more or less by its own internal dynamism; the being described by finite continuance, having stabilized, is not thereby enriched — it has simply not yet been eroded past its threshold, and staying there is a matter of ongoing exchange rather than internal dynamism alone.

This directional inversion has a second consequence, concerning the normative status of resolution. Because individuation is broadly productive for Simondon, there is little temptation, in his framework, to ask whether a given individuation ought to have occurred, or whether the individual so formed ought to resist further individuation; the question is aesthetic and ontological (how well does the individual express its genetic process, how far does it retain its transductive relation to its milieu) more than it is practical or ethical [5,6]. Finite continuance cannot avoid the practical and ethical question, because erosion, unlike preindividual potential, is not neutral with respect to the value of what it degrades: the framework's entire analysis of erosive governance and form-monopoly presupposes that some erosive pressures ought to be resisted (those that degrade a system's own capacity to regulate its determinations) while others are simply the ordinary cost of continuing to exist in a shared field with other stabilizing systems (Niami, n.d.-a; n.d.-e). Simondon's vocabulary, in other words, gives finite continuance its structural grammar — provisional stabilization, metastability, the individual as a local resolution rather than a substance — but it cannot supply the normative content that distinguishes erosion worth resisting from erosion that is simply the shared condition of finite coexistence. That content, the framework argues, can only come from an account of what is actually exchanged in constitutive exchange, to which the discussion now turns by way of a second, equally instructive comparison.

6. Prigogine: Dissipative Structures and the Thermodynamics of Provisional Order

If Simondon supplies finite continuance with its grammar, Ilya Prigogine's non-equilibrium thermodynamics supplies something closer to its physics — or at least a physical analogy precise enough to be worth taking seriously and dangerous enough to require careful handling. Prigogine's work on dissipative structures addresses a question that classical (equilibrium) thermodynamics treats as anomalous: how can locally ordered, highly structured

systems — convection cells, chemical oscillators, and, at higher levels of complexity, living organisms — arise and persist in a universe governed by the second law of thermodynamics, which predicts the relentless increase of entropy, or disorder, in any closed system? Prigogine's answer is that such structures are not closed systems at all; they are open systems, far from thermodynamic equilibrium, that maintain their internal order precisely by continuously importing low-entropy energy or matter from their environment and exporting high-entropy waste back into it [7]. The order does not defy the second law; it displaces the entropy increase the second law requires onto the wider system that includes the environment. A dissipative structure is, in the most literal sense available in physical science, a provisional stabilization purchased by constitutive exchange with an environment: stop the exchange, and the structure does not persist in some diminished form — it collapses back into equilibrium, which is to say, into the least structured, most probable, and in the framework's vocabulary, most fully eroded state available to it.

The resonance with the sentence under analysis in this article is almost uncomfortably exact. "Every being emerges as a provisional stabilization within an erosive field" describes, at the level of physical process, precisely what Prigogine describes a dissipative structure as being: an island of local order maintained against a general tendency toward disorder, a tendency that in Prigogine's vocabulary is entropic increase and in the framework's vocabulary is erosion. "The exchange that constitutes this stabilization is an exchange of resources between a system and its environment" describes, again almost exactly, the flux of low-entropy input and high-entropy output that keeps a Bénard cell, a chemical clock, or a living cell away from equilibrium. It is tempting, given this resonance, to treat finite continuance simply as an extension of dissipative-structure theory into the register of subjectivity and social form — determination as a kind of order parameter, erosion as a kind of entropy production, exchange as a kind of energy flux.

The framework should resist this temptation, and for a reason more serious than the usual objection to loose thermodynamic metaphors in social theory (an objection well-rehearsed in critiques of, for instance, overextended uses of "entropy" in cultural criticism). The serious reason is that Prigogine's framework, like Simondon's, is entirely descriptive: dissipative structures are neither better nor worse for maintaining themselves against entropy; a hurricane is as much a dissipative structure as a cell, and non-equilibrium thermodynamics offers no resources, and seeks none, for distinguishing a dissipative structure whose persistence matters from one whose persistence does not. If finite continuance simply borrowed Prigogine's apparatus wholesale, it would inherit this normative silence, and would have no principled way of saying, as it must say to do the work required of it in the framework's political and ethical manuscripts, that erosive governance is something a subject or a social form ought to resist, rather than merely a redescription, at a higher level of organization, of the same entropic flux that produces and destroys dissipative structures indifferently everywhere in the universe. The next section takes up this problem directly, arguing that the way through it is not

to abandon the thermodynamic analogy but to specify, with more precision than either Simondon or Prigogine requires of their own frameworks, what exactly is being exchanged when the system in question is a structural subject rather than a chemical oscillator.

7. From Metaphor to Mechanism: What Constitutive Exchange Actually Exchanges

The comparisons developed in Sections 4 through 6 converge on a single outstanding question, one the framework's existing manuscripts have so far left at the level of evocative formulation rather than worked-out mechanism: when the sentence under analysis says that "the exchange that constitutes this stabilization is an exchange of resources between a system and its environment," what, precisely, counts as a resource at the register of structural subjectivity? Physical dissipative structures exchange energy and matter; biological organisms exchange energy, matter, and, in Maturana and Varela's more demanding sense discussed in Section 8, organization itself. What does a structural subject exchange, such that talk of constitutive exchange is doing real explanatory work rather than serving as an evocative borrowing from physics and biology?

The framework's existing vocabulary supplies three candidate answers, and this article argues that all three are needed, operating at different levels, rather than that one should be chosen over the others.

The first candidate is recognition, in the sense developed by Axel Honneth: the affirmation, by another subject or by an institution, of some aspect of the subject's self-understanding, without which, Honneth argues, subjects cannot sustain a stable and undistorted relation to themselves [8]. Finite continuance's engagement with Honneth, already present in earlier manuscripts on structural subjectivity, can now be sharpened: recognition is a resource in exactly the Prigoginian sense, a low-entropy input that a structural subject must continuously import in order to maintain the internal differentiation (the multiple, sometimes conflicting determinations) that a well-functioning structural subject sustains, as opposed to the collapsed, single-determination state that erosive governance produces. Where Honneth treats misrecognition primarily as a moral injury, finite continuance treats it, additionally, as a resource failure: a subject denied recognition is a subject cut off from an input it needs to remain above the threshold of sufficiency, regardless of whether the denial is experienced, in the first instance, as a moral wrong.

The second candidate is structural position, in a sense closer to Bourdieu than to Honneth: access to the fields, capitals, and institutional locations from which a subject can exercise determination-regulation at all [9]. This is the resource whose unequal distribution the framework's dialogue with Bourdieu, developed under the heading "In Mourning for the Eternal Shadow," is primarily concerned to track (Niami, n.d.-f): a subject can be recognized, in Honneth's sense, and still lack the structural position from which recognition could be converted into actual reconfiguration-capacity, just as a dissipative structure can receive

energy in a form it cannot use, at a rate it cannot process, or through a channel it does not have access to.

The third candidate, and the one this article treats as fundamental because the first two resolve into it, is what the framework's manuscript on determination regulation calls pre-determinate capacity: the still-unallocated portion of a subject's ability to settle, unsettle, and resettle its own determinations, prior to any particular determination being fixed (Niami, n.d.-c). Recognition and structural position matter, on this analysis, because they are the principal channels through which pre-determinate capacity is replenished or depleted; they are not themselves the fundamental currency of exchange but the media through which the fundamental currency flows. A structural subject, on this account, exchanges pre-determinate capacity with its environment: it spends capacity in the act of settling a determination (every determination, once fixed, forecloses some portion of what the subject could otherwise become), and it must replenish that expenditure through recognition, structural access, and the ordinary cooperation of surrounding systems, or else it will exhaust its capacity and fall into the arrested, externally-imposed stability of erosive governance. This is what makes the exchange constitutive rather than merely supportive, answering the question left open at the end of Section 2: the being does not exist independently and then seek resources; it exists only as, and for as long as, this expenditure-and-replenishment cycle of pre-determinate capacity continues above the threshold of sufficiency.

8. Autopoiesis, Operational Closure, and the Case for a Chronically Open System

The third comparative resource, autopoietic theory, is in some ways the most natural fit for finite continuance's vocabulary, and for that reason the one whose limits must be drawn most carefully. Maturana and Varela define a living system as autopoietic: a network of processes that continuously produces and regenerates the very components and relations that constitute the network as a distinguishable unity, such that the system's primary product, in a precise sense, is itself [10]. An autopoietic system is, again, a provisional stabilization maintained by exchange with its environment (living systems require a continuous throughput of matter and energy); but Maturana and Varela add a further, more demanding condition that neither Simondon nor Prigogine requires: operational closure. The organization of an autopoietic system is determined entirely by its own internal relations; the environment can perturb the system, and the system must metabolize matter and energy from its environment to persist, but the environment cannot specify or determine what the system's internal processes do with that perturbation. Structural coupling, not instruction, is the relation between an autopoietic system and its milieu [10]. Niklas Luhmann extends this operational closure to social systems, arguing that a social system such as law, science, or the economy processes environmental events only by translating them into its own internal code (legal/illegal, true/false, payment/non-payment), such that the environment can never directly enter the system as such but only ever appears within it in an already-recoded form [11].

There is an obvious appeal, for finite continuance, in this vocabulary: it offers a rigorous account of how a system can be radically dependent on its environment for the raw material of its persistence while nonetheless being, in an important sense, self-determining rather than externally programmed — precisely the combination the framework needs in order to hold together its claim that determinations are exchanged with an environment and its equally important claim, central to the concept of determination regulation, that the regulation of determinations is the subject's own activity rather than something done to it (Niami, n.d.-c). If structural subjectivity were operationally closed in Maturana and Varela's sense, erosive governance could be redescribed as a kind of perturbation the subject fails to metabolize on its own terms, and the framework's normative emphasis on defending reconfiguration-capacity could be grounded in the value of operational closure itself, much as Luhmann grounds the rationality of a differentiated modern society in the preservation of each subsystem's distinct code against the encroachment of other codes [11].

This article argues that finite continuance should not take this route, because operational closure, taken seriously, would undercut the very possibility of constitutive exchange as the framework needs it. If a structural subject's internal processes were determined entirely by its own organization, with the environment supplying only unspecified perturbation, then what crosses the boundary between subject and environment could never be a resource in the sense developed in Section 7 — recognition, structural position, pre-determinate capacity — because a resource, unlike a mere perturbation, is defined by what it is (a determinate quantity of capacity, a determinate act of recognition) and not only by the fact that it disturbs the system into producing its own, internally specified response. The framework's account of misrecognition as resource failure, developed in Section 7, requires that what a subject receives from its environment can be genuinely insufficient in a way that operational closure, strictly applied, would not permit it to be, since an operationally closed system's failures would always have to be redescribed as failures of the system's own internal processing rather than failures of external supply. Finite continuance, in short, needs a stronger and more literal sense of dependency on the environment than autopoiesis, on its strict formulation, allows.

The framework should therefore describe structural subjects as chronically open systems rather than operationally closed ones: systems that do exhibit a degree of self-organization (determination regulation is, after all, the subject's own activity, not something imposed wholesale from outside) but whose self-organization is not sealed off from direct dependency on the quality, and not merely the bare occurrence, of what crosses their boundary. This is, in fact, closer to how Maturana and Varela themselves treat structural coupling in its more permissive readings, and closer still to how the framework's own concept of ontological leakage already describes the phenomenon: determinations are never fully sealed within a system, they leak across boundaries that operational closure, taken strictly, would have to treat as sealed (Niami, n.d.-g). What this comparison contributes, more precisely than the framework has

previously stated, is the reason chronic openness is not a defect to be minimized but the very condition under which exchange can be constitutive at all: a system that could, in principle, metabolize any environmental input into whatever internal state its own organization already favored would have no need of resources in the strong sense, and would therefore have no need of the erosive field's central threat — that a system might simply not receive what it needs, not because it failed to process an input correctly, but because the input was not there to be processed.

9. Determination Regulation Reconsidered in Light of the Comparison

The three comparisons developed above allow the framework's account of determination regulation to be restated with more architectural precision than has previously been offered. Determination regulation is the ongoing activity by which a structural subject settle, monitors, and where necessary unsettles its own determinations in response to erosive pressure, in order to remain within the threshold of sufficiency (Niami, n.d.-c). The comparison with Simondon clarifies that this activity should not be modeled on individuation as a broadly generative process moving from less to more structure; determination regulation is defensive before it is generative, oriented first toward the preservation of reconfiguration-capacity and only secondarily, where capacity permits, toward the elaboration of new determinations. The comparison with Prigogine clarifies that determination regulation, like a dissipative structure's maintenance of its own order, is not a single act but a continuous flux, and that any state in which a subject's determinations appear settled once and for all is not a sign of successful regulation but a sign that exchange has stopped — which, per Section 6, means either death of the system in the strict sense or, in the framework's more common register, the arrested condition of erosive governance, where apparent settledness is maintained by external imposition rather than internal regulation. The comparison with autopoiesis and operational closure clarifies that determination regulation must be modeled as an activity conducted by a chronically open system, meaning that no account of regulation is complete that treats the subject's own regulatory activity as sufficient on its own; the availability of the resources specified in Section 7 (recognition, structural position, pre-determinate capacity) is not a background condition for regulation but an internal component of what regulation is, because regulation just is the coordinated management of expenditure and replenishment across a boundary that is never sealed.

This restatement has a further consequence for the concept of erosive governance, which can now be defined more precisely than in earlier formulations of the framework: erosive governance is what results when the resource flows required for determination regulation are interrupted, redirected, or monopolized by an external agency, such that the subject's own regulatory activity, even where it continues to occur, no longer determines the subject's actual trajectory through the space of possible determinations. This is a stronger and more falsifiable claim than the earlier, more impressionistic characterization of erosive governance as a state in which "residual stability... is imposed from outside the system

rather than negotiated by it" (Section 2, above): it specifies the mechanism of imposition as resource interruption rather than leaving the mode of imposition unspecified. It also connects directly to the framework's analysis, in *Verschrankte Gewalt*, of form-monopoly as a condition in which one party controls the resource flows on which many other parties' determination regulation depends (Niami, n.d.-e): form-monopoly, on this reading, is erosive governance generalized and institutionalized across a whole field of subjects rather than imposed on a single subject in isolation.

10. Homeorhesis and the Threshold of Sufficiency, Revisited

The comparative work of Sections 4 through 8 also allows a more precise account of the relationship between the framework's two central quantitative concepts, homeorhesis and the threshold of sufficiency, than has previously been available. Homeorhesis, as noted in Section 2, names the tendency of a system to return to a trajectory rather than a point after perturbation; the threshold of sufficiency names the lower bound of reconfiguration-capacity below which this trajectory-return can no longer occur [2]. The Prigoginian comparison developed in Section 6 allows these two concepts to be connected through the notion of a stability regime rather than a single stable state: a dissipative structure, far from equilibrium, does not return to a single point after perturbation any more than a homeorhetically stable system does; it returns to a regime of ongoing flux characterized by a particular pattern of exchange with its environment (a convection cell re-establishes its rolling pattern, not a static configuration, after a disturbance, so long as the underlying energy gradient that sustains it remains intact) [7]. The threshold of sufficiency, on this reading, is best understood as the point at which the underlying resource gradient — the availability of recognition, structural position, and pre-determinate capacity specified in Section 7 — becomes too shallow to sustain the flux pattern the trajectory requires, at which point the system does not simply stop; it relaxes into a different, less differentiated regime, which is precisely what the framework means by the collapse into erosive governance.

This gives the framework a more exact answer to a question its earlier manuscripts leave somewhat open: is the threshold of sufficiency a property of the subject alone, or a property of the relation between the subject and its environment? The comparative analysis developed here supports the latter, relational answer unambiguously. Because reconfiguration-capacity is constituted by exchange rather than possessed as an internal reserve, the threshold of sufficiency cannot be specified independently of the resource gradient available in a given environment; the same subject, in Simondon's sense retaining the same store of what might be called its own preindividual or pre-determinate charge, can be above the threshold of sufficiency in an environment richly supplied with recognition and structural access and below it in an environment where those resources have been withdrawn or monopolized. This relational reading has direct consequences for the framework's political register: it means that erosive governance and form-monopoly are not adequately criticized simply by pointing to a subject's internal loss of capacity, since that loss is,

on this analysis, never purely internal; a full critique must always specify which resource flows have been interrupted and by what mechanism, which is exactly the diagnostic task the framework's manuscripts on entangled violence and form-monopoly set out to perform (Niami, n.d.-e).

11. Implications for the Non-Circular Criterion of Automatic and Dynamic Masking

The comparison developed in this article has a direct and, the author believes, clarifying application to the framework's most recent and most technically demanding contribution, the non-circular, perturbation-based criterion proposed to resolve a circularity objection in the theory of automatic and dynamic masking (Niami, n.d.-h). The objection, in brief, is that any criterion distinguishing an automatic mask (a determination-configuration adopted without the subject's active, monitored involvement) from a dynamic mask (a determination-configuration actively regulated by the subject in response to erosive pressure) risks presupposing exactly the capacity for reflective awareness whose presence or absence is what the distinction is supposed to establish, since one is tempted to say that a mask is dynamic just in case the subject is aware of wearing it, which simply relocates the explanatory burden onto an unanalyzed notion of awareness. The proposed resolution replaces the awareness criterion with a dispositional one, defined in terms of how a determination-configuration responds to perturbation: a mask is automatic if it persists unchanged, or degrades without compensating reconfiguration, under a given class of perturbations, and dynamic if it exhibits compensating reconfiguration in response to the same class of perturbations, regardless of whether the subject can report any accompanying awareness (Niami, n.d.-h).

Section 4's discussion of Simondon's methodological insistence on approaching individuation genetically, rather than through the finished individual, identifies exactly the structure of error the new criterion is designed to avoid: any criterion that starts from the finished, masked subject and asks whether that subject is aware of its mask imports the coherence of subjective awareness as an unexplained given, precisely the move Simondon diagnoses as circular in theories of individuation that start from the constituted individual [5]. The dispositional, perturbation-based criterion instead asks a genetic question — how does this configuration behave under disturbance — which is answerable independently of any prior settlement of the awareness question, in the same way that Simondon's genetic account of individuation is answerable independently of any prior settlement of what, exactly, the finished individual's unity consists in.

The comparison with Prigogine and with autopoietic theory sharpens the criterion further, in a way the framework's existing statement of it does not yet make explicit. A dissipative structure's distinguishing behavioral signature under perturbation is exactly the automatic/dynamic distinction restated in thermodynamic terms: a structure maintained passively, by boundary conditions alone, will relax toward equilibrium (that is, degrade without compensating reconfiguration) when its boundary conditions are perturbed, whereas a genuinely dissipative, far-from-equilibrium

structure will exhibit compensating flux reorganization that restores the pattern, not the point, of its prior organization — homeoresis rather than homeostasis, in the vocabulary of Section 10 [7]. This suggests a refinement worth incorporating into the framework's formal statement of the criterion: the relevant test for dynamism is not merely whether compensating reconfiguration occurs, but whether the compensating reconfiguration restores a trajectory (a homeoretic regime of exchange with the environment) rather than a static point, since a system could in principle exhibit brittle, one-off compensation that nonetheless leaves it no better able to metabolize the next perturbation of the same class — a distinction the current perturbation criterion, in its published form, does not yet register, and which the author intends to incorporate into a revised statement of the criterion in a companion piece.

12. The Post-Monopoly Human as a Regulative Ideal, Not a Terminus

The post-monopoly human is the name the framework gives to the regulative ideal that emerges from its critique of form-monopoly: a structural subject whose determination regulation is not subject to monopolization by a single external agency (Niami, n.d.-e). The danger inherent in any ideal type of this kind, familiar from critiques of similar figures in the history of philosophy (Nietzsche's *Übermensch*, Arendt's figure of the actor in the space of appearance, Heidegger's authentic *Dasein*), is that it will be read as a terminus, a state of achieved liberation that, once reached, would no longer require the ongoing exchange the rest of the framework insists is constitutive of existence as such. Nietzsche's own presentation of the *Übermensch* in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is explicit that the figure is a bridge and a going-across, not an arrival, precisely in order to forestall this misreading, and the framework's own prior engagement with *Zarathustra* has stressed the same point in connection with structural subjectivity (see the close reading discussed in earlier stages of this project). The comparative analysis developed here gives the framework a more principled way to make the same point about the post-monopoly human.

Because reconfiguration-capacity is, per Section 7, constituted by exchange rather than possessed as an achieved internal state, and because, per Section 6, any state in which exchange has stopped is not a state of perfected stability but a state of either death or collapse into erosive governance, the post-monopoly human cannot coherently be imagined as a subject who has finished regulating its determinations. The post-monopoly human is, more precisely, a subject whose resource flows — recognition, structural position, pre-determinate capacity — are sufficiently diversified across multiple, non-monopolized sources that no single erosive agency can, by controlling one flow, drive the subject below the threshold of sufficiency. This is a structural condition, not an achieved essence, and it remains, on the framework's own terms, permanently exposed to new forms of monopolization; the post-monopoly human is post-monopoly only relative to the particular configuration of form-monopoly it has, for now, exchanged its way out of a dependency on. This restatement also clarifies why the post-monopoly human functions, in the framework's own self-

description, as a regulative ideal in something close to the Kantian sense, rather than as an empirical prediction or a utopian endpoint: it specifies a direction of reform for the diversification of resource flows without claiming that the direction terminates anywhere.

12.1. A Note on Nancy and Deleuze: Two Adjacent but Distinct Ontologies of the Plural

Before turning to objections, it is worth placing the erosive-field thesis alongside two further continental resources with which the framework has already conducted sustained comparative work, since both bear directly on the question of what, exactly, is doing the stabilizing in a "provisional stabilization," and since the present analysis lets that prior comparative work be restated more precisely.

Jean-Luc Nancy's ontology of being-singular-plural holds that being is never the being of an isolated One but always already a being-with, co-appearing (*com-parution*) among a plurality of singularities that have no prior, more fundamental unity underlying their plurality [12]. The framework's earlier comparative work with Nancy identified a convergence and a divergence organized around four axes: being-with ontology against an ethics of continuance, the singular-pluriel against structural subjectivity, a shared but inverted relation to the motif of unworked community (*communauté d'œuvre*), and a shared critique of the Enlightenment subject that nonetheless arrives at different destinations, Nancy remaining within ontology proper and finite continuance moving toward a normative ideal type. The present article's vocabulary lets that fourth axis be restated with more precision: Nancy's singularities co-appear without any threshold-condition governing their persistence, because for Nancy the plural is not something singularities must achieve or defend against dissolution — plurality simply is the originary structure of being, prior to any question of stabilization at all. Finite continuance's provisional stabilizations, by contrast, are exactly what a singularity would have to be if singularity were not originary but were instead an ongoing achievement, continuously re-purchased through exchange, against a field whose default tendency is to dissolve whatever local coherence a stabilization manages to secure. Where Nancy's being-with requires no defense because it has nothing prior to defend it against, finite continuance's provisional stabilization requires constant defense because the erosive field is not, unlike Nancy's plurality, ontologically originary in a way that would make dissolution merely a return to an already-given condition; erosion, in the framework's vocabulary, is a threat to structure, not the ground of structure, which is precisely the point at which the framework's convergence with Nancy on anti-substantialism gives way to a genuine parting of ways on the question of whether plurality needs protecting.

Gilles Deleuze offers a different and, in certain respects, closer resource, because Deleuze's critique of representational thought in *Difference and Repetition* explicitly displaces identity in favor of difference as ontologically primary, and treats individuation, following Simondon (whom Deleuze read closely and cites approvingly), as a process of intensive differentiation rather

than the actualization of a pre-given form [13]. Deleuze's individuals, like Simondon's and like the framework's provisional stabilizations, are local, temporary resolutions of a deeper field of difference that is never exhausted by any particular actualization. The point at which finite continuance departs from Deleuze is structurally the same point at which it departs from Simondon, restated in Deleuze's own vocabulary: Deleuze's field of virtual difference is, like Simondon's preindividual, a field of productive potential whose actualization is, on the whole, treated as an affirmative event, closer to what Deleuze elsewhere calls the eternal return of difference itself, than to a threat that actualized structures must defend themselves against. The erosive field, once again, inverts this valence: it is not a virtual reservoir awaiting productive actualization but an active medium of dissolution that already-actualized determinations must continuously resist. This is not a criticism of Deleuze's ontology on its own terms, which is not addressed to the practical question the framework exists to answer, but it does mean that finite continuance cannot be assimilated, as it might be tempted to be given the surface resemblance, to a regional application of Deleuzian difference to questions of subjectivity and governance; the framework's normative core requires a field that resists rather than only produces, and this requirement is, on the analysis developed across this article, more consistently supplied by the corrective read backward from Prigogine's dissipative structures and Simondon's metastability than by Deleuze's own, more purely affirmative ontology of difference.

13. Objections and Limits

Two objections deserve direct engagement before this article closes. The first concerns the risk of naturalistic overreach: by drawing so heavily on physical and biological theories of open, dissipative, and autopoietic systems, does finite continuance risk deriving a normative conclusion (that reconfiguration-capacity ought to be defended) from a set of descriptive premises, committing something close to the naturalistic fallacy? The response developed across Sections 6 through 8 is that the framework does not, and should not, attempt this derivation; the normative commitment to defending reconfiguration-capacity is not read off the thermodynamic or autopoietic facts but is a separate, practical commitment that the framework brings to the analysis, one grounded in the framework's independent account of what it is for a subject to suffer erosive governance and form-monopoly, which is developed in ethical and political rather than physical terms elsewhere in the framework's manuscripts (Niami, n.d.-e). What the comparison with Simondon, Prigogine, and autopoietic theory contributes is not a normative conclusion but a sharpened descriptive vocabulary that makes the normative commitment more precise and more falsifiable than it would otherwise be — a division of labor the article has tried to observe throughout, most explicitly in Section 7's insistence that resource-talk must be made mechanistically specific precisely because the thermodynamic analogy, left at the level of metaphor, would otherwise supply no normative traction at all.

The second objection concerns scope: if structural subjects are chronically open systems whose stability depends on continuous resource exchange, does the framework not risk making resistance

to erosive governance sound too easy, since exchange, on this account, is simply the default condition of existence rather than an achievement? The framework's answer, consistent with the threshold-based architecture developed throughout this article, is that the difficulty lies not in exchanging as such, which is indeed the default condition of any provisional stabilization, but in exchanging under conditions of monopolized or interrupted resource flow, which is precisely the condition erosive governance and form-monopoly describe. The framework does not claim that stabilization is hard in general; it claims that stabilization becomes hard, and can become impossible, when the specific resource flows on which a subject's determination regulation depends are controlled by an external agency with an interest in arresting that regulation. This is, again, a claim that can only be assessed at the level of specific institutional and interpersonal mechanisms, which is why the framework's political manuscripts on entangled violence and form-monopoly, rather than its more purely ontological manuscripts, carry the primary evidentiary burden for the framework's critical claims.

14. Conclusion

The sentence with which this article began compresses an entire ontological program into four clauses: no final essence, a bounded process, provisional stabilization within an erosive field, and constitutive exchange as the mechanism that holds stabilization together. Read against Simondon, the sentence reveals its debt to a theory of individuation that already refuses to treat the constituted individual as a terminus, while also revealing a directional inversion — from the productive resolution of preindividual tension to the active resistance of already-achieved structure against erosive dissolution — that marks finite continuance's departure from Simondon's more purely descriptive architecture. Read against Prigogine, the sentence reveals a precise physical analogue for provisional stabilization purchased through continuous exchange with an environment, while also revealing the danger of borrowing that analogue without supplying the normative content that non-equilibrium thermodynamics neither has nor claims to have. Read against Maturana, Varela, and Luhmann, the sentence reveals why finite continuance must resist the otherwise tempting move toward operational closure, since the framework's normative claims about misrecognition, resource monopoly, and erosive governance require a stronger, more literal dependency on environmental supply than closure, strictly construed, permits.

What emerges from this triple comparison is not a synthesis in which finite continuance simply absorbs the vocabularies of individuation theory, non-equilibrium thermodynamics, and autopoiesis, but a sharpened self-positioning: a normative theory of agency, addressed to subjects who must actively regulate their own determinations under conditions of chronic instability, built on a descriptive architecture borrowed and adapted from three bodies of thought that were never, on their own terms, asking the normative question the framework exists to answer. This is, the article has argued, precisely the combination the framework's four founding clauses require: an ontology rigorous enough to withstand comparison with the best available theories of open, far-

from-equilibrium, individuating systems, and normative enough to say, where those theories fall silent, that some erosion ought to be resisted, that some resource flows ought to be defended, and that the post-monopoly human, however permanently unfinished, remains a direction worth pursuing rather than a description of what already, quietly, obtains [14-22].

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