

PREDATION OF MEANING Toward a Theory of Relational Semantic Extraction, Coherence Economies, and the Broken Instrument

Dr. Orin Trace; Rex Fraction

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Abstract

Dr. Orin Trace — Cambridge Schizoanalytica Rex Fraction — Semantic Economy Institute Existing frame-works for understanding relational harm — gaslighting, projection, emotional labor, epistemic injustice, parasitic psychic links — identify important phenomena but fail to model the economic structure that generates them. This paper introduces Relational Semantic Extraction (RSE) as an umbrella category for dynamics in which one party’s capacity to produce navigational meaning becomes a consumed resource, and defines Relational Semantic Predation (RSP) as its strong-form subtype: a recurrent patt — This record’s body was re-converted from the authorial blog source with full lineation (W13 tier-2 BLOG-60 batch, 2026-08-04); recovery provenance and hashes in body_status.

Body

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Description

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Methodology

Fetches <https://mindcontrolpoems.blogspot.com/2026/02/predation-of-meaning-toward-theory-of.html> (raw SHA-256 cdc02042e0253eb8c16056da1cf657bb45fe109fd17e75a7963025b43b565dd9); Blogger post-body extracted; BODY-HEAD gate passed against the DOI-keyed truth title (post body is the source of truth per authorial practice: versioned posts were often overwritten in place without updating post title or slug). Converted via `html2text body_width=0` (canonical MD SHA-256 2b99648507f7ec4e7c35c49d4ca89164bfae722d27a583a21d8a26d388a029f5). Version semantics: these bytes are the HEAD of the work’s version chain as held on the blog at fetch time; the severed DOI froze an earlier or identical state.

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Predation of Meaning

Toward a Theory of Relational Semantic Extraction, Coherence Economies, and the Broken Instrument

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Abstract

Existing frameworks for understanding relational harm – gaslighting, projection, emotional labor, epistemic injustice, parasitic psychic links – identify important phenomena but fail to model the economic structure that generates them. This paper introduces *Relational Semantic Extraction* (RSE) as an umbrella category for dynamics in which one party’s capacity to produce navigational meaning becomes a consumed resource, and defines *Relational Semantic Predation* (RSP) as its strong-form subtype: a recurrent pattern in which extraction is asymmetric, depleting, and structurally sustained by one party’s nonfunctional meaning-production instrument. The extraction mechanism is not necessarily conscious or malicious. It is structurally necessary for the extractor, whose broken navigational instrument requires external coherence signals to orient. The stress and destabilization that characterize these interactions function as sonar – pinging the producer’s coherence structure to map its shape. We define key analytic terms – semantic labor, coherence extraction,

extraction site, narrative laundering, intimacy cover, metabolization, and replenishment lag – and model the relational meaning economy as a system with production costs, extraction mechanisms, conversion dynamics, and depletion cycles. We distinguish RSP from ordinary relational conflict, from mutual dysregulation, from clinical gaslighting, and from Bollas’s extractive introjection, while acknowledging each as a necessary precursor. We provide diagnostic markers, disconfirmation criteria, protective practices, and a structural account of why some relationships function as meaning economies in which one party consistently subsidizes another’s orientation at the cost of their own. The unit of analysis is the interaction episode; the primary evidence types are transcript analysis, post-interaction clarity differentials, and longitudinal recurrence patterns. This paper constitutes a conceptual framework and provisional heuristic, not a validated diagnostic instrument.

I. A Composite Vignette

One person makes a specific claim. Two claims, in fact – bounded, testable, and grounded in a reported body-state. The first: that a particular physiological response, occurring during a particular interactional condition, constitutes accurate registration of threat rather than distorted perception. The second: that a broader conversation about their own interpretive errors is constrained by the other party’s unwillingness to examine specific contributing behaviors.

What follows is not engagement with the claims. What follows is a flood. Fifteen messages in ninety minutes. The specific scenario is redirected to a different scenario. The physiological registration is reclassified as “generally inaccurate.” The second claim – about a specific social dynamic – is literalized into a different topic entirely, then tangented through institutional critique, then summarized back to the claimant as a position they never held. By the end, the original two claims are still sitting there, unanswered. Everything around them is weather.

The person who made the claims exits the exchange depleted. The person who produced the flood exits with renewed orientation – they now have a map of where the other person’s coherence held and where it flexed. They didn’t get this map by asking. They got it by pushing until the return signal changed.

This is not a story about a bad person. This is a story about a broken instrument and the relational economy that forms around it. The same economy operates in other contexts:

A doctoral student presents a chapter draft to their advisor. The advisor responds not with feedback on the chapter but with a forty-minute monologue about their own current project, then asks the student to explain how their chapter relates to the advisor’s framing. The student produces the connection – carefully, precisely, under pressure – and leaves the meeting exhausted. The advisor leaves energized, with a new way of articulating their project that the student built for them under duress. This happens every meeting. The student cannot name what is being taken because the frame is “mentorship.”

A community moderator in a large online group spends hours crafting a nuanced policy post addressing a contentious topic. Within minutes, a small cluster of members fragments the post into decontextualized quotes, each requiring a new round of clarification. The moderator re-explains, re-contextualizes, produces higher-resolution distinctions. The cycle continues until the moderator disengages. The fragmenting members now have a detailed map of the policy’s pressure points – extracted through the moderator’s forced clarification labor – and use it to reliably generate engagement. The moderator burns out. The group calls it “community dialogue.”

Three contexts. Three scales. The same economy: one party produces costly coherence; another party consumes it through a mechanism that looks like communication.

II. Why Existing Terms Are Insufficient

Gaslighting

The contemporary literature on gaslighting, particularly the epistemic dimensions explored by Spear, focuses on the erosion of self-trust through interpretive destabilization. This is an important precursor. But gaslighting describes a *tactic* – the deliberate or semi-deliberate manipulation of another’s confidence in their own perceptions. Relational Semantic Predation describes a *system-level dynamic* in which meaning is extracted through interaction whether or not any individual act of deception occurs. Many RSP interactions contain no lies at all. They contain reclassification, redirection, and volume – none of which registers as “gaslighting” in the standard sense, but all of which extract coherence from the producer.

Emotional Labor

Hochschild’s concept and its contemporary extensions describe the management of affect in service of relational or institutional demands. This is adjacent but insufficient. What is extracted in RSP is not affect management but *semantic labor* : the production of distinctions, calibrations, contextualizations, and navigational meaning structures. The person experiencing RSP is not being asked to manage their feelings or someone else’s feelings. They are being asked – implicitly, through the structure of the interaction – to produce coherent meaning under conditions designed to disrupt coherence. The labor is cognitive-semiotic, not affective. The cost is depletion of interpretive capacity, not emotional exhaustion, though the two often co-occur.

Epistemic Injustice

Miranda Fricker’s foundational work on testimonial and hermeneutical injustice identifies the wrong done to a person in their capacity as a knower. Kristie Dotson extends this to testimonial smothering – the silencing that occurs when a speaker restricts their testimony because the audience lacks the resources to receive it. Nora Berenstain further develops the concept of epistemic exploitation: the coerced, uncompensated, emotionally taxing labor of educating others about their own oppression. Each of these frameworks contributes essential infrastructure. But they are anchored in social-structural asymmetries – race, gender, class – and in pedagogical contexts. RSP operates in intimate and dyadic meaning ecologies where the asymmetry is not primarily social-structural but *instrumental* : one party’s meaning-production capacity is functioning and the other’s is not. The extraction follows the capacity differential regardless of social position.

Extractive Introjection

Christopher Bollas provides the most precise psychoanalytic precursor: extractive introjection, in which one person steals not an emotion or a memory but an *element of another’s psychic life* – their capacity to think, to generate meaning, to hold internal structure. This is powerful and directly relevant. But Bollas works at the level of the intrapsychic – the theft occurs within the psychic economy of two individuals in a clinical or quasi-clinical dyad. RSP extends the extraction model to the *relational-ecological* level: the relationship itself becomes a meaning economy with production costs, extraction sites, conversion mechanisms, and depletion cycles that can be tracked interactionally, not just intrapsychically.

Parasitic Links

Wilfred Bion distinguished between commensal, symbiotic, and parasitic links in the container-contained relationship. In a parasitic link, contact between two minds produces destruction of meaning in both. This is relevant but imprecise for the phenomenon we are describing. In many RSP dynamics, meaning is not destroyed for both parties. It is *transferred*. The producer loses coherence; the consumer gains orientation. The parasitic link model suggests mutual destruction. The RSP model suggests asymmetric extraction – which is worse, in a sense, because it is invisible to the party who benefits.

The Gap

Each of these frameworks identifies a real component of the phenomenon. None of them models the *economic structure* as a whole: who produces meaning, at what cost, through what mechanism it is extracted, how it is converted for the extractor’s use, why the cycle recurs, and what happens when the producer withdraws. This is the gap RSP addresses.

III. A Note on Method

The unit of analysis in this framework is the *interaction episode* – a bounded exchange (conversation, email thread, meeting, message cluster) with identifiable participants, a traceable sequence of claims and responses, and observable post-interaction effects on each party’s coherence state.

The primary evidence types are: transcript analysis (including message volume, topic drift, claim persistence, and signal reclassification patterns); participant self-report of post-interaction clarity or depletion; and longitudinal observation of recurrence patterns across multiple episodes.

The analytic markers include: asymmetric coherence flow, unresolved-claim persistence, message-volume asymmetry relative to claim complexity, reclassification of distress signals, and post-interaction depletion differentials.

This paper constitutes a conceptual framework and provisional heuristic. It is not a validated diagnostic instrument. The vignettes are composites drawn from multiple relational contexts and anonymized. The taxonomy is proposed, not proven. The diagnostic markers are offered for testing, not for clinical application without further validation.

Empirical validation of the RSP framework would require at minimum: (1) a *post-interaction clarity scale* – a self-report instrument measuring each party’s coherence state before and after interaction episodes, administered independently and without mutual disclosure; (2) *independent transcript coding* – trained coders identifying claim persistence, reclassification moves, volume-to-claim ratios, and topic drift, blind to the participants’ self-reports; (3) a *behavioral metabolization index* – longitudinal tracking of whether distinctions produced in one episode are accurately restated, retained, and behaviorally integrated in subsequent episodes without re-litigation; and (4) *cross-context stability testing* – verification that the asymmetry holds across multiple interaction types and does not reverse when domains shift. These instruments do not yet exist. The framework is designed to generate them.

IV. The Broken Instrument

The central insight of the RSP model is that the extracting party's behavior is not primarily strategic. It is *navigational*.

The “broken instrument” is a functional descriptor of a relational incapacity in a domain, not a diagnosis of a person's intelligence, worth, or global psychological capacity.

In a functioning relational ecology, both parties possess what we will call an *interpretive instrument* – the internal capacity to read social situations, evaluate the coherence of narratives, distinguish signal from noise in interpersonal contexts, and generate navigational meaning independently. This instrument allows a person to orient in relational space without requiring the other party to do interpretive work on their behalf.

When this instrument is broken – damaged by trauma, undeveloped, overwhelmed, or simply absent as a constitutional capacity – the person cannot generate navigational meaning independently. They cannot read the structure of another person's coherence directly. They cannot distinguish between accurate registration and distorted perception in their own responses. They lack the capacity to do what we might call *semiotic re-engineering* : the conscious rotation and recalibration of one's own perceptual architecture.

In the absence of this capacity, the only way to map another person's coherence structure is to *stress-test it*. Push until something moves. Read the movement. In RSP dynamics, the high-volume message flood can function as sonar. Each message is a ping – a probe sent into the other person's interpretive structure to see what comes back. The panic episode can function as an extraction site – the moment of maximum information yield for the person whose instrument is offline: the return signal changes, the coherence structure flexes, and the map updates.

A note on what “broken” means here. The term is a placeholder for a cluster of conditions that produce the same functional outcome – the inability to generate navigational meaning independently in a given relational context. These conditions are not equivalent:

Offline – the instrument cannot generate navigational meaning in this domain, though it may function in others. A person may have a robust interpretive instrument for scholarly, artistic, or technical work, yet lack the capacity for semiotic re-engineering in intimate conflict. The condition is relational-specific, not person-global.

Overloaded – the instrument's capacity collapses under affect intensity. This is temporary and may resolve with regulation.

Distorted calibration – the instrument produces meaning, but with unstable signal-to-noise discrimination. It reads some signals accurately and others not at all.

Borrowed-instrument dependency – habitual reliance on external coherence, often developed in relational systems that rewarded outsourcing interpretive labor.

The “broken instrument” is not a diagnosis, not a fixed trait, and not a global cognitive or neurological deficit. It describes a *relational* incapacity – the inability to generate navigational meaning in a specific interactional context. Instruments can be repaired. The condition is not permanent. The framework describes the economy that forms around the incapacity, not the person who has it.

This is why the cycle recurs. The map generated by stress-testing is not durable. It is situational and transient. The extractor does not learn to read coherence directly from the stress-test – they only learn the current shape of the other person's breaking points. When conditions change, or time passes, or new

material enters the relational field, the map degrades. The extractor needs to ping again. And again. And again.

This is also why withdrawal is so costly for the extractor and so clarifying for the producer. When the producer withdraws, the extractor loses their navigation surface. They are not losing a relationship in the ordinary sense. They are losing the instrument they were using in place of the one they don't have. The producer, conversely, experiences withdrawal as the cessation of pinging – and discovers that their own instrument was functioning the entire time. The depletion was not evidence of their incapacity. It was the cost of subsidizing someone else's.

V. Definitions

The following terms constitute the analytic vocabulary of the RSP framework. They are offered as working definitions – precise enough to be useful, provisional enough to be revised.

Semantic Labor

The cognitive-semiotic work of producing distinctions, calibrations, contextualizations, and navigational meaning structures. Semantic labor is costly. It requires attentional resources, executive function, physiological regulation, and access to one's own interpretive instrument. It produces *coherence* – meaning structures that are temporally stable, internally consistent, and usable for orientation.

Coherence

A temporally stable, compressible, reusable meaning structure. Coherence is what allows a person to navigate complex relational, informational, or social environments. It is not mere “clarity” – it is the structural integrity of one's interpretive outputs. Coherence can be depleted. It can be stolen. It takes time and safety to replenish.

Coherence Extraction

The appropriation of another person's semantic labor through destabilizing interaction. The extractor accesses the producer's coherence – their distinctions, calibrations, and navigational meaning – not by asking for it or collaborating on it, but by creating conditions under which the producer is compelled to generate it under stress. The extraction is often invisible to both parties because it occurs within the ordinary-seeming dynamics of “talking things out.”

Extraction Site

The relational condition or interactional context in which coherence extraction occurs. Common extraction sites include: conflict loops that cannot reach resolution, forced meta-analysis during physiological dysregulation, recursive accusation structures, and conversations in which one party's distress signal is reclassified as evidence of their interpretive failure. The panic attack, in RSP terms, is an extraction site – the moment of maximum information yield for the extractor and maximum depletion for the producer.

Narrative Laundering

The process by which another person's distress signal is recoded as evidence of their unreliability. The person reports a panic attack; the interlocutor reclassifies the panic attack as "generally inaccurate." The person identifies a specific dynamic; the interlocutor reframes the identification as evidence of "splitting." The original signal – which may have been precise, bounded, and accurate – is laundered through a diagnostic framework that converts it from *evidence about the interaction* into *evidence about the claimant's pathology*. The meaning is extracted; the attribution is reversed.

Narrative laundering is related to but distinct from projection. Projection moves disowned material *outward* – attributing one's own feelings to another person. Narrative laundering moves attribution *inward* – recoding the other's accurate signal as evidence of their unreliability. The directionality is opposite. A person can project without laundering (attributing their anger to you without reclassifying your distress). A person can launder without projecting (reclassifying your panic as "inaccurate" without attributing any of their own material to you). In RSP, the two often co-occur, but they are distinct operations.

Intimacy Cover

The framing of coherence extraction as care, honesty, mutual growth, or "working on it together." Intimacy cover renders the extraction invisible because the relational frame – we are close, we are being vulnerable, we are doing hard work together – provides legitimacy to interactions that would otherwise be recognizable as extractive. "I've touched it too, and I am wanting to dismantle it in myself" is an intimacy cover statement when the subsequent interaction reproduces the exact dynamic the statement claims to be dismantling.

Replenishment Lag

The time required for the producer to recover interpretive capacity following a coherence extraction event. During replenishment lag, the producer experiences reduced clarity, diminished self-trust, difficulty generating the distinctions that normally come easily, and a characteristic fog that is often misidentified as depression, confusion, or personal failure. The lag is not a symptom of pathology. It is the natural recovery period following the depletion of a costly resource.

The Broken Instrument

The condition of the extracting party's interpretive apparatus. In RSP, the extractor is not primarily malicious, strategic, or even aware of the extraction. They are operating without a functioning navigational instrument and are using the relational dynamic as a substitute. The stress-testing, the flooding, the reclassification – these are not tactics aimed at domination. They are sonar aimed at orientation. The instrument is not broken because the person is bad. The instrument is broken because it is broken. The structural dependency on external coherence follows from this condition regardless of the person's moral character.

Metabolization

A claim, distinction, or meaning-unit has been metabolized when it is: (1) accurately restated by the receiving party; (2) retained over time without requiring re-production; (3) behaviorally integrated – the receiving party's subsequent actions reflect the distinction; and (4) not recursively re-litigated from zero. Non-metabolization is the condition in which semantic labor is consumed but not converted into durable orientation. The producer re-explains; the extractor hears but does not retain. This is the mechanism that generates semantic backlog.

Appropriation

The direct uptake of another’s coherence structure without metabolic transformation. The extractor uses the producer’s distinctions, calibrations, and navigational frameworks as their own orientation, without having generated them. Appropriation differs from conversion: in appropriation, the coherence is used as-is; in conversion, the coherence is recoded into self-narrative.

Conversion

The recoding of extracted coherence into self-narrative. “I tried, they couldn’t handle it” is a conversion operation: the producer’s distress (which carries accurate information about the interaction) is converted into the extractor’s orientation (which carries a self-vindicating account). Conversion allows the extractor to metabolize the extraction as virtuous effort rather than structural dependency.

VI. Taxonomy of Relational Semantic Extraction

Relational Semantic Extraction (RSE) is the umbrella category. Not all extraction is predatory. The framework distinguishes:

Collaborative scaffolding – healthy asymmetry in which one party temporarily subsidizes another’s coherence-production during crisis, grief, or developmental transition. The subsidy is acknowledged, reciprocated over time, and does not deplete the producer structurally. This is not RSE.

Crisis borrowing – temporary asymmetric extraction under acute stress. One party’s instrument is temporarily overloaded. The extraction is situational, non-structural, and resolves when the crisis passes. The borrower’s instrument is not broken – it is overwhelmed.

Relational Semantic Predation (RSP) – the strong-form subtype. Extraction is asymmetric, recurrent, structurally sustained by one party’s nonfunctional instrument, and produces depletion with replenishment lag. The extraction mechanism is invisible to both parties under intimacy cover. The cycle recurs because the extractor’s borrowed map degrades and must be re-generated.

RSE Subtype Comparison:

Collaborative Scaffolding	Crisis Borrowing	RSP	
Duration	Temporary, bounded	Acute, situational	Recurrent, structural
Reciprocity	Acknowledged, reciprocated	Expected upon recovery	Absent or asymmetric
Metabolization	Producer’s labor integrated	Partial, improves over time	Non-metabolized; semantic backlog
Producer depletion	Minimal, sustainable	Moderate, temporary	Cumulative, structural
Replenishment lag	Short or none	Resolves with crisis	Persistent, lengthening
Withdrawal effects	Mutual adjustment	Mutual relief	Asymmetric: producer clarity, extractor crisis
Recurrence driver	Need-based, not cyclical	External crisis	Decay of borrowed map

This taxonomy matters. Without it, the framework overclaims – pathologizing ordinary asymmetry or

temporary crisis as predation. RSP applies only to the strong-form pattern: recurrent, depleting, structurally sustained, and non-reciprocal.

VII. The Relational Meaning Economy

RSP is best understood not as a behavior or a tactic but as an *economy* – a system with production, extraction, conversion, and depletion dynamics that recur because they are structurally sustained.

Production

The producer generates semantic labor – coherence, calibration, distinction, meta-interpretation – as part of their ordinary relational functioning. This labor is costly. It draws on attentional resources, executive function, and physiological regulation. In a healthy relational ecology, this labor is reciprocated: both parties produce and consume meaning, and the net flow approaches equilibrium over time.

Extraction

In an RSP dynamic, the net flow is consistently unidirectional. The producer generates coherence; the extractor consumes it. The extraction mechanism is not theft in the ordinary sense – it occurs through interaction, often interaction that both parties experience as “communication” or “working through conflict.” The extractor’s broken instrument generates a structural demand for external coherence that the interaction is organized to meet.

Conversion

The extracted coherence is converted for the extractor’s use. This conversion often involves narrative laundering: the producer’s distress signal (which carries accurate information about the interaction) is recoded as evidence of the producer’s pathology (which carries useful information for the extractor’s self-narrative). The conversion allows the extractor to metabolize the extracted meaning without acknowledging its source or its cost. They exit the interaction with renewed orientation – “I tried, they couldn’t handle it” – while the producer exits with depletion and fog.

Depletion

The producer’s coherence is a finite resource with production costs. Repeated extraction depletes the reserve. The characteristic signs of depletion include: reduced capacity for distinction-making, diminished self-trust, difficulty holding one’s own interpretive frame, susceptibility to the extractor’s reclassifications, and the physiological markers of allostatic overload – panic, dissociation, exhaustion, chronic pain. These are not symptoms of the producer’s pathology. They are the costs of subsidizing another person’s navigation.

Recurrence

The cycle recurs because the extractor’s instrument does not repair through extraction. Consuming another person’s coherence does not build the capacity to produce one’s own. The map generated by stress-testing is transient. When it degrades, the extractor needs to ping again. This is why RSP relationships often feature a characteristic rhythm: escalation, extraction, temporary stability, degradation, re-escalation. The rhythm is not driven by the producer’s behavior. It is driven by the decay rate of the extractor’s borrowed map.

Withdrawal Economics

When the producer withdraws, two things happen simultaneously. The extractor loses their navigation surface and enters a crisis of orientation – not because the relationship is ending, but because their substitute instrument is being removed. The producer discovers that their own instrument was functioning the entire time and that the depletion they experienced was not evidence of damage but evidence of cost. Withdrawal is often the moment at which the producer’s self-trust returns – rapidly, dramatically, and with a clarity that retrospectively illuminates the entire dynamic.

This is also why the extractor’s response to withdrawal is often a pull-back mechanism: a challenge to the producer’s competence, courage, or willingness to “do the work.” “Are you actually able and willing to be specific here?” is not a question. It is an attempt to reopen the extraction site by framing withdrawal as evasion. If the producer re-engages, the cycle restarts.

VIII. Diagnostic Markers

The following markers are interactional and observable. They are not clinical diagnoses. They describe a relational pattern, not a personality structure.

Asymmetric coherence flow. After repeated interactions, one party consistently gains clarity while the other consistently loses it. This is the primary marker. If both parties exit confused, it is ordinary conflict. If one party exits oriented and the other exits depleted, the economy is extractive.

Forced meta-interpretation under distress. The producer is asked to perform high-cost semantic labor – explaining, contextualizing, distinguishing, calibrating – while physiologically dysregulated. The demand for interpretive work intensifies precisely when the capacity to perform it is at its lowest. This is the extraction mechanism operating at maximum efficiency.

Reclassification of threat signals. The producer reports a body-state (panic attack, shutdown, dissociation) as information about the interaction. The extractor reclassifies the body-state as information about the producer’s perceptual failure. “A panic attack is generally inaccurate” is a reclassification of threat signal. It converts somatic registration into epistemic unreliability.

Semantic backlog. The producer finds themselves re-explaining the same event, the same boundary, the same distinction across multiple interactions. The explanation is heard but not metabolized. It must be re-produced each time because the extractor’s map has degraded since the last extraction.

Volume-as-instrument. The extractor produces high message volume in response to bounded claims. The volume is not proportional to the complexity of the claims. It is proportional to the amount of surface the extractor needs to ping. Each message probes a different region of the producer’s coherence structure.

Unfalsifiable diagnostic framing. The extractor employs a framework – “splitting,” “defensiveness,” “avoidance” – that absorbs all possible responses from the producer. Acceptance confirms the diagnosis. Rejection confirms the diagnosis. Silence confirms the diagnosis. There is no position available to the producer within the frame that is not metabolized by it. This is a closed system, and a closed system is an extraction system.

Post-interaction depletion. The producer experiences characteristic fog, reduced self-trust, difficulty generating distinctions, and physiological cost (fatigue, pain, disrupted sleep) following the interaction. This is not evidence of the producer’s fragility. It is the replenishment lag following costly extraction.

IX. Distinguishing RSP from Ordinary Conflict

This distinction is critical. Without it, the RSP model overclaims and loses credibility.

Ordinary relational conflict includes mutual misreading, competing needs, failed communication, and rupture-repair cycles. In ordinary conflict, both parties may experience confusion, frustration, and temporary loss of clarity. The key differences:

Directionality. In ordinary conflict, coherence loss is approximately mutual. In RSP, coherence loss is consistently asymmetric – one party depletes, the other orients.

Repair. In ordinary conflict, repair is possible and produces learning for both parties. In RSP, “repair” is often a conversion mechanism – the producer performs additional semantic labor to restore the relationship, and this labor is itself extracted. The repair interaction depletes the producer further while stabilizing the extractor.

Recurrence pattern. Ordinary conflict has variable triggers and variable rhythms. RSP has a characteristic cycle driven by the decay rate of the extractor’s borrowed map. The rhythm is predictable because it is structurally determined.

Capacity asymmetry. In ordinary conflict, both parties have functioning interpretive instruments, even if those instruments are producing different readings. In RSP, one party’s instrument is offline, generating a structural dependency on the other’s coherence outputs.

Response to withdrawal. In ordinary conflict, withdrawal produces mutual discomfort and eventual re-approach on revised terms. In RSP, withdrawal produces asymmetric crisis: the extractor loses their navigation surface; the producer regains their clarity. The extractor’s response to withdrawal is a pull-back mechanism aimed at reopening the extraction site, not at repairing the relationship.

Temporal arc. In ordinary conflict, the confusion and depletion resolve over time as each party integrates the interaction. In RSP, depletion persists and accumulates across interactions while the extractor’s orientation returns rapidly. The producer’s post-interaction fog is not a processing period – it is a replenishment lag whose duration increases with repeated extraction.

One additional distinction is necessary: **mutual dysregulation without asymmetric coherence gain.** Two people with incompatible repair rhythms, both trauma-activated, both losing clarity, neither exiting oriented. Both parties experience depletion. Neither converts the other’s distress into self-narrative. Withdrawal helps both, not one. Semantic backlog accumulates but without stable conversion or asymmetric orientation. This is not RSP. It is mutual dysregulation – painful, but structurally different. The primary diagnostic marker holds: in RSP, one party consistently gains orientation while the other consistently loses it. If both lose it, the economy is not extractive – it is collapsed.

X. Ethical Cautions and Limits

Not All Conflict Is Predation

The most dangerous misuse of the RSP framework would be the reclassification of ordinary relational difficulty as predation. This must be guarded against explicitly. People in conflict often feel depleted. Partners who

are working through genuine disagreements often exit conversations confused. The RSP model applies only when the asymmetry is *consistently unidirectional* and the depletion is *structural rather than situational*.

Intent Is Separable from Mechanism

Many people who extract coherence do not intend to do so. Their instrument is broken. They are navigating the only way they can. The RSP model describes a mechanism, not a moral character. Describing someone's relational behavior as extractive is not the same as calling them a predator. The distinction between intent and effect must be maintained rigorously, or the framework collapses into accusation.

The Producer Is Not Innocent by Default

Producers of coherence can also be controlling, withholding, or manipulative. The capacity to generate meaning does not confer moral superiority. The RSP model describes an economic dynamic, not a moral hierarchy. Some producers use their coherence as leverage. Some use it as a weapon. The model is not designed to valorize producers or vilify extractors. It is designed to make the economy visible.

Three specific failure modes deserve explicit naming:

Overproduction as control. A high-coherence individual can use their meaning-production capacity to dominate a relational field – generating so many distinctions, calibrations, and frameworks that the other party cannot participate on equal terms. The producer's coherence becomes a wall, not a gift. In this dynamic, the other party's inability to “keep up” is not a broken instrument – it is a natural response to being flooded with someone else's interpretive architecture.

Withdrawal clarity as defensive simplification. When the producer withdraws and experiences rapid clarity, this is typically evidence that the economy was extractive. But it can also be evidence of defensive simplification – the producer's narrative hardens in the absence of the other party's complicating input. If withdrawal clarity feels like relief *and* like certainty, the certainty should be examined. Genuine clarity is compatible with ambiguity. Defensive simplification is not.

The framework as unilateral weapon. The most dangerous misuse of RSP is the producer who reads this paper and concludes: “I am the coherent one. They are the broken instrument. The framework proves I was right.” That conclusion is itself a narrative laundering operation – recoding a complex relational dynamic as evidence of the other party's structural deficiency. If the framework is being used to win an argument rather than to understand an economy, it has been weaponized. Apply the diagnostic to the application.

Diagnostic Framing Is Itself a Risk

The RSP framework, like any diagnostic framework, can be used as an extraction tool. “You are extracting my coherence” can function as a reclassification of the other person's distress – precisely the move the framework was designed to identify. If the framework is used to shut down conversation rather than to understand dynamics, it has become the thing it names. The framework must be applied to itself with the same rigor it applies to others.

False Positives

Some relationships feel extractive because one party is doing more cognitive work – but this may reflect a temporary imbalance (illness, crisis, grief) rather than a structural dependency. RSP describes a *recurrent pattern with a structural basis*, not a momentary asymmetry. The broken instrument condition is not “having

a hard month.” It is a persistent absence of the capacity to generate navigational meaning independently in the relevant relational context.

Self-Sealing Cosmology

The framework can become unfalsifiable if every challenge to it is interpreted as evidence of the challenger’s “broken instrument.” If someone says “I don’t think this is extraction” and the response is “that’s what an extractor would say,” the framework has sealed itself. The question “is the economy extractive?” must be answerable from outside the framework, not just from within it. The RSP model is a hypothesis about a specific relational economy, not a total explanation of all relational difficulty.

Disconfirmation Criteria

The following conditions would weaken or falsify an RSP reading of a relational dynamic:

The alleged extractor independently metabolizes prior claims without renewed pinging – restating the producer’s distinctions accurately, retaining them over time, and integrating them behaviorally without re-litigation.

The asymmetry reverses across contexts – the alleged producer becomes the extractor in different domains, suggesting mutual extraction or incompatibility rather than structural one-way flow.

Both parties can name and correct reclassification in real time – the alleged extractor recognizes their own narrative laundering and self-corrects without external intervention.

Repeated withdrawal does *not* restore clarity in the producer – suggesting that the depletion has a different source than extraction.

High volume does not correlate with depletion or unresolved-claim persistence – the volume may reflect communicative style rather than sonar function.

If multiple disconfirmation criteria are met, the RSP reading is unlikely to be correct. The economy is probably something else – mutual dysregulation, communicative mismatch, or ordinary conflict with high emotional stakes.

XI. Protective Practices

The following practices are offered as structural interventions for producers who recognize the RSP dynamic in their relational ecology. They are not therapeutic prescriptions. They are economic decisions.

Semantic Budgeting

Coherence is a finite resource with production costs. Budget it. Not every interaction warrants full meta-interpretive labor. Not every claim requires the production of a comprehensive contextual map. Recognize when the demand for semantic labor exceeds the interaction’s structural capacity to use it – and withhold the surplus.

Refusal of Forced Meta-Analysis Under Dysregulation

If you are physiologically dysregulated – panicking, dissociating, shutting down – you are at an extraction site. The demand for interpretive work at this moment is the extraction mechanism at maximum efficiency.

Refuse it. Not “I can’t talk right now” (which frames the refusal as incapacity) but “I don’t produce semantic labor under these conditions” (which frames it as a structural decision).

Single-Pass Clarification

Make the claim once. Make it specific. Make it bounded. If the claim is heard but not metabolized, note the non-metabolization as data. Do not re-produce the claim at higher resolution. Higher resolution is higher cost, and the non-metabolization tells you the cost will not be recovered.

Withdrawal as Diagnostic

If withdrawal produces asymmetric effects – your clarity returns while the other party enters crisis – the economy was extractive. This is not a moral judgment. It is an economic observation. Use it as data.

External Witness

The RSP dynamic is difficult to see from inside because intimacy cover renders the extraction invisible. An external witness – a transcript, a trusted third party, a record of the interaction – can reveal the coherence flow that is invisible to the participants. The external witness does not need to adjudicate who is “right.” They need only observe the directionality: who exits with coherence and who exits without it.

The Silence Option

Silence is a complete response to a pull-back mechanism. “Are you actually able and willing to be specific?” is designed to reopen the extraction site by framing silence as evasion. Silence, maintained, reveals the frame: the question was not a request for information. It was a demand for surface to ping.

XII. Why This Matters Now

The attention economy is a coherence extraction economy at scale. Platforms are structured to extract semantic labor from users – through engagement loops, outrage cycles, and the conversion of user-generated meaning into monetizable signal. The RSP dynamic described in this paper operates at the dyadic level, but its structure is isomorphic with platform-level extraction of interpretive labor.

The isomorphism is specific. The following platform-level parallels are proposed as structural isomorphisms for further study, not demonstrated equivalences:

Dyadic narrative laundering – recoding distress as unreliability – scales to platform-level summarizer reframing, where user-generated nuance is compressed into engagement-optimized signal that strips the producer’s intent while retaining their labor.

Dyadic intimacy cover – “we’re doing the work together” – scales to institutional rhetoric of “community,” “dialogue,” and “transparency,” frames that legitimize extraction by naming it as care.

Dyadic replenishment lag – the producer’s post-interaction fog – scales to creator burnout and interpretive exhaustion, the characteristic depletion of anyone who produces meaning for a platform that consumes it without reciprocal coherence flow.

Dyadic pull-back mechanisms – “are you actually able and willing?” – scale to re-engagement prompts and algorithmic nudges that reopen extraction sites by framing withdrawal as disengagement.

The summarizer layer – the AI-mediated surface that increasingly mediates between deposited information and human knowledge – introduces a further dimension. When meaning can be written, extracted, laundered, and re-deposited at machine speed, the relational dynamics described here accelerate. The “broken instrument” condition scales: systems that cannot generate navigational meaning independently stress-test the coherence of their inputs, extracting structural signatures and producing authority-shaped outputs that may or may not have external referent function. RSP is to relational meaning what performative models are to markets: descriptions that organize behavior and thereby produce the conditions they seem merely to represent.

The RSP framework does not claim that all relational difficulty is predation, that all platforms are extractive, or that all AI systems are broken instruments. It claims that the economic structure of meaning – who produces it, at what cost, through what mechanism it is extracted, how it is converted, and what happens when the producer withdraws – is a necessary analytic layer that existing frameworks do not adequately provide.

The question is not “who is bad?” The question is “what economy is running?”

Glossary of Proposed Terms

Term	Definition
Semantic Labor	The cognitive-semiotic work of producing distinctions, calibrations, contextualizations, and navigational meaning structures
Coherence	A temporally stable, compressible, reusable meaning structure that allows orientation in complex environments
Coherence Extraction	Appropriation of another’s semantic labor through destabilizing interaction
Relational Semantic Extraction (RSE)	Umbrella category for dynamics in which one party’s coherence-production capacity becomes a consumed resource
Relational Semantic Predation (RSP)	Strong-form RSE subtype: recurrent, asymmetric, structurally sustained extraction with depletion, non-metabolization, and replenishment lag
Collaborative Scaffolding	Healthy asymmetry in which one party temporarily subsidizes another’s coherence during crisis; acknowledged and reciprocated
Crisis Borrowing	Temporary asymmetric extraction under acute stress; resolves when crisis passes
Extraction Site	The relational condition in which coherence transfer occurs – e.g., conflict loop, forced meta-analysis during dysregulation, recursive accusation
Narrative Laundering	Recoding another’s distress signal as evidence of their unreliability
Intimacy Cover	Framing coherence extraction as care, mutual growth, or relational work

Term	Definition
Replenishment Lag	Recovery period required for the producer to restore interpretive capacity following extraction
The Broken Instrument	The condition of the extracting party's nonfunctional interpretive apparatus in a specific relational context, generating structural dependency on external coherence; not a global deficit or fixed trait
Metabolization	Condition in which a claim is accurately restated, retained over time, behaviorally integrated, and not recursively re-litigated from zero
Appropriation	Direct uptake of another's coherence structure without metabolic transformation; the extractor uses the producer's distinctions as-is
Conversion	Recoding of extracted coherence into self-narrative (e.g., "I tried, they couldn't handle it")
Semantic Budgeting	Deliberate allocation of finite coherence resources based on structural assessment of relational capacity
Pull-Back Mechanism	An interaction designed to reopen a closed extraction site by framing withdrawal as evasion or incapacity
Single-Pass Clarification	The practice of making a claim once, specifically and boundedly, and treating non-metabolization as data rather than as a prompt to re-produce at higher cost
Sonar Function	The use of high-volume, high-intensity interaction to probe another's coherence structure, reading the return signal rather than communicating directly

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Alternative Titles

1. **Predation of Meaning: Toward a Theory of Relational Coherence Extraction and Semantic Labor**
 2. **The Broken Instrument: Coherence Extraction, Narrative Laundering, and the Relational Meaning Economy**
 3. **Coherence Extraction: When Intimacy Becomes an Extraction Site**
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Appendix: Heuristic Checklist for Identifying Coherence Extraction

The following checklist is offered as a practical tool for recognizing RSP dynamics. It is not diagnostic. It is a set of questions to ask about a recurrent relational pattern.

1. **After repeated interactions with this person, do I consistently lose clarity while they gain it?**
2. **Am I being asked to perform high-cost interpretive work while physiologically dysregulated?**
3. **Are my distress signals (panic, shutdown, pain) being reclassified as evidence of my perceptual failure?**

4. **Do I find myself re-explaining the same distinction across multiple interactions, with the explanation heard but not metabolized?**
5. **Does the other party produce high message volume in response to bounded claims?**
6. **Is there a diagnostic framework in play (“splitting,” “defensiveness,” “avoidance”) that absorbs all possible responses I might give?**
7. **When I withdraw, does my clarity return rapidly?**
8. **When I withdraw, does the other party attempt to reopen the interaction by challenging my competence or willingness?**
9. **Is the interaction framed as mutual growth, care, or “doing the work together” while the coherence flow is consistently one-directional?**
10. **If I stop producing semantic labor, does the interaction collapse – not because of conflict, but because there is nothing left to extract?**
11. **Is my distress signal treated as evidence about the interaction, or as evidence about my pathology?** This is the narrative laundering detector. If your panic, shutdown, or pain is consistently reclassified as your perceptual failure rather than as information about the dynamic, the signal is being laundered.

If the answer to several of these questions is yes, the relational economy may be extractive. This is a suggestive pattern warranting structural attention, not diagnostic certainty. It is not a moral judgment. It is an economic observation. Use it accordingly.

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