

# Withdrawal-Under-Formalization: A Cross-Traditional Recognition Pattern and Its Bearing on the Fourth Cell of Paths of Change

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## Abstract

This paper examines a recurring structural pattern — the withdrawal of an object from the very act that attempts to fix it — as it appears independently across seven traditions with no documented line of transmission between them: Heraclitus's fragment on time as a child at play, the Vedantic doctrine of *lila*, the Zhuangzi's Hundun parable and its counterpart practice of *zuowang*, Kant's purposiveness without purpose, Gadamer's ontology of play, spontaneous symmetry breaking in quantum field theory, and Heidegger's account of earth and *aletheia*. Following an evidentiary standard drawn from Gigerenzer's ecological rationality and Taleb's antifragility — convergence across independent domains rather than deductive proof — the paper argues that this pattern is poorly captured by treating it as a fourth member of a fourfold typology (as in McWhinney's *Paths of Change*, where it corresponds to the Yellow/Mythic worldview) or as a fourth relational model (as in Fiske's *Relational Models Theory*, where it borders on Communal Sharing). Instead, the pattern is better understood as the pre-formal condition each of the other three worldviews interrupts in order to stabilize into rule, action, or shared meaning. The paper closes by noting the self-referential limit of its own method: formalizing a withdrawal-pattern is itself an instance of the pattern it describes, and this limitation is treated as a finding rather than a flaw.

Keywords: Paths of Change, McWhinney, Relational Models Theory, Fiske, *wu-wei*, Zhuangzi, spontaneous symmetry breaking, *aletheia*, ecological rationality, antifragility

## 1. Introduction

McWhinney's *Paths of Change* (1997) proposes that organizations, individuals, and political systems operate from one of four dominant worldviews: Unity (Blue, rule-governed), Sensory (Red, action-governed), Social (Green, relation-governed), and Mythic (Yellow, meaning- and imagination-governed). The fourfold structure has proven useful in organizational and political analysis. This paper asks a narrower question: is the fourth cell correctly modeled as a peer of the other three?

The question was prompted by a single diagram — "Geometrische PoC" (Konstapel, 2026a) — which maps Fiske's (1991) four *Relational Models Theory* categories onto four geometric structures, with Authority Ranking (an ordinal geometry) set against Communal Sharing/Play (an equivalence geometry), and a shared invariant center. The present paper investigates what lies at that center by assembling independent recognitions of the same underlying pattern from disparate intellectual traditions, and by asking what these recognitions jointly imply about the fourth cell's proper place in the model.

The method used here departs deliberately from falsificationist epistemology. Consistent with Gigerenzer's (2007) ecological rationality — which evaluates heuristics by robustness across environments rather than derivation from axioms — and with Taleb's (2012) antifragility — which treats survival under repeated, independent stress as the relevant evidence — the paper's central claim rests on convergence: the same structural pattern recognized, without mutual influence, by observers separated by millennia and continents. This is a weaker and different kind of evidence than a formal proof, and the paper does not claim otherwise.

## 2. Seven Independent Recognitions

### 2.1 Heraclitus: the child's game (Ionia, c. 500 BCE)

Heraclitus's fragment 52 (DK 22B52) states that Aion — lifetime, or time — is a child playing a board game (*pesseuōn*), and that the kingship belongs to the child. Commentators have long disputed whether this describes life as rule-governed (like a game with fixed rules), as agonistic (like a game of chance or conflict), or as simply the arbitrary play of a child (Kahn, 1979). The dispute itself is instructive: a child's game, in the relevant sense, is not the external application of a rule that could be extracted and transmitted; the "rule" exists only in the playing and dissolves under attempts to state it independently of the play.

## 2.2 Lila: creation without motive (Vedanta, Brahmasutra 2.1.33)

The Brahmasutra's aphorism *lokavat tu līlā-kaivalyam* ("but [it is] like sport in the world, mere play") and Śaṅkara's commentary describe divine creative activity as motiveless — analogous to ordinary, purposeless bodily processes such as breathing, undertaken not because something is lacking but because nothing is lacking (Thibaut, 1904; Sharma, 1976). The doctrinal insistence that *lila* is play rather than purposive action carries an explicit warning against over-explanation: supplying a determinate motive, however benevolent, converts *lila* into *karma* — work — and forfeits the very property under discussion.

## 2.3 Hundun and Jixian: the parable of imposed and refused form (Zhuangzi, Chapter 7, c. 300 BCE)

The Zhuangzi's seventh chapter ("Yingdiwang") contains two structurally paired episodes. In the first, the shaman Jixian (a *shenwu*, "spirit-shaman," reflecting the Chu *wu* tradition from which the text emerged; see Li & Tian, 2024) claims to read a man's fate infallibly from his face; the sage Huzi presents four successive, ungraspable configurations of face until Jixian, unable to read a fifth, flees. In the second, the featureless sovereign Hundun ("Chaos"), ruler of the Center, is given the seven sensory openings by two grateful neighboring rulers, Shu ("Sudden") and Hu ("Swift"), one per day; Hundun dies on the seventh day. Girardot (1983) situates Hundun within a broader Chinese cosmogonic vocabulary in which *hundun* denotes undifferentiated plenitude rather than privative void, distinguishing it from Greek *chaos*. Both episodes exhibit the same failure from opposite directions — one by insistent reading, the other by well-intentioned formalization — and in neither case is the failure attributable to want of skill or good will.

## 2.4 Zuowang: formalization in reverse (Zhuangzi, Chapter 6)

The same text preserves a counter-movement. In Chapter 6, Confucius's disciple Yan Hui describes *zuowang* ("sitting and forgetting"): a graduated subtraction of moral categories, ritual and musical training, bodily awareness, and finally intellect, until no fixed self or world-boundary remains. Kohn (1987) and subsequent commentary explicitly identify the terminus of this practice with Hundun — the meditator returns to the undifferentiated root that "is one with the Dao." The practice is significant methodologically because it is purely subtractive: nothing is constructed or achieved, which resolves (or rather sidesteps) the standard paradox of *wu-wei* articulated by Slingerland (2003) — that spontaneity cannot be the object of deliberate cultivation, since deliberate cultivation of *X* presupposes an intention toward *X*, and intention toward spontaneity is not spontaneity. Because *zuowang* has no positive object of intention — one cannot "try" to forget in the way one tries to perform — it does not fall to this paradox in the same way.

## 2.5 Kant: purposiveness without purpose (Königsberg, 1790)

In the Critique of the Power of Judgment (§§10–17), Kant characterizes the judgment of beauty as involving a free play (*freies Spiel*) of imagination and understanding that is purposive in form (*zweckmäßig*) yet answers to no determinate concept or end (*Zweckmäßigkeit ohne Zweck*). Such a judgment cannot be derived from a principle and transmitted as proof; it can only be exercised, on each occasion, as if universally communicable, without being demonstrable (Guyer, 1997).

## 2.6 Gadamer: the game plays itself (Truth and Method, Part I.2)

Gadamer (1960/1989) radicalizes the Kantian analysis by displacing the subject: "the actual subject of the game... is not the player but instead the game itself." The player is taken up into a movement whose to-and-fro structure precedes and exceeds any player's intentions, rather than mastering the game as an external object.

## 2.7 Spontaneous symmetry breaking (quantum field theory, 20th century)

In a theory with a symmetric Lagrangian and a degenerate manifold of ground states, the physical vacuum selected is asymmetric, and no feature of the symmetric law determines in advance which degenerate state will be realized (Coleman, 1985; Weinberg, 1996). The symmetry is a property of the theory's solution space, not of any realized solution. This gives a rigorously formalizable instance of a law that is structureless with respect to outcome, an outcome that is unique, and a selection that is uncaused by anything internal to the law.

## 2.8 Heidegger: earth and aletheia (1935/36)

In "The Origin of the Work of Art," Heidegger argues that every work opens a world while resting on an earth that the work brings forth precisely by never fully disclosing it: "the earth is that which comes forth and shelters... The earth appears openly cleared as itself only when it is perceived and preserved as that which is essentially undisclosable, that which shrinks from every disclosure and constantly keeps itself closed up." Truth as aletheia is accordingly unconcealment-with-concealment, not the elimination of concealment; a world that fully illuminated its own ground would not achieve total truth but would lose the earth, and with it the condition for anything appearing as true at all.

### 3. The Shared Gesture

The seven recognitions above share no historical filiation — they arise in Ionia, the Gangetic plain, the Chu kingdom of the Yangtze, eighteenth-century Königsberg, twentieth-century field theory, and twentieth-century Freiburg. What they share is a structural claim, storable independently of any one tradition's vocabulary:

(i) Structurelessness is not the absence of a rule that could in principle be supplied; it is the property whereby supplying a rule is the specific act that terminates the phenomenon. (ii) Purposelessness is not an unstated purpose; it is activity that is not, at any level, a means to an end. (iii) Uniqueness is not a general law awaiting discovery; it is the absence of a second instance over which any law could range.

The three properties are not independent add-ons but consequences of a single dynamic: whatever exhibits them withdraws from the very operation that would fix it as a stable object — as a rule (Blue), an achieved outcome (Red), or a shared, nameable meaning (Green). Disorder, by contrast, is simply failed order and remains on the same scale as order; the phenomenon under discussion here is not disorder.

### 4. Placement in Paths of Change, and Its Limits

McWhinney's Yellow/Mythic worldview is customarily set alongside Blue, Red, and Green as a fourth, coordinate cell. The recognitions surveyed above suggest a different relation: Blue requires a rule that holds invariantly across occasions; Red requires an outcome that can be brought about; Green requires a meaning two parties can share. Each is a device for making something repeatable, checkable, or transferable. Yellow, on the present analysis, names not a fourth device of this kind but the condition each of the other three interrupts in order to stabilize — the play prior to rule-extraction, the breath prior to becoming motive, the face prior to the first opening.

This has a direct consequence for formal models built on McWhinney's typology. The quaternion representation of Paths of Change ( $q = w + xi + yj + zk$ ), in which each worldview occupies one orthogonal vector component, presupposes a structure — orthogonality — that is itself already a formal relation. A component defined by withdrawal-from-form cannot, without contradiction, occupy a fixed orthogonal slot in a structure built entirely from formal relations between slots. The quaternion can represent Yellow's downstream effects as seen from Blue, Red, and Green (the imaginative or generative pole visible after the interruption has already occurred), but not the interruption itself — for the same reason a photograph can show a door that was open, never the act of opening.

#### 5. The Originating Geometry: Fiske's Relational Models Theory

The diagram that occasioned this inquiry (Konstapel, 2026a) derives from Fiske's (1991) Relational Models Theory, which identifies four elementary relational structures — Communal Sharing (CS), Authority Ranking (AR), Equality Matching (EM), and Market Pricing (MP) — and which Fiske himself correlates with four mathematical structures echoing Stevens's (1946) scales of measurement: CS with an equivalence relation (undifferentiated sameness, no metric), AR with an ordinal scale (total order, rank), EM with an interval scale (additive balance), and MP with a ratio scale (fixed origin, proportion).

Rang/Volgorde (Rank/Order) in the originating diagram corresponds to AR, an ordinal geometry. Spel/SamenSpel (Play/Co-play), its stated inverse, corresponds to CS, an equivalence relation: a geometry of pure sameness with no metric — every element interchangeable, nothing to rank or add. This is already, independent of the recognitions in Section 2, a formal articulation of "structureless": an equivalence relation is what remains once every distinction that would produce an order, an interval, or a ratio has been withheld.

However, CS still describes a relation between two or more parties — a shared identity that could in principle be jointly recognized. The recognitions in Section 2 point to something prior even to this: not the geometry of sameness between two terms, but what precedes the drawing of the two terms that could then be declared same or different. Hundun has no second party with whom to be undifferentiated. The dreaming Zhuang Zhou has no butterfly standing apart from him with which to share an equivalence relation — the distinction has not yet been drawn (Zhuangzi, Chapter 2; the *hu-die zhi meng*, "butterfly dream"). Fiske's four-term typology, like McWhinney's, may therefore itself be one step downstream of the phenomenon under study.

#### 6. Methodological Note: The Self-Referential Limit

This paper's own procedure is not exempt from its conclusions. Assembling seven recognitions under a common name, ordering them into sections, and proposing a placement within an existing typology are themselves acts of formalization — of the kind Sections 2.3 and 2.8 describe as terminating the phenomenon they are applied to. Two responses are available. The deflationary response would treat this as disqualifying: nothing coherent can be said about a withdrawal-pattern without extinguishing it, so the paper should not have been written. The response adopted here is instead evidential, in keeping with the ecological/antifragile standard stated in Section 1: the paper does not claim to have captured the phenomenon in a rule, but to have documented, with citation, that independent observers across disconnected traditions and eras converged on structurally identical descriptions of something that resists exactly this kind of documentation. The convergence is the finding; the paper's own formalizing gesture is offered as a further data point about the difficulty of the domain, not as a refutation of the difficulty.

#### 7. Conclusion

Seven traditions with no common ancestor describe the same structural gesture: an object withdraws from the operation that would fix it, not as a side effect of clumsy handling but as an

invariant consequence of the fixing operation itself. This pattern is inadequately modeled as a fourth, coordinate cell within either McWhinney's four worldviews or Fiske's four relational models. It is better understood as the pre-formal condition from which Blue/Authority-Ranking, Red/Market-Pricing-like action, and Green/Communal-Sharing-like relation each derive by an act of closure the pattern itself refuses. Any formal apparatus — including the quaternion representation of Paths of Change, and including this paper — can represent the downstream effects of that refusal but not the refusal itself.

## Annotated Reference List

### I. The Originating Framework: Paths of Change and Relational Models Theory

McWhinney, W. (1997). *Paths of Change: Strategic Choices for Organizations and Society* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications. Why read this: The source of the fourfold worldview typology (Blue/Unity, Red/Sensory, Green/Social, Yellow/Mythic) whose fourth cell is the subject of this paper. Reading guidance: Chapters 1–3 establish the typology; the later chapters on organizational application are not required for this paper's argument.

Fiske, A. P. (1991). *Structures of Social Life: The Four Elementary Forms of Human Relations*. Free Press. Why read this: The source of the Relational Models Theory (Communal Sharing, Authority Ranking, Equality Matching, Market Pricing) that generated the originating diagram, and of Fiske's own correlation of these models with mathematical/measurement structures. Reading guidance: The introductory chapter states the four models; the appendix on measurement-scale correspondence is directly relevant to Section 5.

Stevens, S. S. (1946). On the theory of scales of measurement. *Science*, 103(2684), 677–680. Why read this: The classification of nominal, ordinal, interval, and ratio scales that Fiske explicitly maps his four relational models onto, and that underlies the geometric argument in Section 5. Reading guidance: A short paper; read in full.

Konstapel, J. (2026a). Geometrische PoC. *constable.blog*, June 27, 2026. Why read this: The original diagram — four geometries, Rank/Order against Play/Co-play, with a shared center — that occasioned the present inquiry. Reading guidance: The image and its brief caption are the entire primary source; this paper is an extended commentary on it.

### II. Heraclitus

Kahn, C. H. (1979). *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*. Cambridge University Press. Why read this: The standard scholarly treatment of fragment 52 (DK 22B52) and the interpretive disputes over "the kingship belongs to the child." Reading guidance: The commentary on fragment 52 (numbered as such or as fragment XCIV depending on edition) is the relevant section.

### III. Vedanta and Lila

Thibaut, G. (trans.) (1904). *The Vedanta-Sutras with the Commentary by Sankaracarya*. Sacred Books of the East, vols. 34, 38. Oxford University Press. Why read this: The primary translated source for Brahmasutra 2.1.33 and Śāṅkara's commentary on lila as motiveless divine activity. Reading guidance: The commentary on Sutra 2.1.33 (Book II, Chapter I) is the passage cited in Section 2.2.

Sharma, B. N. K. (1976). *Philosophy of Śrī Madhvācārya*. Motilal Banarsidass. Why read this: A useful secondary treatment of the lila doctrine across Vedanta sub-schools, contextualizing the "play

without motive" claim beyond Advaita alone. Reading guidance: The chapter on creation (srsti) is most relevant.

#### IV. The Zhuangzi, the Chu Shamanic Background, and Wu-wei

Watson, B. (trans.) (2013). *The Complete Works of Zhuangzi*. Columbia University Press. Why read this: The standard accessible English translation; contains all primary passages discussed in Sections 2.3–2.4 and 5 (Hundun, Jixian/Huzi, zuowang, the butterfly dream). Reading guidance: Chapter 7 for Hundun and Jixian; Chapter 6 for zuowang; Chapter 2 for the butterfly dream.

Li, P., & Tian, C. (2024). Chu culture-related romanticism and shamanism in Zhuangzi: A translation perspective. *Cultural Forum*, 1(1). Why read this: Establishes the textual grounding for reading the Zhuangzi's shamanic figures (Wu Zhu, Shenwu Jixian) as direct products of Chu wu-shamanism rather than incidental literary device — the historically traceable layer behind Section 2.3. Reading guidance: The section identifying named shamanic figures in the text is the most load-bearing for this paper's claims.

Girardot, N. J. (1983). *Myth and Meaning in Early Taoism: The Theme of Chaos (Hun-tun)*. University of California Press. Why read this: The definitive study of hundun as a cosmogonic category distinct from Greek chaos — plenitude without differentiation rather than privative void — and of its relation to Chinese creation mythology more broadly. Reading guidance: The chapters specifically on the Zhuangzi's Hundun parable are most relevant to Section 2.3.

Kohn, L. (1987). *Seven Steps to the Tao: Sima Chengzhen's Zuowanglun*. Steiner Verlag. Why read this: Traces the zuowang practice from its Zhuangzi origin through later Daoist systematization, and documents the explicit textual association between the goal of zuowang and Hundun — the key source for Section 2.4. Reading guidance: The introductory chapters tracing zuowang's textual history from the Zhuangzi are sufficient for this paper's purposes.

Slingerland, E. (2003). *Effortless Action: Wu-wei as Conceptual Metaphor and Spiritual Ideal in Early China*. Oxford University Press. Why read this: The most thorough treatment of the wu-wei paradox — that spontaneity cannot be the object of deliberate cultivation — central to the argument in Section 2.4 that zuowang sidesteps rather than solves this paradox. Reading guidance: The introduction states the paradox in its sharpest form; the later chapters trace competing proposed resolutions across early Chinese texts.

Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990). *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. Harper & Row. Why read this: A modern psychological formalization of a state — self-forgetful absorption, dissolution of means-end awareness — structurally continuant with wu-wei; Jochim (1998) notes the Zhuangzi anticipates this description by roughly 2,300 years. Reading guidance: Chapters 2–3 on the phenomenology of flow are most relevant for comparison with Section 2.4.

Jochim, C. (1998). Just say no to "no self" in Zhuangzi. In R. P. Ames (Ed.), *Wandering at Ease in the Zhuangzi*. SUNY Press. Why read this: Draws the explicit comparison between Zhuangzi's account of skilled, unselfconscious action and Csikszentmihalyi's flow. Reading guidance: Read alongside Slingerland (2003) for competing accounts of what wu-wei experientially consists in.

Wang, H. (2018). Zhuangzi and the way of self-organization. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*. Why read this: An explicit, non-mystical bridge between wu-wei and modern self-organization/complexity theory, relevant to the physics parallel drawn in Section 2.7 and to a naturalistic reading of the pattern generally. Reading guidance: The sections drawing the direct analogy between wu-wei and emergent order without central control are most relevant.

## V. Western Philosophy of Purposeless Form and Play

Kant, I. (1790/2000). *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (P. Guyer & E. Matthews, trans.). Cambridge University Press. Why read this: The primary source for "purposiveness without purpose" (*Zweckmäßigkeit ohne Zweck*) and the free play of the faculties, central to Section 2.5. Reading guidance: §§10–17 contain the entire argument needed; §15 is the most concentrated single statement.

Guyer, P. (1997). *Kant and the Claims of Taste* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press. Why read this: The standard secondary commentary clarifying the non-conceptual, non-demonstrable character of the judgment of taste. Reading guidance: The chapters on the deduction of taste judgments are most relevant.

Gadamer, H.-G. (1960/1989). *Truth and Method* (2nd rev. ed.; J. Weinsheimer & D. G. Marshall, trans.). Continuum. Why read this: The primary source for the ontology of play, and for the claim that "the actual subject of the game... is not the player but instead the game itself," central to Section 2.6. Reading guidance: Part I, Section 2 ("The ontology of the work of art") is the relevant portion.

Heidegger, M. (1935/36/2001). The origin of the work of art. In *Poetry, Language, Thought* (A. Hofstadter, trans.). Harper Perennial. Why read this: The primary source for the World/Earth distinction and the account of *aletheia* as unconcealment-with-concealment, central to Section 2.8 and directly relevant to the paper's methodological limit (Section 6). Reading guidance: The section titled "The Origin of the Work of Art and Truth" (on world and earth) is the most concentrated statement.

## VI. Physics of Uncaused Selection

Coleman, S. (1985). *Aspects of Symmetry: Selected Erice Lectures*. Cambridge University Press. Why read this: A classic, relatively accessible treatment of spontaneous symmetry breaking, including worked examples of the kind referenced in Section 2.7. Reading guidance: The chapter "Secret Symmetry: An Introduction to Spontaneous Symmetry Breakdown and Gauge Fields" addresses precisely this paper's example.

Weinberg, S. (1996). *The Quantum Theory of Fields, Vol. II: Modern Applications*. Cambridge University Press. Why read this: The standard graduate-level reference for the formal treatment of spontaneous symmetry breaking in field theory, for readers wanting the full mathematical apparatus. Reading guidance: Chapter 19 is the relevant chapter; the mathematics is not required to follow this paper's argument, only the conceptual structure summarized in Section 2.7.

## VII. Epistemological Standard Used in This Paper

Gigerenzer, G. (2007). *Gut Feelings: The Intelligence of the Unconscious*. Viking. Why read this: The source for the ecological-rationality standard — evaluating a pattern by its robustness across varied real environments rather than by derivation from formal axioms — used in place of falsificationism throughout this paper. Reading guidance: The early chapters stating the ecological-rationality program are sufficient.

Taleb, N. N. (2012). *Antifragile: Things That Gain from Disorder*. Random House. Why read this: The source for the antifragility/track-record standard of evidence — survival and recurrence under repeated, independent stress — applied here to the convergence of the seven recognitions in Section 2 rather than to any single deductive argument. Reading guidance: The early chapters on the difference between fragile, robust, and antifragile systems establish the relevant standard.

