

**BEYOND NIHILISM?
—
ONKRAJ NIHILIZMA?**

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HOW THE OTHER FIRST APPEARS AS A CERTAIN KIND OF PERSON

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL CLARIFICATION OF INITIAL PERSONALITY ATTRIBUTION

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Abstract

The paper offers a phenomenological clarification of how others first appear as warm, trustworthy, manipulative, or dangerous. I argue that the sense of the other as a certain kind of person emerges through a higher-order process of personality-oriented sense-making grounded in expressive, behavioral, narrative, symbolic, and interactional materials. The contribution identifies an intermediate layer between the expressive givenness of occurrent states and a stable personality model. I call

this layer initial personality attribution: a pre-reflective, yet higher-order process, in which a small number of cues are organized around a focal bearer into an anticipatory, cross-situational construal. The ensuing interpretation formulates "the anchorability principle," distinguishes initial personality attribution, initial personality impression, stable personality model, and higher-order personality judgment, and describes the triggering structure as the passive-associative activation of sedimented sense. Initial personality attribution supplements other discussed accounts by explaining the genesis, weighting, and anticipatory direction of personality-related content.

Keywords: phenomenology, intersubjectivity, personality attribution, phenomenological anchorability, sedimented experience.

Kako se drugi najprej pojavi kot določena oseba. Fenomenološka razjasnitev začetne atribucije osebnosti

Povzetek

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Članek ponuja fenomenološko razjasnitev vprašanja o tem, kako se drugi najprej pojavijo kot prijazni, vredni zaupanja, manipulativni ali nevarni. Zastopam tezo, da se smisel drugega kot določene osebe vzpostavlja na podlagi procesa osebnostno orientiranega osmišljanja višjega reda, ki temelji na ekspresivnem, vedenjskem, pripovednem, simbolnem in interakcijskem gradivu. Prispevek identificira vmesno plast med ekspresivno danostjo pojavljajočih se stanj in stabilnim osebnostnim modelom. To plast imenujem začetna atribucija osebnosti: gre za pred-refleksiven proces višjega reda, znotraj katerega se manjše število znakov organizira okrog jedrnega nosilca v anticipativno dojetje glede na situacijo. Interpretacija, ki sledi, formulira »načelo zasidranja« ter razlikuje začetno atribucijo osebnosti, začetno impresijo osebnosti, stabilen model osebnosti in osebnostno sodbo višjega reda, obenem strukturo sprožitve opiše kot pasivno-asociativno aktivacijo sedimentiranega smisla. Začetna atribucija osebnosti druge obravnavane razlage dopolnjuje z razjasnitvijo geneze, ocenjevanja in anticipativne usmeritve vsebine, kakršna se nanaša na osebnost.

Ključne besede: fenomenologija, intersubjektivnost, atribucija osebnosti, fenomenološko zasidranje, sedimentirano izkustvo.

I. The paradox of personality experience

I.1. The apparent immediacy of personality in everyday experience

In ordinary life, others often seem to present themselves immediately as warm, steady, sincere, manipulative, or dangerous. We speak as though these qualities were displayed on the surface of a person like color, shape, or sound. A more careful description, however, shows that what first appears are embraces, pauses, gazes, speaking tempo, facial expressions, bodily rhythms, modes of response, and choices made within relationships. Personality seems vivid, because the process that organizes these phenomena into the sense of what kind of person this is usually unfolds too quickly for its mediating layer to remain visible.

The question of this paper is, therefore, not whether personality exists, but how the other first comes to appear to us as a certain kind of person. If this remains unclear, personality-oriented construal may be absorbed into a general account of the other and the other's present state, or be treated simply as a reflective judgment completed only after the experience. Either treatment fails to explain the experienced rapidity and directness of everyday social understanding.

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I.2. The guiding claim

The guiding claim is that the other's personality is not given at the same level as posture, voice, or facial expression. Rather, the sense of the other as having a certain personality emerges through a higher-order process of sense-making grounded in bodily expression, patterns of behavior, situational information, relational history, and the observer's sedimented experiential structure. This process is organized around a focal bearer anchored within the subject's field of appearance. The minimal structural condition of initial personality attribution is, therefore, not confirmation that the relevant object actually exists, but the presence in experience of a bearer apprehended as one and the same individual to whom personality cues can belong. Anchoring may precede the formation of a personality orientation or arise almost simultaneously with it, but it cannot follow the corresponding attribution. The core case remains

an embodied human other, because bodily similarity and shared forms of action make personality cues especially accessible. Embodiment, however, is a privileged form of anchoring rather than an absolute condition. So long as a body, name, text, narrative, symbol, historical trace, virtual interaction, or other phenomenal material can sustain a person-like focus, actions, intentions, values, and relational expectations can gather around it, even if the corresponding actual object is later found not to exist or to have been misrecognized.

160 More specifically, the paper isolates an intermediate phenomenon that has rarely been theorized in its own right. In its typical core, a subject can form an initial personality-oriented construal of a focal bearer on the basis of only a few cues, without explicit reasoning being a necessary precondition. The bearer may already be anchored, or its anchoring may still be taking shape. Here, higher-order characterizes the content: current materials have already been organized into a cross-situational, anticipatory personality orientation concerning the same bearer. This does not mean that the subject must engage in explicit higher-order reflection. The terminology is used in a strictly layered manner. Initial personality attribution names the process of formation; initial personality impression names its first result; and a relatively stable personality model is the product of impressions coordinated and revised across repeated experience. Drawing on Husserl's analyses of sedimentation, passive synthesis, and associative motivation, I describe the triggering structure as the passive-associative activation of sedimented sense. Available cues awaken embodied, social, narrative, or symbolic connections of sense. At the same time, the concrete subject's experiential history and present condition affect, which cues first become prominent, how much weight they acquire, and how gaps are completed. The resulting personality impression is not an exhaustive knowledge of the bearer. It is an anticipatory and open-ended construal that organizes current material into personality-related sense concerning the same bearer, while remaining open to verification, revision, or cancellation in the bearer's subsequent appearances. The point is not that a complete personality model is already available at first encounter, but that before such a model stabilizes, the focal bearer has already begun to appear as a certain kind of person.

The argument develops four interrelated claims. First, anchoring determines to whom personality-related sense is attributed. Second, currently available information from the target, sedimented experience, and the subject's momentary state jointly shape the direction first acquired by the cues. Third, an open horizon keeps both the content of the personality impression and its anchor subject to updating. Fourth, the strength of the bearer's autonomous self-manifestation, together with the strength of the available corrective material, affects the scope for completion by the subject and idealization.

These claims are not derived from the general slogan that others are not given as neutral physical objects. Different analyses in *Hua XIV* support different parts of the argument. Husserl's discussions of the genesis, habitualities, and experiential nexus of the concrete subject inform the account of the subject's history (Husserl 1973, 16–18, 367–368). His methodological warning against mechanically joining subjectivity and world provides a related caution (348). The open structure, in which an object is given, but not exhausted by current experience, supports the account of anticipatory personality-related sense (349–350). The non-inferential givenness of the actual alter ego, together with intermonadic influence and I–Thou acts, informs the account of the actual other's corrective capacity (350–352, 367–369). Direct social perception, theory-theory, simulation theory, and mental-file theory are used to delimit distinct explanatory tasks within social understanding, rather than cited in parallel as though they jointly established the same conclusion.

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Within this theoretical positioning, Spaulding (2015) marks the boundary between occurrent expressive states and personality traits that extend across time and situations. Mental-file theory, by contrast, can explain how cues are maintained as information about the same bearer. The former blocks an unqualified transition between levels; the latter offers a file-based account of object unity. The independent task of this paper is to explain how the target's current configuration, the subject's sedimented experience, and the subject's momentary state jointly enable a small number of cues to acquire a determinate personality orientation and a horizon of future anticipation within this object-directed structure. The two accounts do not concern entirely different objects. Rather, they address different primary explanatory questions and operate at different explanatory levels.

Section II develops the *anchorability principle*, clarifies the division of explanatory labor between this account and mental-file theory, and distinguishes personality-related sense from the sociocultural sense of ordinary objects. Section III analyzes the genetic sequence of sedimentation, affection, and association, together with the structural boundaries of initial personality attribution and the role of the concrete subject. Section IV uses the embrace, early-relationship, and Jack-and-Mike cases to show how information from the target, sedimented experience, and momentary state jointly shape a personality orientation, while distinguishing concurrent constraint from post-attribution revision. Sections V and VI address error, updating, open horizons, and mediated bearers; Sections VII and VIII consolidate the theoretical positioning and clarify the remaining objections and boundary cases.

162 Methodologically, the paper is conceptual and phenomenological rather than empirical. Empirical materials function only as secondary constraints: they show that rapid personality-oriented construals occur, that they are vulnerable to deception and bias, and that they can be revised in light of later information. Mediated and artificial-intelligence cases clarify the boundary conditions of phenomenological anchorability; they do not constitute an empirical theory of human–AI attachment. The philosophical task is to locate initial personality attribution within the chain of social understanding.

At the level of analysis, the paper primarily adopts the personalistic attitude rather than the naturalistic attitude, which explains a person as a psychophysical object. By concrete subject I mean the subject of experience within the personalistic attitude and the lifeworld: a subject who can feel, act, express, respond to others, and possess a personal history within a sociocultural world. Husserl's transcendental-genetic analyses provide formal resources concerning prominence, association, sedimentation, and horizon. The paper neither simply identifies this concrete subject with the transcendental monad nor attempts to complete Husserl's entire theory of transcendental constitution. Nor does it reduce these formal structures to natural-causal explanations of a psychophysical object.

Accordingly, activation, weighting, and mechanism are used only as working terms of phenomenological description. Activation means that sedimented connections become operative again in current experience. Weighting means

that some cues and some directions of personality interpretation acquire greater or lesser prominence. Mechanism refers to the genetic interrelation among these phenomenal moments. None of these expressions presupposes a specific neural, computational, subpersonal, or empirical-psychological mechanism. To preserve an analytic distinction within a single Husserlian family of terms, I use “being affected” for the genetic relation, in which a concrete subject is affected by the world, objects, and others. I reserve “affection” for the structure, through which current material attains prominence in passive synthesis and exerts an affective pull on the subject. “Affective force” denotes the relative strength with which different materials compete for prominence. This is a distinction between levels of analysis, not a claim that Husserl’s texts posit three independent basic mechanisms. Throughout the paper, “updating” is the neutral term for change in personality-related content or anchor structure. “Revision” designates alteration of an existing construal. “Correction” emphasizes that new material, counterevidence, or the bearer’s behavior moves a construal toward greater coherence or fit. These are differences of descriptive emphasis, not separate psychological mechanisms.

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II. The emergence of personality through higher-order sense-making

II.1. From the encountered body to the other as a bearer of personality

If interpersonal encounter is reduced to its basic experiential structure, what first confronts the subject is not a personality already complete as a whole, but an embodied other: a body, a voice, a facial expression, a posture, and a characteristic rhythm of movement. Here, “first” does not mean that the other is treated as a mere thing. It means only that personality is not given in the manner of a sensory item. The other is encountered as someone who can be seen, heard, approached, and responded to; around this person, attributes, expectations, and relational positions can begin to be organized.

II.2. Why personality-related sense must be anchored in one and the same focal bearer

In ordinary language and experience, “he” or “she” is not a free-floating sign. It usually refers to an individual with bodily continuity or to a position maintained as the same character in narrative, imagination, or fiction. A number, an account, or an extensional identifier can, of course, refer to an individual. But unless the relevant materials have been unified in experience as information about the same bearer, they cannot perform the organizing function required by personality-related sense. Initial personality attribution, therefore, does not begin with a completed personality, but it does require a focal bearer, around which attributes, expectations, and relational positions can gather.

164 More precisely, reference to him or her does not first complete a purely physical identification and only then add personality. In most intersubjective experience, the object is apprehended from the outset as a possible bearer of personality-related sense. To appear as a certain kind of person does not mean that the subject already knows who the other is; it means that an object-directed relation is already in place, allowing attributes to be ascribed, behavior anticipated, and relational positions assigned. A focal bearer is an object, whose anchoring has been established or is still taking shape and around which personality-related sense can gather. In actual interpersonal experience, it is also apprehended as an other who may have a perspective, motivations, and a center of action of its own. In the case of fictional characters, empty objects, or artificial-intelligence systems, however, the focal bearer functions first as an organizing focus in experience rather than as a prior assertion of ontological subjectivity.

This yields the anchorability principle: initial personality attribution requires phenomenological anchorability rather than ontological verifiability. The principle concerns the function of experiential organization, not a claim that an actual object necessarily exists. So long as certain phenomena are unified within the subject’s field of appearance as coming from the same bearer, actions, intentions, values, and relational expectations can gather around that focus. The focus may be sustained by a body, face, voice, name, written style,

narrative role, religious image, historical trace, virtual agent, or artificial-intelligence system. It may also rest on misrecognition—for example, when a subject interprets unrelated traces as originating from a person who does not in fact exist. An attribution may, therefore, lack an actual referent, but it cannot lack a phenomenological focal bearer.

The mere sense that there is someone to whom the cues belong does not yet amount to a determinate personality impression. Even so, the threshold for initial attribution is low. A name, an unidentified person, or minimal awareness of an entity can open a focal position, around which personality-related sense may gather. Once even a few cues—clothing, posture, tone, action, text, or interaction—are assigned to that focus, they can draw on the subject's sedimented experiential connections and trigger a rough, stereotypical, or even mistaken personality construal. Phenomenological anchorability is, therefore, not one personality cue among others; it is the structural condition, under which cues can be understood as concerning the same bearer. This condition need not be temporally prior or independently completed. Anchoring may precede the impression or emerge almost simultaneously with it, but it cannot occur after the corresponding attribution. Later information may confirm, revise, split, merge, or dissolve the original anchor, and may reveal that no corresponding actual object exists. None of this alters the fact that the earlier attribution occurred.

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Mental files should not be distinguished from initial personality attribution merely by structural maturity or complexity. Recanati's mental files need not be stable, content-rich, encyclopedic models of persons. Through acquaintance or another epistemically rewarding relation, a subject can open a temporary perceptual file, a proto-file, or a more enduring object file without already knowing who the object is, what the file will be used for, or having accumulated extensive information (Recanati 2011, 5–9, 12–16; 2012). The present account, therefore, does not claim that initial personality attribution must temporally precede every mental file. At first encounter, a minimal object file, phenomenological anchoring, and a personality impression may arise almost simultaneously.

The principal difference lies in explanatory task and level, not in entirely different objects of explanation or in a simple genetic sequence. Mental-file

theory primarily explains singular reference, object tracking, information aggregation, and identity management: why several items of information are maintained as information about the same bearer, and how different files are linked, updated, or distinguished. A mental file can contain personality attributions, such as introverted, warm, dangerous, or reliable from the outset. Initial personality attribution asks a different question. Once object anchoring has begun or is taking shape, why do bodily, textual, behavioral, and interactional cues enter the object-directed structure with this particular content, weight, and anticipatory orientation? The answer concerns the joint operation of the target's current configuration, the subject's sedimented experience, and the subject's momentary state. Their interaction explains how the same bearer can appear as a different kind of person to different subjects.

166 This division of explanatory labor can be illuminated by a limited structural analogy with Husserl's analysis of the unity of expression and what is expressed. When a subject hears someone speak, observes an action, or apprehends bodily expression, the expressed sense is not added as a second item alongside the sound, action, or body. It is realized in the comprehensive apprehension of the same object (Husserl 1989, 248–251). This analysis does not directly establish the technical mechanism of a mental file. It does, however, suggest that once action, tone, text, or interactional material is apprehended as belonging to the same object, its sense is realized within the integral experience of that object rather than floating outside it as a label attached afterward. The focal bearer is, therefore, not a mental vehicle that competes with a mental file. Within the domain, in which mental-file theory applies, a file structure can represent and maintain object unity. Nor does the present account modify the architecture of singular reference and object tracking. Instead, it offers a supplement at the level of genetic phenomenology by addressing the genesis of personality-related content, a dimension that is not ordinarily the primary explanatory target of mental-file theory. The account analyzes how heterogeneous cues acquire different degrees of prominence, affective weight, and forms of connection within the concrete subject's historical experience and momentary state. It then explains how those cues form an overall orientation concerning the same bearer's future behavior and relational possibilities.

II.3. The higher-order sense-making, through which personality emerges

Personality should, therefore, not be understood as a sensory object. It emerges through a higher-order process of personality-oriented sense-making. Unlike brightness, texture, or pitch, it is not simply received by the sense organs; it takes shape as the subject organizes multiple phenomena over time. Keeping promises, accepting responsibility, responding steadily under pressure, shifting blame, approaching others strategically, or repeatedly crossing boundaries can elicit judgments, such as reliable, sincere, steady, untrustworthy, or manipulative. Most of the paper concerns relatively stable social tendencies—that is, personality traits in the narrower sense. Terms, such as dangerous, often function as broader threat judgments formed on the basis of personality cues. They are retained because everyday social life frequently interweaves personality construction, risk assessment, and relational judgment.

I use the expression “personality-related sense” to avoid the overly broad phrase “object of meaning” and to avoid identifying personality itself with a significance. The claim is not that personality alone has sense, while perceptual or imagined objects do not. Rather, personality experience is constituted at a founded, higher-order level of sense-formation. It is grounded in expressive, behavioral, narrative, symbolic, and interactional materials, without being reducible to their physical properties or simple sum.

In this limited respect, the account can be compared with Husserl’s analyses of body–spirit unity and spiritualized objects. Husserl argues that when we apprehend a person’s words and actions, or understand books, texts, tools, and cultural works, the sensuous bearer and spiritual sense are not two externally juxtaposed objects at the same level. Sense is realized through sensuous appearances, and together they form a comprehensive unity of apprehension (Husserl 1989, 248–251). Applied here, personality-related senses, such as warm, reliable, or manipulative, are neither sensory properties of posture, tone, and behavior themselves nor second entities added outside those materials. They are higher-order personality orientations founded on them and organized around the same focal bearer. Husserl does not formulate a theory of initial personality attribution on cited pages. What the present account borrows is

the structure of foundation and unity between sensuous material and higher-order sense.

At this point, the anchoring condition must be distinguished from four interrelated levels within personality attribution. Phenomenological anchoring is not a fifth kind of personality-related content alongside these four levels; it is the precondition that enables cues to be understood as concerning the same bearer. First are personality cues: actions, tones, expressions, timing, rhythms, textual styles, narrative episodes, symbolic materials, interactional patterns, and relational consequences. Second are initial personality impressions: construals, such as warm, dangerous, or reliable, that arise when these cues are rapidly organized through the joint operation of the target's current configuration, the subject's sedimented experience, and the subject's momentary state. They are higher-order, because their content has already moved beyond recognition of a current state and formed a cross-situational, anticipatory personality orientation concerning the same bearer; explicit higher-order reflection is not required. Third is the relatively stable personality model: a structure formed as impressions are sedimented, coordinated, and exposed to counterevidence across repeated experience, and that can continuously organize subsequent understanding across situations. The distinction between an initial impression and a stable model is structural rather than a precise temporal threshold. What matters is whether the personality-related content has achieved cross-situational coordination through repeated experience and has begun to organize subsequent expectations with relative stability. Fourth are higher-order personality judgments: reflective acts, in which the subject explicitly incorporates background, counterevidence, history, and consequences in evaluating, revising, or rejecting an existing initial impression or personality model. A personality model is an enduringly operative organizational structure; a higher-order judgment is a reflective act directed toward that structure, an initial impression, and their object. The two frequently influence one another, but are not identical.

II.4. Distinguishing personality-related sense from the sociocultural sense of ordinary objects

Personality-related sense and the sociocultural sense of gifts, uniforms, sacred objects, money, tools, and other cultural objects can all have a structure of foundation: sensuous or material elements enter networks of shared practice, norm, narrative, and symbolism, and thereby acquire a higher-order sense irreducible to their physical properties. The present account, therefore, does not claim that personality experience is distinctive, merely because it involves higher-order sense, nor does it deny that personality experience shares basic forms of sense-formation with cultural understanding more generally.

The main differences concern the bearer, the direction of content, and the mode of correction. The sociocultural sense of an ordinary object typically presents it as having a function, normative status, exchange value, or symbolic role. Initial personality attribution instead organizes current material into a cross-situational tendency concerning the same bearer, apprehended at least as potentially possessing a perspective, motivations, and a center of action. The resulting sense opens expectations about the bearer's future responses, relational position, intentions, values, and ways of assuming responsibility. In actual interpersonal experience, the bearer's second-person responses, self-explications, refusals, boundaries, and unanticipated practical consequences can prompt revision or correction of the attribution. Ordinary cultural objects are likewise constrained by practice and interpretive history, but they do not ordinarily resist the subject's model as autonomous centers of action. Mediated bearers weaken or alter this corrective structure, while remaining person-like foci of personality expectation. Personality-related sense is, therefore, distinctive, not because it alone is higher-order, but because it forms a cross-situational and relational structure of anticipation around a potentially subjective bearer and, in the central interpersonal case, remains corrigible from the bearer's side.

II.5. Why more information does not eliminate construction

The constructed character of personality is not an accidental error that occurs only when information is scarce; it belongs to the very structure of how personality is experienced and understood. Construction here is first a phenomenological claim about how personality appears and is apprehended. It does not deny that relatively stable patterns of action, affect, and relation may exist on the side of the object. A personality model may fit these tendencies better or worse, but it cannot convert them into sensory properties laid bare in immediate presence. More information can make a judgment more robust, but it cannot transform personality from a model-mediated apprehension into an entity directly displayed on the surface. Even after prolonged observation of another's manner of speaking, emotional patterns, tendencies of choice, and relational trajectory, what we possess is a more refined personality model with a better fit—not unmediated access to personality itself.

170 This structure can be clarified initially through Husserl's distinction between the immanence and transcendence of the experienced object. According to *Hua XIV*, what is experienced is the object itself, not an unknown entity inferred from a mental image; yet every current experience gives the object only one-sidedly and leaves open further possible experiences of the same object (Husserl 1973, 349–350). Thus, to say that an actual person always exceeds the model means neither that the person as subject is hidden beyond all experience nor that personality lies directly exposed on the surface. It means that current material genuinely gives the bearer without exhausting the bearer's cross-situational personality possibilities. Section VI will further distinguish current interactional sense, personality orientation, and its horizon of future expectation on this basis.

III. The genetic structure of initial personality attribution

III.1. Why it is not an arbitrary projection

If personality is not directly given as a perceptual object, does that make personality understanding arbitrary? No. Personality-related sense is constructed rather than directly given, but it is not an ungrounded fantasy. Three constraints secure its non-arbitrariness. First, attribution depends on available phenomenal materials—bodies, actions, tones, textual traces, modes of response, and relational consequences. The relation between those materials and an actual object may be misrecognized, and the materials may even be wrongly assigned to a bearer that does not exist, but the attribution is not generated from nothing. Second, in the privileged case of interpersonal encounter, subjects share broadly similar bodily structures, sensory channels, affective capacities, and forms of action. Similar bodies do not automatically produce identical sense, but subjects often inhabit partially overlapping phenomenological worlds, allowing another's cues to connect more readily with sedimented bodily and social networks of sense. Third, subsequent interaction, counterinstances, situational change, and long-term history can correct distorted construals and can even revise or dissolve the original focal bearer. Construction is, therefore, fallible, but neither unsupported nor free-floating.

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Consider a simple example: one person receives an embrace from another. The recipient may understand the gesture as warm, not because the physical movement itself contains warmth, and not because the recipient merely projects a private inner experience onto the other. Approach, encirclement, pressure, temperature, rhythm, acceptance, soothing, intimacy, and trust may have been repeatedly sedimented together in prior experience and become reactivated in the present interaction. A third-party observer has access only to part of the visible material, whereas the recipient also has tactile access to pressure, temperature, and bodily coordination. Neither position automatically displays a warm personality; both can nevertheless trigger warmth as personality-related sense on the basis of the materials available from their respective standpoints.

The same process is not confined to embraces. Keeping a promise, appearing at a critical moment, maintaining a steady rhythm under pressure, accepting responsibility after an error, refraining from emotional coercion, shifting blame, approaching another only when advantageous, or probing another's vulnerabilities can rapidly elicit construals, such as reliable, responsible, steady, instrumental, manipulative, or untrustworthy. What is currently experienced consists of concrete actions, their timing, rhythms, interactional consequences, and related materials. Personality-related sense is the result of their rapid organization within the subject's experiential nexus.

III.2. Sedimentation, affection, and passive-associative activation

172 In the core embodied case, facial expressions, postures, gestures, tones of voice, and actions can appear publicly within a shared situation. In more general cases, writing, narrative, symbols, and interactional responses can also enter the subject's field of appearance. These materials sustain a focus on the same bearer, while also functioning as cues concerning that focus and triggering sedimented connections of sense. Initial personality attribution usually occurs before reflection becomes dominant and does not require explicit, deliberative, or systematic reasoning as a necessary condition. Spaulding (2015), however, cautions that pre-reflective, automatic, or unconscious processing does not by itself establish that a process is wholly non-inferential in every broad cognitive sense. The present paper, therefore, does not use the explicit/non-explicit distinction to decide directly whether a process counts as inference. At the phenomenological level, it distinguishes the initial formation of a personality orientation, non-explicit reorganization after attribution, and explicit reflective revision, while leaving open how these processes should be classified under competing conceptions of inference. So long as the first impression has not yet coalesced into a provisionally maintainable orientation, reasoning or other processing already under way may still participate in the same attribution. Once the orientation has provisionally coalesced, newly organized materials and changes in judgment enter the phase of post-attribution revision.

Sedimentation does not mean that past experiences are stored in the subject as unaltered replicas. Husserl's analysis of persistent position-takings

shows that a belief, judgment, decision, love, or aversion that has passed is no longer present as the same actual lived experience, yet can remain as a lasting acquisition of the subject and later be taken up again, modified, or cancelled (Husserl 1989, 118–121). More precisely, so long as no new motivation calls for change, the earlier position-taking remains effective as a persistent acquisition; when new motivations arise, it can be partially revised, wholly abandoned, or re-established. This structure supplies general support for the present account of post-attribution revision. How an actual other can compel the subject to update a personality model through autonomous action, response, boundaries, and practical consequences is grounded more specifically in the open structure of verification described in *Hua XIV* (Husserl 1973, 349–350) and the analysis of intermonadic influence (367–369). Applied to social experience, the general structure of persistence means that bodily, relational, and personality-related connections formed in the past can become operative again in encounters with a new bearer without being explicitly recollected on each occasion.

Current materials do not enter attribution as inputs of equal weight. Husserl's analysis of affection shows that different materials compete for prominence through contrast, interrelation, and differences in affective force. Some cues can become prominent, before the subject turns toward them attentively or judges them explicitly, while others remain in the background or are drowned out by stronger cues (Husserl 2001, 196–198). At this most elementary genetic level, however, Husserl provisionally brackets knowledge, interests, and values that the subject has already acquired in worldly life. Pages 196–198, therefore, directly support an account of how current material enters a competition for prominence, but they cannot by themselves establish how historical experience alters the weighting of cues. That further question requires the analyses of persistent position-takings, affective awakening, and reproductive association (Husserl 1989, 118–121; 2001, 221–226). Once a current cue becomes prominent within this competition, it can allow contents that have receded into latency to regain a degree of prominence and to connect with current material through similarity, continuity, fusion, or contrast (Husserl 2001, 221–226). In this way, past patterns are not merely awakened again; they can also prefigure components not yet adequately appearing and the bearer's possible subsequent

behavior, thereby forming a structure of expectation directed toward what has not yet been given (235–238).

The present paper applies these general genetic structures to personality experience and calls the resulting triggering structure the passive-associative activation of sedimented sense. Current cues acquire different degrees of prominence and weight; sedimented connections become operative again; and the cues are connected and completed around a focal bearer, so that an initial personality-oriented construal can form, without requiring explicit, deliberative, or systematic reasoning as a precondition. What is borrowed from Husserl are general genetic resources concerning lasting acquisitions, affection, association, and expectation. Their reconstruction as a fivefold genetic structure of personality attribution is a domain-specific analysis undertaken here within the personalistic attitude. It is neither a ready-made Husserlian theory of personality nor an empirical hypothesis about neural or computational mechanisms.

174 This passive-associative activation has a fivefold structure. First, repeated connections among bodily cues, affective tones, social situations, narrative patterns, and relational outcomes become sedimented through past experience. Second, current phenomena are unified in experience as cues concerning a focal bearer. Third, current cues can make sedimented connections operative again without deliberate inference. Fourth, the target's current configuration, the subject's sedimented experience, and the subject's momentary state jointly affect, which cues first become prominent, how much weight they acquire, and how connections and completions are made where the material is incomplete. Fifth, the jointly organized material coalesces into an affectively charged and directional tendency toward the focal bearer, yielding anticipatory personality impressions, such as warm, threatening, reliable, sincere, or manipulative. The point is not that a first impression is fixed or infallible. It is that sedimented experience can give cues a preliminary direction, before reflection becomes dominant, while the target's current configuration, the subject's momentary state, and reasoning or other processing already under way within the same initial situation can concurrently strengthen, weaken, or differentiate that direction.

III.3. The structural boundaries of initial personality attribution

To prevent the concept from collapsing into a broad synonym for first impression, I propose four structural conditions and one typical genetic feature of initial personality attribution. First, a focal bearer, to which personality-related sense can belong, has formed within the subject's field of appearance, whether or not a corresponding actual object has been verified. Second, the attribution is triggered by available cues, such as action, tone, expression, timing, response pattern, textual style, narrative behavior, symbolic presentation, or interactional feedback. Merely knowing that there is such a bearer opens an anchoring position, but does not yet yield a determinate personality impression. Third, the result is a personality-oriented construal, not merely the identification of an action or a current state. Fourth, the construal is in principle open to later interaction, counterevidence, historical corroboration, narrative recontextualization, symbolic reinterpretation, and confirmation or dissolution of the anchor itself. In addition, its typical mode of genesis is to acquire a personality orientation, before reflection becomes dominant. This is a typical genetic feature, not the absolute exclusion of every form of inference or other processing.

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The first four conditions define the structural boundary of initial personality attribution. If anchoring, dependence on cues, personality orientation, or structural openness is absent, the phenomenon is no longer initial personality attribution in the sense defined here. Openness to revision is not a psychological requirement concerning the subject's actual attitude: a subject may stubbornly refuse counterevidence, but the personality-oriented construal remains in principle capable of verification, recontextualization, or cancellation through subsequent appearances. There is no precise clock-time boundary between initial attribution and post-attribution revision; the distinction is functional. While a personality orientation lacks sufficient internal unity to constitute a provisionally maintainable construal, new cues continue to participate in the same initial attribution. Once the orientation has provisionally coalesced and the subject begins to interpret subsequent materials through it, later changes belong to post-attribution revision.

III.4. *The concrete subject, historicity, and momentary state*

The role of the understanding subject must, therefore, be specified more carefully. Initial personality attribution should not be conceived as a simple analogy, in which a ready-made, ahistorical ego first possesses complete private content and then projects it onto a wholly external other. The attributing subject is itself a concrete subject formed through bodily orientation, being affected, memory, habituality, social relations, and repeated revision. Nor is the other an external item added only after this subject has been completed; the other is always an important pole, through which the subject's experience is articulated, stabilized, and revised. The account, therefore, need not understand the primal monad (*Urmonade*) as an already completed self that is subsequently determined through contrast with another subject. The weaker and more precise claim required here is that personality attribution occurs within the experiential nexus of a subject that is historically formed, affected by the world and others, and continually changing.

176 *Hua XIV* provides only a methodological warning at this point: transcendental subjectivity and the experienced world should not first be conceived as complete, mutually external entities and then connected by a causal relation internal to the world. Analogously, the attributing subject should not be posited as an already completed inner entity, to which the world and the other are subsequently attached as external additions (Husserl 1973, 348).

Hua XIV further indicates that the concrete subject includes endowments, capacities, previous experiences, motivational connections, a stream of experience, and multiple habitualities; the appearance, evaluation, and verification of objects are realized within this continually developing experiential nexus (Husserl 1973, 16–18, 367–368). The present account neither identifies initial personality attribution with what Husserl calls a free act nor reduces the object to a mental image internal to the subject. The relevant conclusion is that cues acquire prominence, weight, and association within the nexus of a historically formed subject that is affected and continues to change. As new experience becomes sedimented, existing habitualities are reorganized, and motivational connections change, the subject also changes.

Accordingly, when the same person attributes personality at different times, the experiences called upon, the structure of prominence, and the threshold for revision may differ. In relation to this general account of subjectivity Husserl (1989, 118–121) explains more specifically how a position-taking that has once been instituted can remain a lasting acquisition of the subject when it is no longer actually being lived through.

Past experience should, therefore, not be understood as a static stock of images mechanically copied onto others, but as an open structure that is continuously sedimented, differentiated, and reorganized over time. It allows current cues to acquire a preliminary direction without explicit, deliberative, or systematic reasoning, while remaining constrained by the phenomenal materials provided by the bearer and by the bearer's form of life. In addition to long-term sedimentation, the subject's current emotion, bodily condition, distribution of attention, and concrete environment modulate, which experiences are awakened and which cues receive priority. An embrace ordinarily understood as intimate, for example, may in anger, defensiveness, or heightened vigilance first trigger orientations of insincerity, intrusion, or manipulation. Different experiential histories and momentary states, therefore, jointly produce different structures of prominence, thresholds of connection, and thresholds of revision.

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III.5. The relation to Husserlian empathy

Initial personality attribution and Husserlian empathy occupy different explanatory levels. The experience of the alter ego analyzed in *Hua XIV* shows that the other's ego is not a hidden hypothesis inferred from a neutral body. Through bodily expression and empathy, the other is experienced in a non-original manner that remains open to further verification (Husserl 1973, 350–352; see also Zahavi 2011; van Mazijk 2025). Husserlian empathy primarily explains how another subject, or a state belonging to that subject, is given to me as the other's. Initial personality attribution asks a further question: once the other has been given with this minimal alterity, or while focal anchoring is taking shape, how are current expressive, behavioral, and interactional materials organized into a cross-situational personality orientation concerning

the same bearer? Initial personality attribution is, therefore, not identical with empathy and does not presuppose a complete grasp of the other's particular feeling. In the core embodied case, it is grounded in the other-givenness clarified by empathy, but it performs a different explanatory task. Its product is not the givenness of a transient state, but an anticipatory personality synthesis directed toward the same bearer.

IV. From expressive material to personality orientation

178 The literature on expression is crucial, because it shows that gestures, tones, movements, and actions are not neutral physical events, to which sense is added only afterward. In the core case of embodied interpersonal experience, pain, fear, anger, hesitation, and related states can appear with relative directness through facial expression, posture, and situated action as states belonging to the other (Husserl 1989, 248–251; Merleau-Ponty 2012; Scheler 1954; Zahavi 2011). Appearance here does not mean that the relevant movement must be an intentional and explicit declaration by the agent. It means that the movement enters the shared situation as publicly available expressive material. The present account accepts this point, while locating its own contribution at a further level. Expressive sense is not yet personality-related sense. A hesitant movement, a cold tone, a warm gesture, or an angry expression may already be meaningful, yet still fall short of a construal of what kind of person the focal bearer is. Initial personality attribution names the transition, through which these materials, once organized around a sustained focus and connected with sedimented experience, yield a directional construal of the bearer as a certain kind of person.

To say that the materials are organized by sedimented experience does not imply that current material is a neutral stimulus merely awaiting arbitrary imposition of sense by the subject's history. The temporal unfolding of action and the integral relations among expression, voice, posture, direction of action, and concrete situation can constitute temporally extended, cross-modal information available from the target. Drawing on a Gestalt account of emotion and a Gibsonian information framework, Meyer and Baggs (2025, 41–44) argue that a positive research program for direct social perception

should identify the informational structures available in the environment rather than merely oppose inferentialism. The present account does not infer from this that personality traits themselves are directly perceived. Its more limited conclusion is that these current configurations are not passive materials: together with the subject's sedimented experience and momentary state, they participate in the selection, weighting, and connection of cues, and thereby constrain the completion by the subject prompted by sparse material.

The football-diving case discussed by Meyer and Baggs illustrates this constraint from the side of the target. Observers can distinguish a genuine collision from a simulated fall by tracking such information as the temporal continuity between contact and falling, whether the fall preserves the dynamical continuity generated by the collision, and whether the point of contact is consistent with the ensuing bodily response. What is discriminated is not a discrete intention hidden behind and detached from the action, but information specifying intention in the temporal unfolding and overall configuration of the movement. Similarly, occurrent emotions, such as anger or joy, may be expressed through temporally extended and cross-modal patterns involving facial expression, bodily posture, vocal modulation, and situational relations. These cases support, at most, the discriminability from information supplied by the target of occurrent intentions or emotional states. They do not directly establish cross-situational traits, such as "this person is dishonest," "this person is irascible," or "this person is manipulative." That further step remains subject to the level restriction marked by Spaulding. It requires the operation called initial personality attribution here: the interaction of a current configuration with the subject's sedimented experience and momentary state, through which an anticipatory personality orientation concerning the same bearer is formed (Meyer and Baggs 2025, 41–43; Spaulding 2015).

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IV.1. How current interactional sense becomes a personality orientation

In this process, approach, lingering, embrace, rhythm, warmth, pressure, encirclement, and coordination can first make the present interaction appear warm. Only when these materials are connected, around the same focal bearer, with the subject's prior embodied and relational experience does the subject

form the further, cross-situational construal “this person is warm.” The first apprehension concerns how the present interaction appears. The second organizes the current material into a personality orientation concerning what kind of person the bearer is.

The same transition occurs in non-tactile and mediated cases. Acts, such as keeping promises, responding promptly, maintaining a steady rhythm under pressure, acknowledging error, or repeatedly crossing boundaries, may become the basis of an anticipatory personality orientation. The same is true of a written style, a narrative role, a symbolic image, a religious description, or the response pattern of an artificial-intelligence system. In each case, currently available material can acquire personality-related significance, once it is organized around a person-like focus. The fewer the cues, the greater the relative role ordinarily played by the subject’s existing history and expectations in connecting and completing them.

IV.2. Why the same action can elicit different personality judgments

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The same embrace can trigger different personality construals in different subjects. If one subject’s sedimented experience repeatedly connects embracing with safety, acceptance, and sincerity, the action is more likely first to be understood as a warm expression and to elicit an impression of warmth or trustworthiness. If another subject’s history connects intimate behavior with deception, intrusion, or control, the same embrace may first be understood as strategic or deceptive and then elicit impressions, such as insincere, untrustworthy, or manipulative. Likewise, “let me help you” may trigger reliability within one experiential structure and surveillance or control within another. An action does not carry one unique personality-related sense in itself. Its determinate sense arises through the interplay of action, context, memory, expectation, and the subject’s present condition. The structure that makes rapid understanding possible thereby also makes misunderstanding possible.

The subject’s experience is not a static memory store. It participates in four operations: it affects, which cues first enter prominence, assigns different weights to different cues, connects current cues with previous relational

outcomes, and completes a more integral personality orientation where the material is insufficient. It also shapes the threshold of revision—the amount of incompatible information the subject must accumulate, before abandoning the original personality construal. Long-term sedimentation is not the only variable. Emotion, bodily condition, attentional state, and the current environment situationally modulate sedimented networks. The same embrace can activate safety and acceptance in a calm state, yet first activate insincerity, intrusion, or control in a state of anger, shame, defensiveness, or heightened vigilance. It is, therefore, more accurate to say not that the subject's experience determines or controls every attribution, but that sedimented experience, the subject's momentary state, and currently available information from the target jointly constitute the attribution. The more limited and ambiguous the cues, the greater the relative role ordinarily played by the subject's selection and completion in the genesis of sense.

The target's current configuration and the subject's sedimented experience are not simply added together after attribution has concluded; they can modulate one another within the same initial attribution. Suppose the other says, "I like embracing you; you are warm," while continually withdrawing bodily during the embrace. The verbal content and bodily movement constitute inconsistent cues from the target. Because of its temporal unfolding, postural alteration, and contrast with the utterance, the bodily withdrawal may become more prominent than the competing cues, before the subject actively reflects on it (Husserl 2001, 196–198). On Meyer and Baggs's account of environmentally available information (2025, 41–44), the withdrawal is likewise not an isolated physical movement, but part of a temporally extended configuration of movement, posture, voice, and situation.

If the subject's prior experience has repeatedly connected withdrawal following intimacy with deception, insincerity, or control, the corresponding sedimented content may be preferentially awakened by the bodily withdrawal and participate in reweighting the current utterance and movement (Husserl 2001, 221–226). Historical experience does not unilaterally overwhelm present material, nor does the current movement naturally carry one fixed sense. More precisely, the target's current configuration affects, which current cues first become prominent and awaken the corresponding sedimented connections;

those awakened historical connections then affect, in turn, how the subject selects, connects, and understands the current cues.

A more complex case arises from the sedimentation of early intimate relationships. In long-term relations with parents or other caregivers, what becomes sedimented may be not merely visual memories of particular persons, but integral connections among modes of expression, interactional rhythms, personality construals, and relational consequences. Suppose a caregiver seldom expresses emotion directly, yet offers support through an even tone, restrained posture, and reliable presence at critical moments. Repeated experiences of this kind may sediment an affectively weighted connection among low-intensity expression, stable response, and safety and reliability. When the subject later meets someone with a similar tone, rhythm of movement, and mode of response, those current cues may awaken the earlier connection even if the subject does not explicitly think that this person resembles their parent. The other may consequently appear initially as reliable, reassuring, or safe to approach. By contrast, if a similar restrained expression was connected in another subject's relational history with coldness, neglect, or control, it may trigger a tendency toward distance, distrust, or vigilance.

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This initial personality construal, together with its familiarity and affective weight, may subsequently influence the subject's willingness to approach a potential partner. This is neither identical with the eventual choice of a partner nor evidence that the subject must prefer someone resembling a parent. The point is not to assert a universal and mechanical parental-similarity law, but to show how early relational experience can operate as an affectively weighted sedimented structure that participates in selecting, weighting, and completing current personality cues.

At the level of genetic structure, this cross-object operation can be clarified through two groups of Husserlian analyses. Evaluations and relational position-takings formed in the past can persist as lasting acquisitions of the subject (Husserl 1989, 118–121), while current similar cues can awaken contents that have receded into latency without explicit recollection and allow them to participate in new connections and unifications (Husserl 2001, 221–226). The way early relational sedimentation participates across objects in the attribution of personality to a potential partner is, however, the present paper's domain-

specific application of these general structures to the social-personality domain, not a conclusion Husserl directly formulates on the cited pages.

Information from the target can constrain an attribution, while it is still forming, and this must be distinguished from revision after the attribution has been completed. Initial personality attribution is not an instantaneous, temporally point-like event. During the brief process, in which the focus is already anchored but the personality orientation has not yet coalesced into a provisionally maintainable construal, newly appearing expressions, tones, rhythms of movement, and situational relations can redistribute the weight of cues. They may strengthen, weaken, or differentiate the sedimented connections already awakened. New material at this stage still participates in the same initial attribution and should not be described as an after-the-fact revision of an established impression. Only once a personality orientation has achieved a provisionally maintainable internal unity, such that the subject begins to understand subsequent materials through it, do changes brought about by later interaction, behavioral history, or practical consequences count as the post-attribution revision discussed in Section V.

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A case of stereotypical attribution makes the process more concrete. Suppose the subject knows Jack well: Jack is relatively introverted and often wears gray. The subject also knows Mike: Mike, too, is relatively introverted and often reads while leaning beside a window. These co-occurrences need not be organized by the subject into an explicit rule that people who wear gray or read beside windows are introverted, but they may become sedimented as connections capable of later reactivation. The subject subsequently sees a stranger in a library wearing gray and reading beside a window. The current clothing, posture, and activity are first unified as cues concerning that person. They then awaken experiential connections involving Jack and Mike and converge upon an introverted personality orientation. The subject may, therefore, initially construe the stranger as introverted without deliberate inference.

This case displays the moments of passive-associative activation one by one. Earlier experience of Jack and Mike sediments the connections gray clothing–introverted and reading beside a window–introverted. The current clothing, posture, and activity are unified as cues concerning that stranger, thereby

forming a focal anchor. Similar cues then awaken experiential connections that have receded into latency, which converge and are completed in the direction of introversion. Finally, the subject forms an anticipatory personality construal, without performing an explicit syllogism. Jack and Mike are not explicitly retrieved as premises in an inference. The case is better described as one, in which current similar cues restore efficacy and prominence to previous connections and generate associative convergence (Husserl 2001, 221–226). This, thus, applies Husserl's general structures of affective awakening and reproductive association, in a domain-specific manner, to stereotypical completion across persons.

184 Suppose the subject continues observing and the stranger then initiates conversations with several people with whom he has not previously spoken. He repeatedly introduces topics in an animated tone and displays marked social initiative. This currently available information still does not establish that he is extroverted. But, while the first impression has not yet coalesced into a provisionally maintainable orientation, it will reduce both the weight and the credibility of the stereotype-based construal of introversion. What occurs here is not a counterevidential revision after an attribution has been completed, but a concurrent constraint imposed by actual cues on the same initial attribution. By contrast, if the orientation of introversion has already provisionally coalesced and the subject has begun to interpret subsequent materials through it, counterevidence accumulated across repeated encounters counts as post-attribution revision.

The example shows that incomplete current appearance does not prevent personality attribution. On the contrary, the sparser the cues, the greater the relative role often played by the subject's existing experience in selection, weighting, and completion. If, after the initial impression has formed, repeated encounters reveal that the stranger consistently displays extroverted tendencies across different situations, the original introversion construal is revised, while the bearer can still be maintained as the same person. This is a post-attribution correction of personality-related content, not the necessary cancellation of the object anchor. In terms of the Husserlian structures already discussed, the concrete subject's experience participates in current orientation, the same object always exceeds its current appearance, and an actual other can

supply corrective material through autonomous action (Husserl 1973, 16–18, 349–350, 367–369).

The case also shows that a considerable distance may separate an initial personality impression from the relatively stable tendencies later displayed by the bearer, especially when the subject has had little contact with the bearer, cues are sparse, or independent counterevidence is unavailable. The attribution based on gray clothing and reading beside a window is constrained by current material, yet clearly includes stereotypical completion derived from previous experience. An actual other ordinarily has a stronger corrective capacity: the other acts continuously across situations, may do things that violate the subject's expectations, and can resist one-sided completion through practical consequences. Similarly, if the earlier embrace is recontextualized by continuing to uphold honesty, respect for boundaries, and acceptance of responsibility, the original construal of deception can be revised. Updating an impression after acquiring more information is precisely a process, in which the bearer exerts corrective pressure on the initial attribution through new materials, especially materials incompatible with the existing model.

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IV.3. Empirical research as a secondary constraint

The preceding cases primarily perform conceptual and phenomenological work, but empirical research can impose secondary constraints on their triggering conditions and subsequent effects. Asch's studies of impression formation, thin-slice research, and the warmth–competence model all indicate that subjects rapidly form integrated personality judgments from few cues and that dimensions, such as warmth, have a strong priority in social evaluation (Asch 1946; Ambady and Rosenthal 1992; Fiske *et al.* 2007). Lin *et al.* (2025) further show that prior trait impressions formed from unfamiliar faces systematically affect subsequent inferences concerning the same person's mental states. Their study does not directly test how a history of personal interaction generates the earliest personality impression, but it supports a neighboring conclusion: current cues are not always processed in isolation, and an established trait construal participates in the selection and interpretation of subsequent cues. These studies confirm the widespread occurrence of rapid

personality-oriented construal, but they cannot by themselves determine whether personality-related sense belongs to primary perception, explicit inference, or the pre-reflective higher-order construal analyzed here.

V. Misrecognition, deception, and revision

V.1. Why deception is an internal possibility

Continuing the example of the embrace, B may initially understand A's embrace as warm, while A's actual intention may be to control, exploit, or harm. B's experience that this is warm does not mean that A's personality has been grasped infallibly in that way; it means only that the relevant cues have successfully triggered B's initial personality impression.

The possibility of deception arises from the very possibility of understanding. A subject must gain access to the other through outward phenomena, but those phenomena can be performed, managed, or disguised. Social actions can express personality and can also conceal it. They make understanding possible and thereby make structural misrecognition possible as well.

This claim is consistent with deception research, which shows that average accuracy in lie detection is only slightly above chance and that judgments depend on weak, mixed, and strategically manipulable cues (Bond and DePaulo 2006). The research does not prove the thesis concerning personality models. It constrains that thesis by showing how dependence on cues introduces the possibility of error into personality understanding.

V.2. Subsequent revision: Recalibrating the initial impression

The initial personality impression generated by this process is not the endpoint of personality understanding or of the formation of a stable personality model. Subsequent interaction, behavioral history, changes of situation, and practical consequences can alter an existing personality orientation through non-explicit reweighting, reconnection, and adjustment of anticipation. The subject may also explicitly compare old and new cues, background, and consequences, reflectively revising or withdrawing the first impression. The present account distinguishes non-explicit reorganization

from explicit reflective revision, but does not on that basis prejudge whether the former is wholly non-inferential in the broad sense of cognitive processing discussed by Spaulding (2015).

The vocabulary of predictive processing can redescribe this revisability, but it should not be mistaken for the primary phenomenological clarification offered here. In those terms, revision can be described as recalibrating an operative personality-directed expectation in light of new cues, background information, and relational history (Clark 2013). McGovern and Otten (2024) show how social priors shape intergroup perception, reinforcing the claim that social understanding is structured by expectation, history, and context. The concern here, however, is the structure of updating itself: how new material regains prominence and weight, how it enters into concordance or conflict with an existing construal, and how the bearer's subsequent behavior changes personality-related content or the structure of the anchor.

Updating, therefore, does not occur automatically whenever a new fact appears. What matters is the prominence and weight that the new material acquires through the joint operation of the target's current configuration, the existing personality model, the subject's sedimented experience, and the subject's momentary state. A further question is whether that weight is sufficient to weaken the cross-situational coherence of the original construal, alter subsequent expectations, or force a reorganization of the anchor structure. Updating can occur at two levels. The first is personality-related content. If new cues remain broadly compatible with the existing pattern, relational history, and situational consequences, the subject normally retains the original construal while adjusting its details. If counterevidence repeatedly acquires substantial weight, the original impression or existing personality model comes into conflict with a competing construal supported by the new material. Successful correction should gradually move the subject toward a construal with a better explanatory and predictive fit, although an actual subject may resist updating because of prior commitments, affective investment, or confirmation bias. The second level is anchor structure. New information may confirm the original focus or reveal that cues previously assigned to one bearer in fact came from several objects, requiring the anchor to be split. Conversely, information previously assigned to distinct foci may be found to concern the same object

and, therefore, require a merger. In cases of emptiness or misrecognition, later material may dissolve the posited actual object altogether.

Updating personality-related content presupposes that the bearer is maintained as one and the same object across different appearances. According to *Hua XIV* (Husserl 1973, 349–350, current apprehension points toward further appearances of the same object, and subsequent experience can continue or disrupt the original concordance. In the case of an actual other, subsequent appearances are not limited to the observer's active collection of more material of the same kind. The other can make decisions contrary to expectation, explain a motivation, reject an assigned relational position, set boundaries, and compel the reorganization of the original model through practical consequences. The analysis of intermonadic influence and I–Thou acts (367–369) shows that the social act of one subject produces a corresponding effect within another subject without merging their streams of experience. The present account develops this structure of relatedness without mutual exhaustion into an account of the actual other's autonomous corrective capacity.

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V.3. Reflective revision can also produce distortion

Reflection does not invariably increase accuracy. A person may in fact be expressing warmth. Yet, if the recipient is influenced by prior expectations, chronic vigilance, or hostile attribution bias, ambiguous benevolence may be persistently interpreted as strategy and intimate action as threat. In such a case, reflection no longer merely corrects an initial impression; it can produce a new higher-order distortion. Research on hostile attribution bias supports this possibility: ambiguous social situations can be systematically interpreted as hostile (Wagels and Hernandez-Pena 2024). The four levels distinguished earlier reappear here. Cues supply the material, initial attribution yields a first impression, repeated interaction sediments a model, and reflection can extend, correct, or overwrite that model.

VI. Current appearance, personality orientation, and the open horizon

VI.1. From current interactional sense to an anticipatory personality orientation

To complete the account, it is first necessary to avoid conceiving personality experience as a Cartesian theater, as though mental images of actions and expressions first appeared within the subject, and an external personality were then inferred from them. Husserl argues that the transcendence of an experienced object does not mean that a fundamentally inaccessible entity lies hidden behind experience. What is given in experience is the object itself, although in any current experience it appears only inadequately and one-sidedly, while retaining an open horizon of further experience of the same object (Husserl 1973, 349–350). Applied to personality experience, this means that the subject actually encounters the other's embrace, pauses, tone of voice, promises, and responses, rather than internal replicas of these phenomena. Yet, these currently given materials never exhaust the other as the same bearer.

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The preceding distinction between current interactional sense and a cross-situational personality orientation must now be supplemented by an account of the latter's anticipatory horizon. "This person is warm" goes beyond "this embrace feels warm." It also opens the prefiguration that the person may continue to respond warmly in the future. The first formulation apprehends the sense of the present interaction. The intermediate layer organizes current material into a cross-situational personality orientation concerning the same bearer. Only the third formulation makes explicit the future expectation opened by that orientation. Initial personality attribution can, therefore, be reduced neither to the recognition of a current state nor entirely to expectation, although an anticipatory horizon is indispensable to it.

Husserl's analysis of expectation shows that previously constituted patterns of similarity, continuity, and coexistence can prefigure components that are not yet currently manifest in accordance with established experiential styles (Husserl 2001, 235–238). Suppose the subject is not yet familiar with the other, but the rhythm, pressure, respect for boundaries, and mode of response in the current embrace resemble interactions previously experienced as safe and

caring. The subject may then understand the embrace as warm and also begin to anticipate caring conduct, stable responsiveness, or respect for boundaries in other situations. The resulting construal of this person as warm is not exhaustive knowledge of the person's personality. It is an open personality orientation that connects what is currently given with possibilities of behavior that have not yet appeared.

Such prefiguration is not an arbitrary completion. It is constrained jointly by the target's current configuration, previously constituted patterns of similarity, and the subject's momentary state, and it remains open to verification or cancellation in subsequent appearances. If the bearer later repeatedly displays indifference, exploitation, or boundary violations, the original expectation is frustrated and revised. *Hua XIV*'s account of the object's open horizon and of the actual other's autonomous response further clarifies why personality expectations are subject to correction in later experience (Husserl 1973, 349–350, 367–369). Current givenness and the transcendent horizon thus constitute not a completed personality in its entirety, but a personality orientation that is experientially operative, while remaining capable of being deepened, recontextualized, or withdrawn. Color provides, at most, a brief analogy of levels, indicating that currently manifest material and higher-order personality construal do not belong to the same level. It does not carry the principal argument of the paper.

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VI.2. Fictional, virtual, and symbolic extensions

Fictional characters, virtual agents, artificial-intelligence systems, religious figures, and other mediated figures do not require an entirely different mechanism of personality attribution. So long as textual, narrative, auditory, visual, or interactional materials can sustain a focus on the same bearer within the subject's field of appearance, actions, values, intentions, styles of response, and relational expectations can gather around it. This shared structure, however, must not erase differences in the modes of givenness of different bearers. An actual embodied other manifests itself through the lived body, action in a shared space, and reciprocal interaction. A real person encountered online is mediately indicated through an account, a name, text, voice, and a history of

interaction. A fictional character is sustained by the narrative continuity of a work. An artificial-intelligence system can form a person-like focus through a style of response, continuity of memory, and interface identity. The occurrence of personality attribution does not prejudge whether these bearers constitute subjects in the same ontological sense.

Online conversation provides an important intermediate case. The other is not currently present through a co-present lived body, and the subject forms a personality impression primarily from writing, voice, temporal rhythm, choices of response, and the previous conversational record. If the subject believes that an actual person stands behind the account, these materials are still understood as expressions of another actual subject rather than as pure fiction. An online relationship may, therefore, accommodate idealization more readily than embodied co-presence, while remaining open to correction through video interaction, offline action, third-party information, identity verification, and the other's sustained and unexpected responses. It differs both from the core case of embodied empathy and from the case of a fictional character.

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A fictional character ordinarily does not correspond to a second monad capable of entering into actual reciprocal interaction with the reader from its own center of experience. This does not mean that the reader may project arbitrarily. The character's diction and actions, the plot, and later revelations in the work constrain interpretation: later chapters can compel the reader to revise an earlier construal of warmth or reliability. What is weakened here is not every form of correction, but correction arising from the autonomous action, bodily boundaries, and shared practical consequences of an actual bearer. The case of artificial intelligence should remain suspended. A system can be anchored in a user's experience as a temporally continuous, person-like focus with a distinctive style of response, but whether it possesses a stream of experience, lived body, or independent first-person center is a separate ontological question.

The same sedimented experience can also participate in attributions concerning fictional characters. Suppose a novel describes Evan as always wearing gray and reading alone beside a window. The reader's previous experience of Jack and Mike may still be activated by these textual cues, leading

Evan initially to appear introverted. If later episodes show him engaging actively with others and expressing himself readily in public, the reader will recalibrate that impression. The difference between an actual and a fictional person is, therefore, not that only the former recruits historical experience, but that the sources and independence of corrective materials differ. An actual other can supply counterevidence from its own center of action that was not arranged by the observer; a fictional character is constrained and the reader's completion revised primarily by the narrative development, language, and later disclosures of the work.

192 The crucial differences among bearers, therefore, concern not only the quantity of material but also its source, manner of selection, independence, and capacity for resistance. An extended narrative or sustained interaction with an artificial-intelligence system may provide extraordinarily rich material, without possessing the same autonomous practical source as an actual other. Conversely, even when a real person encountered online provides only a small amount of text, that person is still understood as an actual subject capable of acting independently in other situations. When materials are sparse, selectively mediated, or lack counterevidence capable of independently resisting the subject's expectations, passive-associative activation depends more heavily on the subject's sedimented expectations, desires, fears, and ideal personality schemata. The resulting impression is not wholly arbitrary, but may contain a greater proportion of completion by the subject.

This can partly explain why some subjects find it easier to like or become attached to a character in a book, a virtual figure, or a focal bearer mediated by artificial intelligence than to an actual person. An actual other resists the subject's idealized model through unpredictable actions, boundaries, refusals, and practical consequences. Where independent corrective material is limited, a mediated bearer can more readily retain a personality image congruent with the subject's existing experience and ideals. This conclusion does not imply that every mediated relationship is more subjective than every actual relationship, that fictional characters lack textual constraint, that real persons encountered online lack subjectivity, or that artificial intelligence necessarily lacks consciousness. It claims only that different modes of givenness provide corrective constraints of different kinds and strengths.

VII. Theoretical positioning: From understanding states to attributing personality

Existing approaches illuminate different stages and resources of social understanding. This section clarifies why none of them, taken alone, eliminates the need for an intermediate account of how currently available material becomes a cross-situational, anticipatory, and revisable personality orientation around the same bearer.

VII.1. How another's state is understood—and why this is not yet personality attribution

Husserlian empathy and direct social perception first rule out an excessively intellectualized point of departure. A subject does not invariably confront a neutral body and then add a hidden mind through a subsequent reflective inference. The analysis in *Hua XIV* distinguishes the experience of the alter ego through bodily expression and empathy from an inference, based on traces, such as a fire, that someone was previously present. Related discussions by Merleau-Ponty, Scheler, Gallagher, and Zahavi likewise show that pain, fear, anger, hesitation, and directions of action can be understood, through facial expression, posture, voice, and situated action, as states belonging to another (Husserl 1973, 350–352; Scheler 1954; Merleau-Ponty 2012; Gallagher 2008; Zahavi 2011). This insight supplies the minimal basis of alterity and expression required by personality attribution, but “the other is now behaving hesitantly” is still not equivalent to “the other is an indecisive person.”

Gallagher's (2008) approach presents with particular clarity the core case, in which the other is encountered through expressive bodily comportment: posture, facial expression, rhythm of movement, tone of voice, and direction of action can already be perceived as expressive, social, and intentional. Initial personality attribution, however, does not require the bearer to have displayed a stable personality, nor does it require mature, active, reciprocal interaction sufficient to reveal personality with any stability. An infant's behavior is driven largely by physiological need, and its personality is not yet available for stable assessment. Yet, relatives experience the infant as a unified and continuously identical person rather than as an aggregate of cries and bodily states. Parents

may notice variations in the intensity and rhythm of crying and in responses to care, and may describe an infant who cries more intensely as “naughty” and a quieter infant as “good” or “easy.”

Such terms are not direct appearances of a stable personality already formed in the infant. They arise more plausibly, when caregivers complete sparse physiological-expressive material through prior language, cultural types, relational experience, and future expectations. Cues from the infant are not absent, but they are too limited to support a stable personality judgment, so completion by the caregiver plays a greater relative role. The case, therefore, distinguishes the occurrence of personality attribution from the question whether the attributed quality already exists stably in the bearer. It shows that relatively sparse expressive material, largely driven by physiological need, can nevertheless trigger personality-related completion within a relation of care.

194 Zahavi (2011) further shows that, in the core embodied case, the other’s pain, fear, anger, hesitation, or affective orientation can be given through bodily expression without being inferred as a hidden inner state. The present extension of anchorability to textual, narrative, symbolic, virtual, and AI-mediated foci does not transfer Zahavi’s argument concerning embodied others directly to nonhuman or fictional objects. What the account retains is a weaker but necessary insight: understanding another’s state need not begin with reflective inference from neutral bodily material. In non-embodied cases, continuity of the bearer is sustained by different materials, including textual continuity, narrative position, interface identity, and interactional history. Their modes of subjective givenness and sources of correction must, therefore, be distinguished from those of an actual embodied other.

Theory-theory and simulation theory add two kinds of resources not exhausted by expressive givenness. Theory-theory holds that a subject may draw on general folk-psychological knowledge concerning beliefs, desires, intentions, and their relations to behavior, placing a current action within a broader explanatory framework (Gopnik and Wellman 1994). Such processing may be rapid and implicit, and cannot, therefore, be excluded merely because initial personality attribution usually precedes explicit reasoning. Simulation theory, by contrast, emphasizes that subjects may employ their own affective, bodily, and practical resources in attempting to reconstruct another’s possible

situation, state, or perspective, and such simulation need not always be explicit or deliberative (Goldman and Jordan 2013). These approaches clarify, respectively, how general psychological knowledge and first-person resources can participate in social understanding. They do not, by themselves, explain how a bearer is phenomenologically anchored, why previous experience gives current cues for this determinate personality orientation, or why that orientation appears as an anticipatory sense directed toward the future. Approximating another's state or perspective through simulation is likewise not yet the organization of the same bearer as reliable, dangerous, warm, or manipulative.

VII.2. Why an intermediate layer is needed between a current state and a personality orientation

Meyer and Baggs (2025, 41–44) provide a more specific account of the information available from the target in this process. They emphasize that social perception can depend on the temporal unfolding of action and on higher-order configurations among expression, posture, voice, direction of action, and situation. Research should not merely oppose inferentialism; it should identify the informational structures actually available in the environment. For the present argument, this contribution does not imply that personality traits, such as warmth, reliability, or extraversion, have themselves become contents of direct perception. It shows instead that current materials are not passive matter awaiting arbitrary sense-bestowal by the subject. Their temporal, cross-modal, and configurational relations can strengthen, weaken, or differentiate personality orientations awakened by sedimented experience.

Spaulding (2015) further marks the boundary between a current state and a stable personality. Differences in subjects' experiences of the same stimulus do not establish that a higher-order property has entered sensory perceptual content; they may instead result from the modulation of attention, expectation, and prominence by background experience. Spaulding argues that occurrent emotions and motor intentions are comparatively plausible candidates for basic perceptual beliefs, whereas dispositional emotions, temperaments, and personality traits require cross-situational, diachronic, and counterfactual information, and cannot be directly perceived in the same manner. Thus, "the

other is angry now” or “the other is withdrawing” is not naturally continuous, as one and the same content, with “the other is dangerous” or “the other is untrustworthy.” Spaulding does not provide a theory of initial personality attribution. Her role is to show that, even where a current expressive state is apprehensible, it is not sufficient by itself to generate a cross-situational personality orientation concerning the same bearer.

Meyer and Baggs as well as Spaulding thus establish, respectively, the lower and upper limits of the intermediate layer. Current materials are not neutral inputs awaiting arbitrary sense-bestowal. Yet, their expressive and configurational character does not amount to the givenness of stable personality traits. The independent task of initial personality attribution is to analyze how, once a focus has formed or is forming, information from the target interacts with sedimented experience, the subject’s momentary state, and any reasoning operative during the formation of the first impression. Through this interaction, the bearer begins to appear as a certain kind of person.

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VII.3. The explanatory division of labor between mental files and initial personality attribution

Within its domain of application, mental-file theory can provide one account of the object-directed layer required by initial personality attribution. A file can be opened at a very low threshold and can maintain clothing, posture, action, text, and interactional information as concerning the same bearer. A minimal object file, phenomenological anchoring, and an initial personality orientation may, therefore, arise almost simultaneously (Recanati 2011, 5–9, 12–16; 2012). The two accounts can concern the same object and the same information, while addressing different explanatory tasks. Mental-file theory treats singular reference, object tracking, information aggregation, as well as the linking, splitting, and updating of files.

Initial personality attribution explains how, as an object-directed position opens or has opened, heterogeneous cues acquire a personality orientation, affective weight, and a horizon of future anticipation within the concrete subject’s historical experience and momentary state. It does not modify the file architecture of singular reference and object tracking. Rather, it supplements mental-file theory at the level of genetic phenomenology by addressing the

genesis of personality-related content, a dimension that the theory does not ordinarily take as its primary explanandum. Husserl's analyses of the concrete subject, the unity of expression, the open horizon, and the actual other's response provide resources for this genetic account, without replacing the technical explanation furnished by mental-file theory (Husserl 1973, 16–18, 349–350, 367–369; 1989, 248–251).

VIII. Objections and boundary clarifications

VIII.1. Does construction amount to fiction?

The first objection is that if personality is not directly given in perception, it may not exist. This objection conflates not being a direct object with nonexistence. Personality is not fabricated *ex nihilo*; it is grounded in relatively stable patterns of behavior, enduring styles, affective tendencies, tendencies of decision, and relational histories. What the present account rejects is only the idea that personality is immediately present as a sensory object. It does not deny the reality of personality. Rather, it argues that personality becomes experientially intelligible through a higher-order process of personality-oriented sense-making.

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VIII.2. Does strong agreement amount to direct visibility?

A second objection holds that if many people converge in their judgments of someone, personality must be objectively visible. Yet, broad agreement should not be confused with direct perceptual visibility. Similar patterns of behavior constrain the range of plausible interpretations, and can, therefore, produce convergent impressions. Agreement shows only that different subjects, relying on similar cues and similar embodied structures, have formed substantially overlapping personality models. It indicates a comparatively good fit among those models, not the disappearance of interpretation, organization, and categorization.

VIII.3. Does greater reflective capacity bring us closer to the person's actual personality?

A third objection claims that if personality is model-mediated, a more reflective subject must necessarily come closer to the person's actual personality. Reflective analysis can improve calibration, but it cannot transform interpretive apprehension into direct perception. It may resist a crude initial construal, but it may also introduce distortion through overanalysis. To be closer, therefore, means only that a judgment achieves a better fit with long-term patterns of behavior, relational history, and situated modes of response. It does not mean that the subject has bypassed all interpretive mediation and reached personality itself.

VIII.4. Does attribution still occur when no actual object exists?

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A fourth objection asks whether, if the actual object, toward which an attribution is directed, does not exist, the alleged personality attribution is merely an objectless fantasy and, therefore, no attribution at all. The act of attribution, its content, and actual reference must be distinguished. A subject can genuinely perform a personality attribution and form relatively determinate content—for example, construing a person as dangerous or reliable—, although the attribution lacks a corresponding actual referent or mistakenly concerns another object. Phenomenological analysis establishes how a focal bearer forms within the subject's field of appearance and how personality-related sense is organized around it; it does not guarantee that the focus corresponds ontologically to an actual personal subject. Subsequent investigation may dissolve the anchor, but cannot make the preceding event of attribution to never have occurred. Nor does this claim imply that a nonexistent object really has a personality. It means only that the conditions, under which personality attribution occurs, differ from the conditions, under which its object actually exists.

VIII.5. *Self-anchoring and the boundary case of de se attribution*

Although the paper centers on experience of others, minimal self-reference must still be distinguished from self-directed personality attribution. To be the subject of an experience is not yet to judge oneself cowardly, reliable, warm, or dangerous. Reflexive personality attribution arises only, when the subject reflectively takes itself as a bearer of personality and applies the relevant evaluative schema to itself. Such attribution is mediated by memory, reflection, first-person givenness, and feedback from others, but it cannot be reduced to object-reference directed toward another. Analyses by Perry, Lewis, and Castañeda of *de se* attitudes and quasi-indicators help mark the specificity of such self-ascription (Castañeda 1966, 1967; Perry 1979; Lewis 1979).

The framework also accommodates a boundary case, in which the subject attributes personality to a focal bearer that is in fact the subject itself, while phenomenologically anchoring that bearer as another. A subject may watch a video or read a description and judge that person to be cold, without realizing that the person is the subject itself. The attribution is then *de re* about the subject, but not *de se*: the ontological identity remains unchanged, while the mode of anchoring and the self-knowledge recruited by the attribution differ. The case further shows that initial personality attribution is governed not only by who the bearer is in fact, but also by how that bearer is anchored in experience.

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IX. Conclusion

The paper has argued that personality is not given as a primary perceptual object, although others often appear immediately as warm, reliable, manipulative, or dangerous. Initial personality attribution names the pre-reflective, yet higher-order process, through which a small number of cues becomes a cross-situational and anticipatory construal of a focal bearer. Phenomenological anchoring is structurally necessary, but it need not be completed as a separate prior stage. This framework distinguishes the process of attribution, its initial impression, the relatively stable model formed across repeated experience, and later higher-order judgments.

Such an impression is neither the mechanical output of cues supplied by the target nor an arbitrary projection of the subject's experience. The target's current configuration, the subject's sedimented experience and momentary state, and any reasoning operative before the impression has provisionally coalesced jointly shape the result. Spaulding marks the gap between occurrent states and cross-situational traits, while mental-file theory explains how information is maintained as concerning the same bearer. The present account supplements these resources at the level of genetic phenomenology by explaining how personality-related content acquires its direction, affective weight, and horizon of anticipation. It also differs from ordinary sociocultural sense-formation, because it organizes relational expectations around a bearer that may possess its own perspective and center of action.

200 This intermediate layer clarifies both the fallibility and the corrigibility of personality understanding. An actual other can resist the subject's model through autonomous action, response, refusal, boundaries, and practical consequences; mediated bearers differ in the independence and strength of the corrective materials they provide. The occurrence of personality attribution, including attribution directed toward artificial intelligence, does not by itself settle the bearer's ontological status. Initial personality attribution, therefore, explains how another can begin to appear as a certain kind of person, before a stable model has formed and before the other is adequately known. It fills the explanatory gap between expressive, behavioral, narrative, or interactional materials and the construal of what kind of person the bearer is.

AI use statement

The author used generative AI tools during the preparation of this manuscript for language refinement, translation support, and stylistic revision. All substantive arguments, conceptual distinctions, interpretations, and final editorial decisions are solely those of the author, who takes full responsibility for the content of the manuscript.

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