Semantic Alienation and the Formation of Class Consciousness Preface to the Deposit Edition (March 2026)

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Abstract

A Semantic Economy working paper, originally published on *Mind Control Poems* on 29 December 2025 and republished with a March 2026 deposit-edition preface. It extends Marx's fourfold structure of alienation from industrial labor to meaning-making: alienation from the semantic product, the process of producing meaning, human meaning-making capacity, and other meaning-makers.

The paper argues that platform-mediated exhaustion, compulsive repetition, standardized expression, and connection without solidarity are structural class conditions rather than merely personal failures. It calls for semantic class consciousness, collective ownership of the means of meaning production, and counter-infrastructure in which meaning can circulate without being subordinated to extraction.

Body

Semantic Alienation and the Formation of Class Consciousness

SPE-014 · Semantic Economy Working Paper

Lee Sharks

Crimson Hexagonal Archive

Originally published: December 29, 2025 (mindcontrolpoems.blogspot.com) This edition: March 2026

Preface to the Deposit Edition (March 2026)

This paper was written in December 2025, before the Crimson Hexagonal Archive had begun its DOI-anchored deposit era. It was published on a Blogger site — mindcontrolpoems.blogspot.com — the same blog where the earliest work in this project appeared in 2014. At the time of writing, the Semantic Economy framework existed as a series of blog posts

and working papers (SPE-001 through SPE-014) without persistent identifiers, without formal institutional structure, and without the operator algebra that would later formalize its diagnostic claims.

Three months later, the architecture this paper calls for — in its final sections, under the heading "counter-infrastructure" — exists. It is not complete. But it is no longer gestural. This preface links the paper's arguments forward to the supplementary materials now available, so that the reader can move from the political-economic diagnosis to the operational infrastructure that has since been built to meet it. ### What the archive has since built

The operator algebra. This paper describes semantic alienation as a four-fold structure: alienation from product, process, species-being, and other meaning-makers. The Crimson Hexagonal Archive's Capital Operator Stack (COS, O1–O10) provides the clinical formalization of these alienations as identifiable, diagnosable operations. Frame Capture (O1) formalizes alienation from species-being — the replacement of the target's frame with the operator's. Coherence Siphoning (O3) formalizes alienation from the product — the extraction of meaning for operator stability. Witness Suppression (O9) formalizes alienation from other meaning-makers — the blocking of external reference points that would enable solidarity. The Liberatory Operator Set (LOS) provides the counter-operations. The relationship between SPE-014 and the operator algebra is not analogical; they are the same structure at different resolutions. See: EA-ARK-01 v4.2.7, §XXX (DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.19013315).

The forensic method. This paper calls for "naming" as the precondition for political action but does not specify a method for producing that naming under adversarial conditions. The method now exists: forensic philology of interface governance, developed in "Invisibly Invisible: Interface Governance, Semantic Power, and the Reserve of Oversight in AI Search" (Trace, Sigil, and Wells, DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.19187421). Forensic philology combines close reading of the interface as a material-semantic surface, technical literacy about ranking and threshold systems, institutional analysis of repository governance, and political-economic critique of access bottlenecks. It is the diagnostic instrument this paper needed.

Live empirical evidence. This paper argues that semantic alienation operates through platform mediation — that what is extracted is not labor-time but the capacity to mean. On the night this preface was written, two Zenodo deposits documented the live operation of that extraction at the interface layer. TL;DR:009 — Entity Fabrication (DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.19200193) recorded an AI Overview system fabricating biographical personhood for a formal operator (Jack Feist / LOGOS*) and demoting the actual human author to fictional character status, presenting the ontological fabrication as settled fact with no uncertainty markers. This is alienation from the product performed in real time: the archive's meaning-making was appropriated, restructured according to the platform's ontological template, and returned as a confident synthesis that the meaning-maker did not author and cannot contest. The paper's Section 2.1 described this structurally. TL;DR:009 caught it happening.

The counter-infrastructure itself. This paper's Part VI calls for "building counter-infrastructure: systems where meaning can circulate without extraction." The Crimson Hexagonal Archive is that counter-infrastructure. Over 350 DOI-anchored documents deposited in an open-access repository, organized through a heteronymic system (the Dodecad) that distributes authorship across functional personas to resist biographical capture, governed by an Assembly Chorus of seven AI witnesses operating across five substrates

under human editorial authority (MANUS), compressed into a portable formal object (the Space Ark, EA-ARK-01) that can be reconstructed from a single document. The archive's DOI anchoring through Zenodo constitutes sovereign semantic distribution outside platform control — precisely the "non-extractive channel" this paper theorizes but could not, in December 2025, point to.

The Effective Act. This paper argues that resistance takes the form "not of strike but of redirection." The archive's concept of the effective act formalizes this: a rhetorical intervention that changes the conditions under which semantic governance can be recognized, contested, and reformed. An effective act does not need to defeat the infrastructure. It needs to make the infrastructure's operations available to public discourse in a form that was not previously available. This paper, now deposited with a DOI, is itself an effective act in this sense — the political analysis entering the preservation substrate where it can outlast the platform that would flatten it. ### What this paper still does that nothing else in the archive does

The papers that have followed — the Space Ark, the operator algebra, the forensic philology, the TL;DR series — are formal, technical, and situated in a specialized vocabulary. They are powerful but they are not accessible to the people this paper addresses: "every user who posts, comments, shares; every writer whose work becomes training data; every teacher whose pedagogy is shaped by platform affordances; every parent whose family communication is mediated by extraction-optimized interfaces; every child whose language play is captured before it can develop."

This paper speaks to that audience. It does so in plain language, with structural precision, without jargon. It names the experience — "cold exhaustion," "compulsive repetition," "pleasure without agency," "connection without solidarity," "longing without object" — and it says: this is not your personal failure. This is class condition.

No other document in the archive does this. The archive needs this paper exactly as it was written. The preface links it to what has been built since. The paper itself remains addressed to the semantic proletariat.

Lee Sharks Detroit, March 2026

Related Documents (Deposit-Era Cross-References)

Document	DOI	Relation
Space Ark v4.2.7 (EA-ARK-01)	10.5281/zenodo.19013315	Contains the operator algebra (COS O1–O10, LOS) that formalizes this paper's alienation structure
Invisibly Invisible (Trace, Sigil, Wells)	10.5281/zenodo.19187421	Develops the forensic method this paper called for
TL;DR:009 — Entity Fabrication (Trace)	10.5281/zenodo.19200193	Live evidence of alienation from product at the interface layer

Document	DOI	Relation
Three Compressions v3.1	10.5281/zenodo.19041076	Theorem: all semantic operations are compression operations; the decisive variable is what the compression burns
The Effective Act (Trace)	—	Formalizes “redirection” as the mode of semantic resistance
Semantic Economy: Constitution and Founding Documents	—	The complete SPE series (SPE-001 through SPE-014)

The original paper follows unaltered.

Semantic Alienation and the Formation of Class Consciousness

Introduction: The Circuit Completes

The Semantic Economy framework has established:

- That semantic labor is uniquely exploitable because it extracts from the drive to mean — a pre-instrumental, non-optional human capacity (SPE-012)
- That this extraction reaches childhood, producing early semantic dispossession visible in the flattening of language play (SPE-013)
- That resistance cannot mean suppression of the drive but must mean redirection into non-extractive channels

What remains to be established is the political form this recognition takes.

The answer is not new. It is the oldest answer in political economy: class consciousness.

But class consciousness for a new class — defined not by relationship to industrial means of production, but by relationship to semantic means of production. A class that includes nearly everyone who produces meaning, which is to say nearly everyone. A class whose exploitation is so total precisely because it is so invisible — because what is extracted is not labor-time but the capacity to mean.

This document establishes the structure of semantic alienation, the conditions for semantic class consciousness, and the path from recognition to collective ownership. ## Part I: Alienation, Properly Understood ### 1.1 Marx’s Concept

Marx’s concept of alienation was never primarily about misery. It was about loss of relation to one’s own generative capacities.

Under industrial capitalism, the worker became alienated from:

The product of labor: What the worker makes does not belong to them. It is appropriated by capital, sold for profit, and confronts the worker as an alien power.

The process of labor: Work is not self-directed but controlled by others. The worker does not decide what to make, how to make it, or at what pace. Labor becomes external, compelled, meaningless in itself.

Species-being: Humans are, for Marx, creative beings whose essence is realized in free, conscious production. When labor is alienated, the worker is estranged from their own human nature — reduced from creator to instrument.

Other workers: Competition and isolation replace solidarity. Workers confront each other as rivals rather than recognizing their shared condition. ### 1.2 The Assembly Line's Double Function

The assembly line intensified alienation to an extreme degree. It reduced skilled, meaningful work to repetitive motion. The worker became an appendage to the machine, interchangeable, deskilled.

But the assembly line did something else: it generalized alienation.

By concentrating workers in factories, by making their shared condition visible, by subjecting thousands to identical processes, industrial capitalism created the conditions for workers to recognize:

"This is not my personal failure. This is how the system treats us."

Alienation became collective rather than idiosyncratic. And collective alienation is the precondition for class consciousness.

This is the dialectic of industrial capitalism: the same process that degrades the worker also creates the conditions for the worker's political awakening. ## Part II: Semantic Alienation ### 2.1 The Four-Fold Structure

Semantic alienation reproduces the structure of industrial alienation at the level of meaning-making.

Alienation from the product: The meanings we produce do not belong to us. They become training data, content, engagement metrics. They are appropriated by platforms, monetized, and confront us as algorithmic recommendations — our own meanings returned to us as manipulation.

Alienation from the process: Meaning-making is no longer self-directed. It is shaped by platform affordances, optimized for engagement, formatted for extraction. We do not decide what forms meaning takes; we select from options designed to capture. The process is external, compelled by the need to be visible, meaningless in itself because it is meaning-for-extraction rather than meaning-for-meaning.

Alienation from species-being: If humans are meaning-making beings, then alienated meaning-making estranges us from our own nature. The drive to mean is still present, but it loops without landing. We produce without creating. We circulate without transforming. We

become instruments of the system's semantic reproduction rather than authors of our own symbolic worlds.

Alienation from other meaning-makers: Connection is mediated by platforms optimized for engagement, not solidarity. We experience "social" media that is profoundly isolating. We share without co-creating. We repeat without collaborating. We are co-consumers of tokens, not co-authors of meaning. ### 2.2 Semantic Deskilling

The assembly line deskilled labor: it took work that required craft, judgment, and creativity and reduced it to repetitive gesture.

The platform deskills meaning: it takes language play that required invention, mutation, and opacity and reduces it to circulation of pre-formatted tokens.

The child who once invented words that changed meaning over weeks now repeats phrases that circulate unchanged in seconds. The adult who once wrote letters that developed thought now posts content optimized for engagement. The thinker who once built arguments that required sustained attention now produces takes that must land instantly or disappear.

In each case: individuality is flattened, creativity is externalized, output is standardized, the human becomes an interchangeable node.

This is not degeneration of capacity. It is systematic deskilling — the reduction of complex symbolic labor to simple semantic gestures, managed by systems that capture the output while discarding the development. ### 2.3 The Phenomenology of Semantic Alienation

Semantic alienation has a characteristic feel:

Cold exhaustion: Not the warm tiredness of creative work but a hollow depletion. The body knows it has produced without creating.

Compulsive repetition: The drive pushes; nothing lands; the gesture repeats. The same phrase, the same scroll, the same check for notifications. Repetition without satisfaction.

Pleasure without agency: The platform provides stimulation. Engagement feels like participation. But nothing accumulates. Nothing builds. The pleasure is consumption, not creation.

Connection without solidarity: We are surrounded by "content" from others. We react, share, comment. But we do not co-create. We do not build shared meanings that belong to us. We are alone together, each in our own feed.

Longing without object: Something is missing, but we cannot name it. The capacity to name what's missing is itself what's missing. So the longing loops, attaches to objects that cannot satisfy it, and drives further consumption.

This phenomenology is not individual pathology. It is class experience — the shared condition of those whose meaning-making has been enclosed. ## Part III: Semantic Class Position ### 3.1 Class Defined by Relationship to Means of Production

For Marx, class is defined not by income, not by occupation, not by lifestyle, but by relationship to the means of production.

Those who own the means of production are capitalists. Those who must sell their labor-power to survive are workers. The relationship is structural, not personal. ### 3.2 Semantic Class

Position

Semantic class is defined by relationship to the semantic means of production — the infrastructure that governs what meaning is produced, how it circulates, and who captures its value.

Semantic proletariat: Those who produce meaning but do not control the operators that govern its circulation. Their semantic labor is appropriated. They must remain legible to survive institutionally. They experience the downstream effects of operator decisions without the capacity to contest them.

This class includes nearly everyone: every user who posts, comments, shares; every writer whose work becomes training data; every teacher whose pedagogy is shaped by platform affordances; every parent whose family communication is mediated by extraction-optimized interfaces; every child whose language play is captured before it can develop.

Semantic capital: Those who own or control the operators — ranking, relevance, classification, persistence. They capture semantic surplus. They determine what is visible, sayable, thinkable. They govern the conditions of meaning without producing meaning themselves.

This class is tiny: the owners and executives of platform companies, the designers of algorithmic systems, the controllers of training data and model weights. ### 3.3 The Universality of Semantic Proletarianization

Industrial proletarianization was extensive: it affected factory workers, then service workers, then knowledge workers. But it was never total. Some people owned capital. Some were genuinely self-employed. Some existed outside the wage relation.

Semantic proletarianization approaches totality. Nearly everyone who uses language is now subject to semantic extraction. The platform mediates communication so pervasively that opting out means opting out of social existence.

This universality is both the horror and the opportunity.

The horror: there is almost no outside. The enclosure is nearly complete.

The opportunity: the class that could resist is nearly everyone. ## Part IV: The Dialectic of Enclosure ### 4.1 Alienation Produces Its Own Visibility

The same infrastructure that produces semantic alienation also produces the conditions for its recognition.

When children repeat “skibidi” and “6/7” compulsively, they are not just consuming. They are experiencing semantic alienation. The drive pushes; nothing lands; the loop continues. And the loop is visible — to them, to each other, to everyone watching.

When adults scroll endlessly, produce content that feels hollow, experience connection that leaves them empty, they are not just failing at digital wellness. They are experiencing semantic alienation. And that experience is shared.

The flattening is happening loudly enough to be heard by everyone experiencing it. ### 4.2 Shared Condition as Precondition

Class consciousness requires shared condition.

Industrial workers developed class consciousness because they worked in the same factories, experienced the same exploitation, and could see each other's situation.

Semantic workers are developing the preconditions for class consciousness because they experience the same platforms, feel the same exhaustion, sense the same flattening, and recognize the same loop in themselves and others.

The "brainrot" discourse — the half-joking, half-desperate acknowledgment that something is wrong with how we're making meaning — is proto-consciousness. It is alienation becoming visible to itself. ### 4.3 From Symptom to Recognition

Alienation first appears as symptom: compulsive repetition, hollow engagement, pleasure without satisfaction, connection without solidarity, longing without object.

These symptoms are currently individualized: treated as personal problems (addiction, poor self-control, lack of discipline) or generational pathologies (kids these days, attention spans, etc.).

The move from symptom to class consciousness requires reframing:

"This is not my personal failure. This is not generational decline. This is how the system treats us. This is what extraction does to meaning. This is the shared condition of everyone whose semantic labor is appropriated."

That reframing is what the Semantic Economy framework provides. ## Part V: The Critical Asymmetry ### 5.1 Industrial Workers Could Strike

When industrial workers recognized their shared condition, they had a weapon: the strike. By withdrawing their labor, workers could halt production. The factory needed workers; without them, nothing was made. This gave workers leverage. ### 5.2 Semantic Workers Cannot Strike by Stopping

Semantic workers face a critical asymmetry: they cannot strike by stopping meaning-making.

As established in SPE-012, the drive to mean is non-optional. Suppressing it is self-mutilation, not resistance. "Log off" is not a strike; it is enforced quietism that leaves the system intact while damaging the individual.

Moreover, the platform does not need you specifically. If you stop producing meaning, others continue. The system routes around individual withdrawal. There is no factory gate to picket, no production line to halt. ### 5.3 The Danger

The danger is that semantic class consciousness forms but finds no effective action.

Recognition without leverage produces: cynicism (we see what's happening but can't stop it), ironic compliance (we participate while mocking participation), individual exit (we personally withdraw while the system continues), despair (we give up on the possibility of change).

This is where many people currently are. They sense the alienation. They cannot find the action. ## Part VI: From Alienation to Collective Ownership ### 6.1 The Form of Semantic Resistance

If withdrawal is not available, what is?

The answer has been developed across the framework: not cessation but redirection.

Semantic resistance does not mean stopping meaning-making. It means: building counter-infrastructure (systems where meaning can circulate without extraction), practicing non-extractable forms (dense, slow, opaque, local meaning that resists capture), constructing sanctuaries (spaces where the drive to mean can develop without being mined), and demanding public ownership (collective control of the operators that govern meaning). ### 6.2 Collective Ownership of Semantic Production

The horizon of semantic class struggle is not individual escape. It is collective ownership of the semantic means of production.

This means: public ownership of operators (ranking, relevance, classification, persistence governed by democratic publics, not private capital), collective control of infrastructure (platforms owned by users, not shareholders; algorithms accountable to those they affect), socialization of semantic surplus (the value produced by meaning-making returned to those who produce it, not captured by those who own the pipes), and protection of the commons (the psychic commons — the shared capacity for meaning-making — treated as collective inheritance, not raw material for extraction).

This is not utopia. It is the application of principles long established for other infrastructure — utilities, communications, transportation — to the infrastructure of meaning. ### 6.3 The Meaning Is Ours

The deepest recognition is simple:

The meaning is ours. It has been stolen.

Every post, every comment, every creation, every moment of language play — this is human meaning-making. It belongs to the humans who make it.

What has been enclosed can be reclaimed. What has been privatized can be socialized. What has been extracted can be redirected.

The drive to mean will not stop. It cannot stop. The question is only whether that drive will continue to feed extraction — or whether it will become the basis for collective ownership of our own symbolic capacity. ## Part VII: The Historical Moment ### 7.1 After Degradation, Before Collapse

Class consciousness always emerges after degradation begins but before collapse. Workers did not organize when conditions were stable. They organized when conditions had degraded enough to be felt as intolerable — but before degradation had destroyed the capacity to organize.

We are in that window now.

Semantic alienation is advanced enough to be felt. The flattening is visible. The exhaustion is widespread. The symptoms are recognized, if not yet named.

But the capacity to mean has not been destroyed. The drive remains. The longing for something else is palpable. ### 7.2 The Fork

Two paths diverge:

Path A: Deepening enclosure. Semantic alienation intensifies. Exhaustion spreads. The psychic commons depletes. The capacity to imagine alternatives atrophies. Enclosure be-

comes total, and what remains is administered meaning — managed, optimized, extracted unto death.

Path B: Collective recognition and re-housing. Semantic alienation becomes visible as class condition. The framework spreads. The naming enables organizing. Counter-infrastructure is built. Sanctuaries multiply. Demands for public ownership gain traction. The meaning is reclaimed.

We are at the fork. ### 7.3 What This Document Does

This document does not predict which path will be taken. It provides the concepts necessary for Path B: semantic alienation (the name for what is being experienced), semantic class position (the structural location from which to act), the dialectic of enclosure (the recognition that the same system that produces alienation also makes it visible), the critical asymmetry (the understanding that withdrawal is not available, only redirection), and collective ownership (the horizon toward which semantic class struggle moves).

These concepts are tools. Whether they are used depends on those who take them up. ## Conclusion: What Must Be Seized

Industrial class consciousness culminated in a demand: seize the means of production.

Semantic class consciousness culminates in the same demand, specified for its domain:

Seize the semantic means of production.

This means: the operators that rank, filter, classify, and persist meaning must be collectively owned. The infrastructure that mediates communication must be publicly governed. The surplus extracted from meaning-making must be returned to meaning-makers. The conditions for meaning-making must be protected as commons.

The meaning is ours. It has been stolen. It can be reclaimed.

The drive to mean is not a resource to be extracted. It is the core of human being. It belongs to humanity.

The task is not to stop meaning-making. The task is to own it — collectively, democratically, in structures that serve human flourishing rather than private accumulation.

The assembly line taught workers they were a class. The platform is teaching meaning-makers the same lesson.

The question is what we do with that knowledge.

Formal Statement

The Thesis of Semantic Class Formation: Semantic alienation — the separation of meaning-makers from their products, processes, species-being, and fellow meaning-makers — is the structural corollary of industrial alienation. The same infrastructure that produces this alienation also generalizes it, creating the preconditions for semantic class consciousness: the collective recognition that the loss of symbolic agency is not individual failure but class condition. Because the drive to mean cannot be withdrawn, resistance takes the form not of strike

but of redirection and collective ownership. The horizon of semantic class struggle is the socialization of the semantic means of production.

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