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- INFRASTRUCTURE
BEFORE VALUE**

TIMOTHY SPEED

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**Universal Care Income – Infrastructure
Before Value**

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Universal Care Income – Infrastructure Before Value

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Abstract

This volume concludes Section V of the series by synthesizing the theoretical implications of the Emergence Economy developed in the preceding contributions. The section has shown that modern economies systematically misrecognize forms of work whose effects unfold over long temporal horizons, through relationships, or through the stabilization of complex social and epistemic fields. By introducing the concepts of the **Value Threshold**, **Diversity Threshold**, **Unfolding Gap**, and **Eigenzeit**, it outlines a framework for understanding the growing disjunction between real world-forming work and its economic recognition.

From this perspective, poverty appears not merely as a lack of resources, but as a structural loss of world-binding capacity. The volume therefore situates the concept of **Universal Care Income** within a broader theoretical context: not primarily as a redistributive policy, but as an infrastructural condition that protects the possibility of world-forming work in complex societies.

Keywords: Universal Care Income, emergence economy, ontology of work, world-forming work, care economy, relational labour, primary economy, secondary economy, value threshold, diversity threshold, unfolding gap, Eigenzeit, ontology of poverty, structural poverty, world-binding capacity, institutional conditions of work, post-growth economy, non-market labour, care work, social reproduction, ecological regeneration, epistemic labour, artistic research, neurodivergent work, autistic epistemology, relational agency, systemic invisibility of work, economic recognition, threshold theory of value, infrastructure of work, temporal conditions of labour, complexity and economy, post-capitalist economic theory

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Introduction

The preceding contributions of Section V examined work, value, poverty, and institutional structures from the perspective of the Emergence Economy. Taken together, they developed a conceptual framework for understanding how modern societies organize the relationship between world-forming activity and its economic recognition.

The present chapter does not introduce new empirical material. Instead, it draws together the central implications of the arguments developed across the section. By connecting the concepts of the Value Threshold, Diversity Threshold, Unfolding Gap, and Eigenzeit, it outlines how contemporary economic systems systematically displace forms of work that sustain complexity, relationships, and long-term developmental spaces.

From this perspective, the question of work becomes inseparable from the institutional conditions under which human action can still bind the world. The following reflections therefore shift the focus from isolated policy proposals to the broader institutional architecture required for complex societies to remain capable of emergence.

Universal Care Income

Work Before Value: An Ontological Reframing of Income, Time, and Entfaltung (Development)

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Abstract

This paper develops the concept of Universal Care Income (UCI) as an ontological alternative to income- and distribution-based models of social security. UCI is not understood as a transfer payment or a social-policy instrument, but as an infrastructural condition under which world-sustaining (i.e. socially and ecologically reproductive) work can exist at all.

The point of departure is the diagnosis that modern economic systems recognize work only when its effects are immediately visible, completed, and translatable into value form. Forms of work whose efficacy is relational, time-delayed, regenerative, or epistemic—such as care work, social stabilization, ecological regeneration, artistic practice, or neurodivergent modes of work—remain structurally invisible under these conditions or are damaged by permanent output and efficiency demands.

Universal Care Income addresses this problem not at the level of distribution, but at the level of the boundary conditions of work. It decouples existential security from immediate visibility and thereby creates a space in which work can unfold its effects without having to be continuously translated into secondary-economic performance formats. UCI does not aim to accelerate or optimize processes of unfolding, but to recognize their temporal, relational, and regenerative character as a precondition of productive efficacy.

In contrast to models of an unconditional basic income, which primarily distribute purchasing power within existing value orders, UCI shifts the question of the conditions under which work can be considered legitimate in the first place. In conclusion, UCI is discussed as a temporal and relational infrastructure that reduces the structural extraction pressure on world-sustaining work without abolishing markets or income. UCI thus appears not as a social-policy add-on, but as a necessary precondition for sustainable work in complex social and ecological systems.

Unfolding Gap (Entfaltungsabstand)

The *unfolding gap* denotes the real space between an intervention in the world (work, action, innovation) and the long-term consequences of that intervention for freedom, possibilities of development, and ecological or social complexity. It does not measure whether something appears as value, but what becomes possible or impossible through that appearance.

The unfolding gap arises where progress, efficiency, or innovation are effective in the short term while simultaneously narrowing future spaces of action, creating dependencies, or reducing complexity. It thus describes a temporally and structurally staggered effect of work: work can be immediately successful and yet cost freedom in the long run.

The unfolding gap is neither a deficit nor a delay, but an ontological parameter of freedom. It makes visible whether development truly constitutes unfolding—that is, greater self-determination, greater diversity, greater robustness of an ecosystem—or whether it merely stabilizes existing value orders by displacing alternatives.

While the value threshold determines what counts as performance, and the diversity threshold determines which deviations are tolerated, the unfolding gap describes the quality of the future: whether a system is more open or more closed after an innovation than it was before.

In this sense, the unfolding gap is a measure of whether progress genuinely expands real freedom—or whether it exchanges freedom for short-term efficiency.

Speed, T. (2019). *Radical Worker - The Fight for Self-Determined Work (AAM Open Version in German and English)* [Computer software]. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18145937>

Speed, T. (2019). *Unfolding Gap - On the Structural Gap Between Work and Value (2 English)*. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17951579>

Value Threshold (Wertgrenze)

The *value threshold* designates the structural boundary beyond which work can appear as value within secondary-economic systems. It does not mark the beginning of efficacy, but the point at which activities become visible, comparable, and administrable. Work below the value threshold is not ineffective; it is structurally excluded from economic recognition. The value threshold is therefore not a moral judgment, but a selection mechanism that determines which forms of work are considered legitimate, productive, or eligible for remuneration.

Speed, T. (2025). *The Value Threshold: Why Value Only Comes Into Being When Work Appears — Ontology of the Emergence Economy and Introduction of the Universal Care Income (UCI) (2 English)*. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17840416>

Diversity Threshold (Diversitätsmarke)

The *diversity threshold* designates the structural boundary below which a system no longer possesses sufficient differentiation, variance, and complexity to remain stable and capable of innovation in the long term. It does not refer to diversity in a merely statistical sense, but to a system's capacity to sustain deviation, irritation, and non-standardized forms of efficacy. When the diversity threshold is undercut, processes may stabilize in the short term, but they lose their future viability.

Speed, T. (2025). The Diversity Threshold – A Threshold Model of Emergent Systems (2 English). Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17847399>

Primary Economy (Primärökonomie)

The *primary economy* refers to those forms of work through which the world is brought forth, sustained, and regenerated. This includes activities that stabilize relationships, enable orientation, regulate conflict, cultivate capacities, or care for ecological foundations. Primary-economic work takes effect prior to its economic visibility and is often bound to time, context, embodiment, and relationality. It is world-sustaining before it can become value-forming.

Secondary Economy (Sekundärökonomie)

The *secondary economy* refers to the formats through which work is made visible, comparable, measurable, and administrable. It does not operate by bringing forth the world, but by translating already-performed work into indicators of value, performance, and efficiency. The secondary economy is functionally necessary, yet remains ontologically dependent on primary-economic efficacy. When it is declared the primary source of value, a structural level-confusion emerges, from which exploitation, exhaustion, and systemic crises result.

Speed, T. (2019). Primary and Secondary Economy - On the Ontological Distinction Between Value Formation, Work, and Systemic Extraction (2 English). Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17952123>

1. Introduction

Why do activities that sustain society, buffer crises, stabilize relationships, or enable ecological regeneration come under systematic pressure, even though their absence produces immediately perceptible damage? Why do certain forms of work appear indispensable without ever being recognized as performance, productivity, or value? And why do contemporary economic systems repeatedly respond to this tension with activation, acceleration, or efficiency increases—even in cases where precisely these measures exacerbate the problems they are meant to address?

These questions point to a fundamental structural problem of modern economies. Work is primarily evaluated according to its visibility, comparability, and short-term output capacity. Activities whose efficacy unfolds relationally, with temporal delay, or through regenerative

processes are thereby systematically marginalized. Care work, social stabilization, education, conflict regulation, ecological maintenance, artistic practice, and large parts of epistemic work appear under these conditions either as “unproductive” or as cost factors, even though they establish the very preconditions of economic and social continuity.

In current debates, this problem is often treated as a question of distribution. Models of an unconditional basic income or other transfer mechanisms are intended to compensate for income losses resulting from the lack of recognition of certain forms of work. These approaches, however, implicitly assume that existing value and evaluation systems can remain intact. They address symptoms without altering the conditions under which work can be considered legitimate, recognizable, or capable of securing existence in the first place.

This paper takes a different point of departure. It argues that the core problem does not lie in insufficient income distribution, but in the boundary conditions under which work is allowed to appear. The central question is therefore not: How much income should be distributed? but rather: Under what temporal, relational, and structural conditions can work exist without destroying itself?

Against this background, Universal Care Income (UCI) is introduced as an alternative economic category. UCI does not denote income in the classical sense, but an infrastructural precondition that enables work to be stabilized prior to its translation into value form. UCI shifts the focus from retrospective compensation to prior enablement. It does not intervene in markets in order to redistribute their outcomes, but alters the conditions under which work can unfold its efficacy—and thereby its value.

The argument builds on a previously developed distinction between primary-economic and secondary-economic work, as well as on the concept of the unfolding gap. These concepts are not re-derived comprehensively in what follows, but are recapitulated where necessary for understanding UCI. The aim is to develop Universal Care Income not as a political program, but as a structural response to an ontological problem of the contemporary order of work and value.

2. Income, Value, and the False Question of Distribution

The current dominance of income- and distribution-centered debates rests on a tacit assumption: that value is already given and merely needs to be distributed more justly. Within this perspective, income appears as a downstream compensatory mechanism for inequalities generated in the production process. This assumption shapes both labor-market-centered social policy and many models of an unconditional basic income.

What is overlooked, however, is that distribution always operates where value has already been defined, measured, and recognized. It can mitigate inequalities within an existing value order, but it does not reach the conditions under which certain forms of work appear as value-relevant in the first place. Activities that operate prior to or beyond this value form remain structurally invisible even under conditions of perfect redistribution.

Care work, social stabilization, ecological regeneration, or long-term epistemic work in particular thus enter into a paradoxical relationship with income logics. They are socially

necessary, yet they do not generate immediate or isolable outputs. Their contribution lies in maintaining relationships, capacities, life-supporting conditions, and orientation—precisely those dimensions that distributive models presuppose but cannot themselves produce.

Models of an unconditional basic income respond to this problem by decoupling income from proof of employment. This marks an important step: the recognition that not every socially relevant activity can be translated into wage labor. At the same time, however, these models remain within the logic of secondary-economic value formats. Income continues to function as access to markets, consumption, and participation, while the criteria that determine what counts as productive work remain unchanged.

From this perspective, distribution stabilizes an order whose central blind spot lies precisely in its failure to perceive world-sustaining work except retrospectively—or not at all. Recognition does not occur at the site of unfolding, but at the site of circulation. Income compensates for missing recognition without altering the conditions under which recognition is denied.

Universal Care Income therefore does not begin with the distribution of income, but with the prior question of value formation. It shifts the focus from retrospective compensation to structural enablement. UCI does not ask how income can be distributed more fairly, but under what conditions work may exist without having to constantly adapt itself to secondary-economic requirements of visibility and efficiency.

In doing so, income itself is re-framed. It no longer appears primarily as an equivalent of performance or as purchasing power, but as an infrastructural precondition that protects temporal, relational, and regenerative processes. This shift marks the transition from a distributive to an ontological perspective on work and forms the basis for the determination of Universal Care Income developed in what follows.

3. Universal Care Income — Conceptual Definition

Universal Care Income (UCI) does not denote a form of income in the classical sense, but a structural category. The term is deliberately composed in order to make visible a shift in how work, value, and existential security are conceived. UCI is neither designed as a wage substitute nor as a social transfer, but as an infrastructural condition under which certain forms of work can exist at all.

The term universal does not refer to uniformity or flat-rate provision, but to fundamental accessibility. UCI is not tied to specific activities, identities, or proofs of performance. Its universality consists in decoupling existential security from the criteria that secondary-economic systems use to evaluate work. Universal here means: non-selective, non-conditional, and not bound to short-term visibility.

The term care is likewise not to be understood sectorally. It does not designate a particular occupational group or a moral attitude, but a function of work. Care encompasses those activities through which relationships are sustained, systems stabilized, conflicts regulated, capacities developed, and life-supporting conditions regenerated. In this sense, care is not an add-on to productive work, but its precondition. Care work is world-sustaining before it can become value-forming.

The term income, finally, marks a deliberate tension. UCI is income insofar as it secures material existence and enables real capacity for action. At the same time, it is neither a performance equivalent nor a market wage. Income is not understood here as compensation for output, but as a temporal and relational condition of enablement. UCI does not produce productivity; it protects the conditions under which productive efficacy can emerge.

Taken together, Universal Care Income designates a form of existential security that operates prior to the value form. UCI does not intervene where work already appears as performance, but where work is still in the process of unfolding. It shifts the boundary condition under which work may be considered legitimate, without immediately translating it into measurable results.

UCI thus differs categorically from labor-market-centered security systems as well as from income-based transfer models. It does not aim at integration into existing evaluative logics, but at their temporary suspension where they undermine the conditions of world-sustaining work. In this sense, Universal Care Income is not an instrument for correcting markets, but an infrastructure for enabling work beyond its immediate market form.

4. Universal Care Income, the Unfolding Gap, and the Question of Freedom and Development

The concept of Universal Care Income can only be adequately understood against the background of the *unfolding gap*. The unfolding gap denotes the real space between the enactment of work or innovation and its long-term consequences for freedom, possibilities of development, and systemic complexity. It does not primarily describe a delay in economic recognition, but the structural difference between short-term effectiveness and the long-term world-compatibility of work.

The unfolding gap is neither an additional threshold nor an independent selection criterion; rather, it constitutes the dynamic zone of effect between the value threshold and the diversity threshold. While the value threshold determines what appears as performance, and the diversity threshold marks the minimum degree of differentiation and variance a system requires to remain developmentally and emergently viable in the long term, the unfolding gap describes the quality of development: whether work and innovation open real spaces of unfolding or gradually close them.

In contemporary economic orders, this gap is not recognized as a necessary space of freedom and development, but is systematically compressed. Progress is expected to be immediately effective, visible, and comparable. Time, relationality, regeneration, irritation, or non-linear development are treated as inefficiencies. The result is not only exhaustion or loss of quality, but a structural reduction of future possibilities for action: systems are stabilized in the short term while their capacity for self-correction and emergence is pushed below the diversity threshold.

Universal Care Income intervenes precisely at this point. UCI does not aim to close or minimize the unfolding gap, but to make it *sustainable*. It recognizes that certain forms of work and development can only be freedom-enhancing and future-oriented if they are not

permanently subjected to pressures of visibility, comparability, and output. UCI therefore does not protect results, but the conditions of unfolding.

This becomes particularly evident where work is performed as an irreversible advance contribution. Relationships are built, orientation is provided, crises are buffered, and ecological or social regeneration processes are enabled without these contributions being fully reversible or insurable. Here, the unfolding gap is not a neutral intermediate space, but a structurally risky zone in which potentials for freedom and development can be consumed while being realized elsewhere in the form of efficiency, stability, or returns. Universal Care Income addresses this risk not through retrospective compensation, but through prior safeguarding.

In this context, the unfolding gap also functions as a central criterion for evaluating progress and innovation. Innovations may appear progressive by increasing efficiency, reach, or availability, while simultaneously narrowing real spaces of freedom and development. The unfolding gap makes visible whether innovation expands or compresses spaces of unfolding—and thus whether it increases systemic complexity or pushes it below the diversity threshold. Progress is not measured here by output growth or the multiplication of options, but by whether future possibilities for action expand or contract.

Freedom, in this sense, does not denote individual freedom of choice or consumer options, but the capacity of social and ecological systems to sustain differentiation, time, deviation, and regeneration without collapsing into coercion, dependency, or breakdown. The unfolding gap is the space in which this freedom is practically decided.

By decoupling existential security from immediate visibility, Universal Care Income interrupts the compulsion toward permanent self-compression. Work no longer has to be continuously translated into secondary-economic short formats in order to remain legitimate. This creates a space in which temporal depth, relational density, and regenerative cycles are not treated as costs, but as constitutive conditions of productive, freedom-enhancing efficacy.

Universal Care Income thus addresses the unfolding gap not as a problem to be overcome, but as a structural precondition that must be protected. In this sense, UCI is less a social-policy measure than a response to an ontological deficit of modern orders of work and value. It shifts the question from the efficiency of work to its developmental and world-sustaining capacity and thereby forms a central foundation for economic architectures in which progress is no longer played off against freedom and future viability—something that classical Universal Basic Income cannot achieve. Its redistributive strategy continues to affirm a narrowed concept of work and remains, in its financing, bound to the value threshold.

5. Distinction: Universal Care Income ≠ Universal Basic Income

The necessity of Universal Care Income is frequently and prematurely equated with existing concepts of an unconditional basic income (UBI). This equation obscures a categorical difference. While UBI models primarily target distribution, Universal Care Income addresses the conditions under which work, unfolding, and development are possible in the first place.

UBI intervenes where value has already been defined and where income functions as access to markets, consumption, and social participation. It decouples income from individual proof of

work, yet leaves largely untouched the underlying criteria that determine what counts as productive or relevant work. From this perspective, the secondary-economic value order remains intact; recognition continues to be governed by standards of visibility, efficiency, and comparability.

Universal Care Income, by contrast, operates prior to the value form. It does not address the distribution of purchasing power within existing evaluative regimes, but shifts the boundary condition under which work may be considered legitimate. UCI secures existence not as compensation for output, but as a precondition for work with a large unfolding gap to take place at all—without having to compress or destroy itself.

This difference is structural, not political. Under conditions of high efficiency and extraction, UBI can have a stabilizing effect by injecting purchasing power without reducing the pressure on unfolding. Universal Care Income, by contrast, aims precisely to reduce this pressure by securing time, relationality, and regeneration as constitutive elements of productive efficacy.

The distinction can also be sharpened with regard to progress and innovation. UBI compensates for possible losses resulting from rationalization or technological acceleration. UCI intervenes earlier: it influences which forms of innovation are considered meaningful at all by taking into account their effects on spaces of unfolding, freedom, and systemic complexity. UCI is therefore not an instrument for cushioning consequences, but a mechanism for shifting developmental logics.

Universal Care Income replaces neither wage labor nor market processes. It does, however, interrupt the implicit equation of value and visibility on which many basic income models are built. While UBI enables participation within existing orders, UCI creates conditions under which those orders themselves can become transformable.

In this sense, Universal Care Income is not a variant of basic income, but a different economic category altogether. It shifts the question from the just distribution of existing value to the safeguarding of those conditions of unfolding from which value, future viability, and social freedom emerge in the first place.

6. Universal Care Income as Infrastructure

Universal Care Income is not to be understood as a benefit, transfer, or compensatory instrument, but as infrastructure. This distinction is central. Benefits respond to deficits; infrastructure enables processes. While social benefits typically intervene where scarcity has already occurred, infrastructure operates upstream: it creates the conditions under which certain forms of activity, development, and coordination can take place at all.

In this sense, UCI is less comparable to income in the classical sense than to temporal, social, or health infrastructures. Just as roads enable movement without prescribing destinations, and just as language enables communication without predetermining content, Universal Care Income provides a stable framework within which work with a large unfolding gap can exist without being subjected to constant existential pressure. UCI does not define purposes; it protects spaces of possibility.

This infrastructural function concerns three dimensions in particular: time, relationality, and regeneration. UCI creates temporal buffers in which unfolding does not have to be immediately translated into output. It stabilizes relational work that depends on trust, continuity, and situational responsiveness. And it protects regenerative processes that are prerequisites of sustainable efficacy but remain systematically underfunded or invisible within secondary-economic logics.

As infrastructure, UCI does not operate in a steering mode typical of classical labor-market policy. It prescribes no activities, evaluates no performances, and sanctions no deviations. It is precisely in this respect that it differs from activating or conditional security systems. UCI does not intervene in individual decisions, but in the structural conditions under which decisions can be made in the first place.

This logic also explains why Universal Care Income is not conceived as a replacement for wage labor or markets. Infrastructure does not replace use; it enables it. UCI creates the preconditions for markets, organizations, and forms of cooperation to emerge that do not permanently operate against the conditions of their own possibility. It does not limit activity, but extraction pressure.

As an infrastructural mechanism, UCI also feeds back indirectly into evaluative logics. By decoupling existential security from immediate visibility, secondary-economic metrics lose part of their disciplinary force. Work no longer has to constantly legitimate itself in order to exist. Over time, this also shifts what is considered meaningful, sustainable, or future-viable activity.

In this sense, Universal Care Income is not one social-policy measure among others, but a basic condition of economic architecture. It operates prior to market, prior to performance, and prior to the value form. Its effect does not lie in the direct steering of outcomes, but in the stabilization of those spaces of unfolding without which neither innovation nor freedom nor ecological or social regeneration can endure.

6.1 No Abolition of Capitalism, but Infrastructural Limitation

At this point, the question arises whether Universal Care Income implies an implicit abolition of capitalist economic forms. This reading, however, falls short. UCI is not directed against markets, exchange, or organization as such, but against the structural overextension of secondary-economic logics of valorization.

Capitalist markets do not operate on a neutral foundation. They presuppose extensive primary-economic preconditions: care, regeneration, social stability, ecological viability, and epistemic work. In existing architectures, these preconditions are systematically externalized and consumed. Universal Care Income does not intervene in market processes themselves; rather, it protects these preconditions from total appropriation.

In this sense, UCI does not abolish capitalism, but limits it. It withdraws from the logic of valorization access to those domains in which unfolding, freedom, and development are possible only under non-valorizing conditions. Markets continue to exist, but they lose their claim to being the primary instance of societal value definition.

Universal Care Income is therefore not a post-capitalist program, but an infrastructural correction. It shifts the conditions under which markets are permitted to operate without fundamentally calling their existence or function into question.

7. Universal Care Income, Work, and Concrete Practice

The preceding argument has described Universal Care Income as an infrastructural condition under which work with a large unfolding gap can exist without being systematically compressed or destroyed. In this section, this abstract determination is anchored in a concrete form of practice: work-integrated relational action, as empirically and existentially documented in the book *Speed's Work* (Speed's Work / Speeds Arbeit, <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18146105>).

Work-integrated relational action denotes a form of work in which care, relationality, orientation, and conflict regulation do not appear as subsequent add-ons, but constitute integral components of productive activity. This mode of work does not follow the logic of clearly delimited outputs; rather, it operates relationally, situationally, and over extended periods of time. Its efficacy does not lie in isolable results, but in the stabilization of social fields, the preservation of capacity for action, and the enablement of further work.

Within existing economic architectures, such forms of work inevitably come under pressure. Because their effects are not immediately visible, comparable, or balance-sheetable, they are either devalued as inefficient, treated as disturbances, or forced into secondary-economic short formats that damage their actual function. The experiences documented in *Speed's Work* demonstrate that this devaluation is not accidental, but results from the structural dominance of secondary-economic evaluative logics.

Against this background, Universal Care Income can be read as a structural precondition under which work-integrated relational action becomes sustainably possible at all. UCI does not replace these forms of work, does not evaluate them, and does not institutionalize them. Rather, it removes them from the permanent compulsion toward self-justification. Existential security is no longer tied to the successful translation of relational efficacy into short-term performance formats.

Crucially, UCI does not privilege any particular practice. Work-integrated relational action is not a model to be generalized or normatively imposed. Instead, it functions as an exemplary case that makes visible how much productive efficacy emerges under conditions of large unfolding gaps—and how systematically this efficacy is endangered under prevailing value orders.

This perspective also allows for a more precise re-evaluation of work beyond classical categories. Work no longer appears primarily as individual performance or marketable output, but as a relational practice that produces social, ecological, and epistemic continuity. At this point, Universal Care Income does not intervene in a steering capacity, but in a stabilizing one: it protects the conditions under which such forms of practice can exist without exhausting themselves.

The connection between UCI and work-integrated relational action makes clear that Universal Care Income is not to be understood as an abstract structural principle, but as a response to real, documented forms of work that are neither adequately recognized nor sustainably supported within the existing system. UCI is thus not the cause of new modes of work, but a condition of their visibility, durability, and integrity.

8. Limits, Open Questions, and Research Agenda

This paper understands Universal Care Income as an ontological and infrastructural category. It necessarily follows that certain questions are deliberately left open. This openness is not a deficiency, but a consequence of the chosen approach. Ontological misalignments cannot be corrected through administrative fine-tuning; they must first be clarified conceptually in order to be addressed in an empirically and institutionally meaningful way.

A first limitation concerns the operational design of Universal Care Income. The paper develops neither a financing model nor proposals for institutional implementation. Such questions are not irrelevant; however, they presuppose a prior clarification of what UCI is intended to do—and what it is not. Without this clarification, there is a risk that UCI will be prematurely subsumed under existing social-policy categories and thereby neutralized at a structural level.

A second open question concerns the empirical identification of unfolding gaps. The unfolding gap is introduced here as a qualitative parameter of freedom and development, not as a narrowly measurable quantity. Future research faces the challenge of developing indicators that render unfolding processes visible without once again compressing them. Possible lines of inquiry include qualitative longitudinal studies, institutional analyses of time and evaluation regimes, and comparative investigations across different forms of work and innovation contexts.

Further research needs arise with regard to the relationship between Universal Care Income and existing economic forms. While this paper describes UCI as an infrastructural limitation of secondary-economic valorization logics, it remains open how different market architectures respond to such limitations. This raises questions of coexistence, displacement, or transformation of organizational forms, without normatively prejudging these processes.

The relationship between UCI and neurodivergent modes of work also requires further clarification. This paper deliberately avoids an essentialization of neurodivergent subjects. Nevertheless, there are strong indications that forms of work characterized by large unfolding gaps structurally expose neurodivergent people more intensely—both in terms of their productive capacities and their vulnerability to secondary-economic pressure. Empirical research could clarify under which conditions UCI functions as a protective and enabling structure in this context.

Finally, Universal Care Income raises fundamental questions concerning the relationship between work, freedom, and future viability. If freedom is understood not as individual choice among options, but as the capacity of systems to unfold, the criteria of economic evaluation shift accordingly. UCI thus opens a research agenda that no longer measures work exclusively

in terms of efficiency or output, but in terms of its capacity to enable development without destroying its own preconditions.

In this sense, Universal Care Income is not a closed proposal, but a theoretical point of opening. It marks a domain in which economic theory, empirical research, and institutional practice can be newly related to one another—provided that the question of the conditions of unfolding is not once again displaced in favor of short-term solution promises.

9. Concluding Remarks

This paper has developed Universal Care Income not as a social-policy instrument, but as an ontological correction of a truncated order of work and value. Its point of departure was not the question of fair distribution, but the conditions under which work, freedom, and development are possible at all without becoming self-destructive.

Universal Care Income addresses a structural deficit of modern economies: the systematic compression of unfolding processes through pressures of visibility, efficiency, and valorization. When existential security is tied to immediate recognition, those forms of work come under pressure whose efficacy is temporal, relational, or regenerative. In this context, the unfolding gap was specified as a space of freedom and development in which it is decided whether progress opens real futures or merely stabilizes existing value orders.

UCI shifts this logic without abolishing markets, work, or income. It does not intervene at the level of outcomes, but at the level of preconditions. As infrastructure, it protects time, relationality, and regeneration from total appropriation by secondary-economic evaluative regimes. In doing so, Universal Care Income limits not activity, but extraction, and enables forms of work that sustain the world without having to be permanently legitimized.

This perspective allows for a re-evaluation of progress and innovation. Progress no longer appears automatically as a gain in freedom, but is assessed according to whether it expands or contracts spaces of unfolding—whether it increases systemic complexity or pushes it below the necessary diversity threshold. Universal Care Income does not function here as a steering instrument, but as a structural precondition under which such evaluations can become possible at all.

In conclusion, Universal Care Income can be read as a proposal to reframe the question of work: not in the mode of optimization, but in the mode of viability. It shifts the focus from short-term performance capacity to long-term world-compatibility. In this sense, UCI is neither a reform nor a utopia, but a conceptual and infrastructural opening—for an economy in which freedom, development, and work are no longer systematically played off against one another.

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The following section draws together the conceptual implications of the preceding analyses and situates Universal Care Income within the broader framework of the Emergence Economy developed in Section V.

Final Synthesis of Section V: Implications of the Emergence Economy — Work, Freedom, and Institutional Architecture

The following section concludes Section V of the series by synthesizing the conceptual implications of the preceding analyses and situating Universal Care Income within the broader framework of the Emergence Economy.

1. The Shift in the Concept of Work

The contributions in this section have not examined work primarily as an economic category, but as a structural condition of world-formation. This shifts the starting point of the analysis. The question is no longer how work should be organized or distributed, but under what conditions work can emerge at all as a world-binding practice.

Modern societies largely define work through visibility, measurability, and short-term output capacity. Work appears as performance, productivity, or market value. This perspective appears self-evident, yet it is structurally truncated. It captures only those activities whose effects can be translated directly into economic formats.

Many forms of socially sustaining work, however, function according to a different logic. Care work, social stabilization, cultural practice, epistemic work, or self-determined forms of intensive problem processing do not unfold their efficacy primarily in isolated results. Their effects arise in the stabilization of relationships, in the formation of orientation, in the maintenance of complexity, or in the long-term enabling of future spaces of action.

Here a fundamental shift in modern societies becomes visible. They produce real effects without being able to stabilize these effects durably as value. Work operates at the level of world-formation, yet it does not appear at the level of economic visibility.

This discrepancy forms the starting point of the theory of the Emergence Economy developed in this section.

2. Emergence and Stabilization as a Threshold Structure

The preceding contributions have shown that the relation between work and value cannot be understood as a linear relationship. Between the emergence of new reality and its societal stabilization lies a structural threshold.

This threshold is described as the Value Threshold. It designates the condition under which forms of work can appear at all as social value. Visibility, comparability, and institutional translatability determine whether real effects pass into economic form.

At the same time, it has become clear that systems generate new reality long before this threshold is reached. This dynamic is captured in the concept of the Diversity Threshold. Systems begin to generate new forms once they must carry a critical density of incommensurable differences.

Between these two thresholds a structural gap emerges. Work can be real and effective without being stabilized as value. This constellation has been described in the concept of the Unfolding Gap.

The Unfolding Gap denotes the real distance between an action and its long-term consequences for freedom, developmental capacity, and systemic complexity. Work can appear successful in the short term and yet destroy spaces of development in the long run. Conversely, work may stabilize systems over long periods of time without ever becoming visible as value.

Without an Unfolding Gap there is no *Eigenzeit*. Work then risks becoming simulation, manifesting itself in ever smaller unfolding gaps until only functioning without world remains. This is the ideal of certain AI fantasies—but it marks the end of human existence.

Against this background, the crisis of modern economies appears in a new light. Societies do not primarily suffer from a lack of work or productivity. They suffer from a structural decoupling of emergence and stabilization.

They suffer from the loss of work-integrated relational action.

3. Work as World-Binding

From this diagnosis follows a fundamental redefinition of the concept of work. Work appears not primarily as the production of output, but as a practice of world-binding.

Work binds the world by connecting actions with irreversible consequences. Decisions alter real spaces of possibility. Relationships stabilize social fields. Cultural practices generate meaning and orientation. In all these cases, reality does not arise through simulation or representation, but through concrete intervention in open world conditions.

In this perspective, work becomes an ontological category. It designates the practice through which the world is stabilized, transformed, or expanded.

Precisely those activities that are often marginalized within contemporary labour regimes appear from this perspective as particularly central. Artistic practice, care-based work, activism, critical research, or neurodivergent forms of intensive perception frequently do not produce isolated outputs. Their efficacy lies in the stabilization of complex social, cultural, and epistemic fields.

They maintain complexity. They form a balance between openness and irreversibility.

For precisely this reason they come into conflict with economic systems that define value primarily through visibility, scalability, and short-term efficiency—that is, through reductions that understand the market as object-output rather than as a comprehensive form of relational organization.

4. Eigenzeit and the Limits of Simulation

The analysis of these conflicts leads to a further categorical shift: the role of time in societal orders.

Modern institutions organize time primarily as an administrable sequence. Processes are made planable, delegable, and reproducible. Time appears as a neutral container of events within which decisions can be made without these decisions themselves altering the structure of the world.

This perspective proves viable only under conditions of stable world relations. Where actions close real spaces of possibility, this ontology of time is no longer sufficient.

At this point the concept of Eigenzeit comes into the foreground. Eigenzeit denotes that form of time which cannot be delegated. It arises where decisions irreversibly exclude real possibilities and thereby bind the world.

Eigenzeit is therefore not a subjective experience of duration. It is an ontological operation. It arises where actions produce consequences that can no longer be reversed or fully simulated.

Eigenzeit arises from the unique relation of a human being to the world that is given through their concrete existence.

In modern societies this dimension is systematically suppressed. The human being is expected to function as interchangeable. Decisions are outsourced into models, forecasts, and procedures. Responsibility appears as a delegable function within institutional structures.

The stronger this logic becomes, the more work shifts into the mode of simulation. Processes are optimized without real world-binding having to arise. Action is replaced by function, decision by calculation, responsibility by procedure.

In this sense the compression of the Unfolding Gap becomes a central feature of late-modern systems. The less space exists between action and effect, the smaller the possibility of real world-binding becomes. Work transforms into a system of the permanent reproduction of existing structures.

The result is a paradoxical situation: societies increase their efficiency while their capacity for world-formation simultaneously declines. They simplify themselves and thereby produce permanent crises—crises arising from the confusion of categories and from the displacement of boundaries that constitute affordances for concrete existences, without which they cannot be.

The stabilization society strangles itself in its attempt to produce permanent and universally valid solutions for all, without the willingness to undertake the long path of their emergence in co-creation. Space is globalized while at the same time the individual reality (Eigenzeit) of those affected is broken. Power encounters here the limits of its own scale—in a medial, globally networked self-reduction.

Where Eigenzeit disappears, no world emerges anymore—only its simulation. A society that reaches this point no longer optimizes its future, but merely the administration of its own disappearance.

5. Poverty as the Loss of Eigenzeit

Against this background, the concept of poverty also acquires a different meaning.

In the dominant economic perspective, poverty appears as a lack of income or resources. Yet this description is insufficient. It describes symptoms rather than the underlying structure.

From the perspective of the Emergence Economy, poverty appears as the loss of Eigenzeit. It arises where people may still act, but their actions can no longer produce real world-binding. Those who fall out of the system in this way and enter material poverty are often still able to activate Eigenzeit in their actions, because it emerges outside the job function. Yet this Eigenzeit remains excluded from the simplified simulation of a market filter.

Under these conditions, poverty does not primarily mean material deprivation but a structural prohibition of existence. What is meant here is not a formal restriction of life, but a structural constellation in which the possibility of real world-binding disappears.

Some are formatted within their jobs and thereby lose Eigenzeit—and with it the capacity to co-shape complexity. Others are pushed out of the simulation; their Eigenzeit may remain intact, yet it appears unproductive because it does not connect to the world in which value and life chances are distributed.

In this situation, work becomes either a pure function or invisible labour. It reproduces systems without generating new reality. And if it nevertheless produces new reality, this is often interpreted as a disturbance rather than as a contribution.

6. Universal Care Income as an Infrastructural Consequence

Against this background, the proposal of a Universal Care Income acquires a more precise meaning.

UCI should not primarily be understood as a social policy measure. Rather, it constitutes an infrastructural response to a structural malfunction of modern societies.

The analysis in this section has shown that contemporary economic systems systematically place pressure on those forms of work whose effects unfold over long periods of time, through relationships, or through regenerative processes. Such work typically has a large unfolding distance between the act itself and its economic visibility.

This is precisely where Universal Care Income intervenes.

It does not primarily shift the distribution of income, but the conditions under which work can exist at all. Existential security is no longer tied exclusively to short-term visibility and immediate value form.

This creates a space in which work with a large Unfolding Gap can exist at all. Relationships can be stabilized without being immediately commodified. Cultural and epistemic processes can unfold without constantly being translated into short-term performance formats.

Universal Care Income therefore protects not results but conditions.

It protects the possibility of world-binding.

7. The Emergence Economy and the Institutional Future of Work

The theory of the Emergence Economy thus leads to a fundamental shift in economic perspectives.

The economy no longer appears primarily as a system of resource allocation, but as a societal architecture that determines which forms of reality can be stabilized.

The central conflict of modern societies lies in the fact that their institutional structures increasingly destroy precisely those processes on which their own future capacity depends. Systems optimize efficiency while simultaneously losing their capacity for emergence.

A sustainable social order must therefore establish a different balance. It must be able to sustain difference, tension, and temporal unfolding without permanently forcing these processes into short-term efficiency formats.

In this context, Universal Care Income can be understood as a first infrastructural mechanism that enables such a balance.

It limits not activity but extraction.

It does not replace markets, but protects those domains in which markets alone are unable to secure the conditions of world-formation.

In this sense, the Emergence Economy does not mark a political reform proposal but a structural perspective on the future of complex societies.

It does not primarily ask how work should be organized.

It asks under which conditions work can still bring forth a world—a world in which we can all live as the beings we are through our individual existence.

The shift that every existence represents must not be interpreted as a disturbance, but as the expression of a more complex pattern of order. Without these shifts, reality degenerates into simulation—and a simulation is not viable in the long run.

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Timothy Speed is an independent artist-researcher working on operator-based ontologies, world-formation, and neurodivergent epistemology.

His work connects philosophy of physics, consciousness studies, and social theory through the framework of operatoric research.

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(The present text constitutes an interface translation into neurotypical academic discourse. This translation functions as an accessibility measure necessitated by dominant linguistic and epistemic conventions. It does not represent the native epistemic form of the research, but a communicative adaptation required for participation in standardized scholarly exchange.)

A more in-depth paper on the methodology can be found here:

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A paper providing an overview of the work can be found here:

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