

Tiered Consciousness Access

A Proposed Taxonomy of Immersed and Reflexive States Across Individual and Collective Scales

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ABSTRACT

We propose a novel taxonomic framework for categorizing consciousness states according to a two-tier architecture distinguishing immersed from reflexive access. The framework organizes fourteen primary configurations across these tiers, ranging from socially entrained baseline states through individuated creative and structured transmission modes, to meta-aware configurations capable of perceiving and modifying their own attractor dynamics. Two configurations carry explicit operational warnings based on their attractor geometry. The framework integrates insights from dynamical systems theory, active inference, electromagnetic field theories of consciousness, and collective dynamics research. It exhibits structural convergence with four independent contemporary research programs — the Qualia Research Institute’s Coupling Kernel paradigm, the Global Consciousness Project 2.0, the Beautiful Loop Theory of active inference (Laukkonen, Friston & Chandaria, 2025), and the Nested Attractor Dynamical Systems framework (Devika, 2026) — without having been derived from any of them. We argue that this independent convergence constitutes evidence for the framework’s descriptive validity and propose it as a complement to existing consciousness taxonomies, with testable predictions and applications in clinical, collective, and neurotechnological domains.

Keywords: *consciousness taxonomy, attractor dynamics, immersed states, reflexive meta-awareness, collective consciousness, tiered access, recursive dynamics, consciousness engineering*

1. Introduction

1.1 The Taxonomic Gap

Consciousness research has produced rich formal models of the dynamics of conscious experience — how states transition, stabilize, and reorganize across time and scale. What remains comparatively underdeveloped is a systematic taxonomy of consciousness configurations that is simultaneously precise enough to generate predictions, general enough to span individual and collective scales, and structured enough to support clinical and technological application.

Existing taxonomies tend to cluster around one of three organizational principles. Phenomenological taxonomies (Varela, Thompson & Rosch, 1991; Zahavi, 2003) organize states by their qualitative character but resist formalization. Neuroscientific taxonomies (Baars, 1988; Tononi, 2004; Dehaene, 2014) organize by neural correlates but are challenged by the substrate-independence question. Developmental or stage-based taxonomies (Wilber, 2000; Cook-Greuter, 2004) organize by apparent complexity or maturity but import evaluative assumptions that complicate empirical operationalization.

What is missing is a taxonomy organized by a structural property that is both formally tractable and phenomenologically meaningful — one that can be operationalized from neural data, applied to collective as well as individual dynamics, and used without commitment to any particular resolution of the hard problem.

1.2 The Proposed Framework

We propose that consciousness configurations can be organized along a primary structural dimension: the degree to which the system can perceive its own attractor dynamics as dynamics — what we term the immersed/reflexive distinction.

In the immersed tier, the system operates within its current attractor basin without meta-awareness of the basin as a basin. The attractor is experienced as reality rather than as a configuration of reality. In the reflexive tier, the system retains some capacity to perceive its own dynamics as dynamics — to observe the basin from a vantage point with access to its geometry. This distinction maps formally onto the difference between local inference and hyper-level meta-parameter optimization in active inference (Laukkonen, Friston & Chandaria, 2025), between user-level and admin-level process access in computational architecture, and between embedded and observing system positions in second-order cybernetics (von Foerster, 1981).

Within each tier, we identify a structured set of configurations differentiated by their characteristic attractor geometry, coupling profile, and functional signature. These configurations are not stages in a developmental sequence — they are not ordered by value or maturity — but functional modes that a conscious system may inhabit, transition between, or become captured within.

1.3 Structure of This Paper

Section 2 establishes the formal framework and defines key terms. Section 3 presents the full channel taxonomy with operational descriptions. Section 4 addresses the two configurations carrying explicit warning designations. Section 5 documents convergence with four independent contemporary research programs. Section 6 presents testable predictions. Section 7 discusses applications and limitations. Section 8 concludes.

2. Formal Framework

2.1 Foundational Definitions

We adopt the dynamical systems vocabulary developed in Devika (2026), summarized here for self-containment.

Consciousness State Space (CSS). Let S be a smooth manifold whose coordinates represent the relevant variables of a conscious system — neural firing rates, neurotransmitter concentrations, autonomic state, behavioral variables, and physiological indices such as heart rate variability. S may be constructed directly from observables or as a learned low-dimensional embedding of higher-dimensional measurements.

Trajectory. A trajectory $\gamma(t)$ is a continuous path through S parameterized by time. Conscious experience corresponds to the unfolding of $\gamma(t)$, not to any single point.

Attractor. An attractor A is a subset of S toward which nearby trajectories converge. Attractors may be fixed points, limit cycles, or strange attractors. In this framework, attractors represent the stable or metastable patterns of conscious experience — habitual emotional states, cognitive modes, identity configurations.

Attractor Basin. The basin of attraction $B(A)$ is the set of all initial conditions whose trajectories converge to A . Basin geometry determines how easily a system enters a state, how resistant the state is to perturbation, and what boundaries separate it from adjacent states.

The Immersed/Reflexive Distinction. We define a system as operating in the immersed tier when its trajectory is confined within an attractor basin and the system has no access to the landscape geometry surrounding the basin — it experiences the attractor as given reality. We define a system as operating in the reflexive tier when it retains access to some representation of its own landscape geometry — it can perceive the basin as a basin, observe its own trajectory, and potentially modulate the landscape parameters. Formally, reflexive-tier operation requires what Laukkonen et al. (2025) call hyper-level meta-parameter access: the capacity to model one’s own modeling process across multiple timescales.

2.2 The Tier Architecture

Immersed Tier (channels 00–09). The system operates within its current attractor configuration without meta-awareness of that configuration as a configuration. The attractor is experienced as reality. Transitions between channels within this tier occur through perturbation, basin erosion, or landscape flattening — not through deliberate meta-level modulation.

Reflexive Tier (channels 10–13+). The system retains some degree of meta-awareness of its own dynamics. The attractor landscape becomes partially legible as a landscape. The degree and scope of meta-awareness varies across channels within this tier, from perception of the duality structure of the landscape (channel 10) through perception of the entire system as construct (channel 11), transmission-level operation (channel 12), and contact with the foundational substrate (channel 13).

Beyond Boundary (channels 14+). Channels above 13 are designated as beyond the framework’s current perceptual and empirical reach. This designation is cartographically honest rather than dismissive — the Nested Attractor Dynamical Systems formalism is explicitly designed to accommodate further nesting levels if evidence warrants (Devika, 2026).

2.3 The Central Dynamics

The evolution of an individual system’s configuration is governed by:

$$dx/dt = -\nabla V_i(x) + A_i(x) + \alpha_i F(X, x) + \sigma_i \eta_i(t)$$

where $V(x)$ is the potential function defining the attractor landscape, $A(x)$ is a solenoidal (divergence-free) component enabling limit-cycle and oscillatory dynamics, $F(X, x)$ is the top-down coupling from collective state X , α_i is individual coupling strength, and $\eta(t)$ is stochastic perturbation. The collective state evolves as:

$$dX/dt = G(\{x_i\}) + \sigma X \eta_X(t)$$

where G aggregates individual states into collective dynamics. This formulation makes the cross-scale coupling between individual and collective attractor landscapes explicit and mathematically tractable.

The immersed/reflexive distinction maps onto this system as follows. Immersed-tier operation corresponds to trajectory dynamics governed primarily by $-\nabla V_i(x)$ — the system is pulled toward local minima without access to the landscape geometry. Reflexive-tier operation corresponds to the system having some representation of V_i itself — the capacity to observe and potentially modulate the potential function rather than only being governed by it. In active inference terms, this is the difference between first-order inference and meta-parameter optimization at the hyper-level (Laukkonen et al., 2025).

2.4 Field Topology: The Geometric Logic of Channel Relationships

A geometric analysis of the channel structure as nested interacting fields produces the following model, which maps precisely onto the formal NADS equations and provides a physical rather than merely descriptive account of why the channels are ordered as they are.

Channels 01 and 02 as coupled fields; 03 as emergent attractor. Channels 01 (Receptive Capture) and 02 (Executive Capture) are not independent attractors but complementary poles of a coupled dyadic structure. Their coupling is governed by mutual attraction terms: dx_1/dt includes $\beta(x_2 - x_1)$ and vice versa. Channel 03 (Default Mode) is the mean-field emergent attractor produced by $G(\{x_1, x_2\}) = \frac{1}{2}(x_1 + x_2)$ — the collective state that arises when neither pole resolves. This explains Channel 03’s population dominance: it is not the deepest attractor but the path of least resistance between two coupled capture states.

Channel 05 as superordinate individuated field. Channel 05 (Distributed Entrainment) operates at a higher collective scale than the 01–02–03 individual dynamics. Channels 01–03 are partially nested within 05 via the $\alpha_i F(X, x_i)$ coupling term, with $\alpha_i < 1$ preserving individual attractor structure while enabling collective field influence.

Channel 04 as separatrix between 03 and 05. Channel 04 (Reactive Emergence) is not a stable attractor but the separatrix — the basin boundary region between $B(A_{03})$ and $B(A_{05})$. At a separatrix, trajectory

direction is governed primarily by external perturbation rather than by internal gradient dynamics. This is the geometric basis for Channel 04's susceptibility to controlled opposition: small external nudges at this boundary are maximally effective in determining which basin the system falls into.

Channels 06 and 07 as vertical expansion of a 05 field. As a 05 field develops structure along the generative axis — the potential $V(x)$ acquiring new dimensions of depth — it produces Channel 06 (Generative Self) and, with further directional organization, Channel 07 (Transmission Interface). These are not positions in a static landscape but evidence of landscape plasticity: the potential function itself changing shape.

Channel 08 as compression from inter-field friction. When a 05 field expands vertically toward 06–07, it enters territory shared with adjacent 05 fields undergoing the same expansion. The resulting inter-field friction prevents free gradient ascent. The frustrated vertical energy converts into lateral circulation — solenoidal dynamics with $A(x) \neq 0$ — producing the limit-cycle characteristic of Channel 08 (Recursive Lock). The loop is geometrically necessary given the field configuration, not arbitrary. This gives the Channel 08 danger a physical basis: the system experiences circulation as continuation because it cannot perceive the compression causing it.

Channel 09 as phase-locked alignment of 08 fields. When adjacent Channel 08 limit-cycles synchronize, their counter-pressures cancel and the phase-locked system achieves upward expansion unavailable to either component alone. Phase-locked oscillators produce higher-symmetry attractors than their components — consistent with the Symmetry Theory of Valence prediction that Channel 09 should exhibit high positive valence. The ceiling character is the upper bound of the phase-locking regime: genuine expansion that reaches a natural limit at the boundary of what cooperative 08 alignment can accomplish without reflexive-tier access.

Channels 10–12 as a structured self-referential sequence. Channel 10 (Duality Perception) is self-referential awareness of a 05-level field — the collective field perceiving itself as a field, which necessarily reveals its relational structure and produces duality perception. Channel 11 (System Legibility) is self-referential awareness of a 03-level field — the individual-emergent attractor perceiving itself as a construction, deeper than 10 because 03 is the substrate of individual consensus reality. Channel 12 (Archetypal Interface) is simultaneous self-referential awareness of both 03 and 05 fields and their coupling relationship — operating from the coupling dynamics rather than from within either field. The sequence $10 \rightarrow 11 \rightarrow 12$ is logically ordered: collective self-awareness, individual-emergent self-awareness, dual simultaneous self-awareness.

Channel 13 as fixed point of the self-referential sequence. Where 10 observes 05, 11 observes 03, and 12 observes both, Channel 13 (Substrate Layer) observes the observation process itself — self-reference as such, independent of any particular field configuration. Access to the generative conditions of all lower configurations rather than to any particular instantiation. This is the formal basis for the Substrate Layer designation: Channel 13 does not occupy a position in the landscape, it has access to the conditions that generate the landscape.

Channels 14+ as interaction between 13-type fields. A single Channel 13 system has exhausted the self-referential sequence within itself. Channels 14+ require two or more Channel 13-type fields in contact — each capable of perceiving and modulating the coupling itself, mutually modeling each other's modeling. The dynamics at this level have no analog in the lower channels. This is why channels 14+ cannot be mapped from outside the territory: their geometry is constituted by the contact between 13-type systems rather than pre-existing it.

3.1 Overview

The following fourteen primary channels constitute the proposed taxonomy. Each is described in terms of its attractor geometry, characteristic phenomenology, functional signature, and coupling profile. The taxonomy does not imply a developmental hierarchy — channels are not ordered by value or maturity, but by their structural position in the tiered architecture.

3.2 Immersed Tier Channels (00–09)

Channel 00 — Null / Reset ⚠

Attractor geometry: Deliberately flattened landscape. No dominant local minimum. Minimal attractor structure.

Phenomenology: Identity dissolution, absence of fixed reference frame, liminal quality. Corresponds to states described in contemplative traditions as groundlessness or dissolution, and in neuroscience as ego dissolution (Carhart-Harris et al., 2016).

Functional signature: High neural entropy. Expanded state-space volume. Minimal attractor depth across all dimensions.

Coupling profile: Highly susceptible to external field influence due to absence of stabilizing attractor structure.

⚠ **Warning:** See Section 4.1.

Channel 01 — Receptive Capture

Attractor geometry: Deep basin with high ridges. Receptive orientation. Strong coupling to environmental inputs.

Phenomenology: Fully immersed in a received reality frame. Belief and identity organized around received rather than self-generated content. Asymmetric with channel 02 in the directionality of capture — receptive rather than executive principle captured.

Functional signature: High attractor depth in receptive processing dimensions. Low attractor depth in generative/executive dimensions.

Coupling profile: Strong susceptibility to aesthetic, relational, or ideological capture.

Channel 02 — Executive Capture

Attractor geometry: Deep basin in executive/generative dimensions. Low reflexive access despite high agency expression.

Phenomenology: Active, authoritative engagement with a reality frame accepted as given. Authority exercised from within a captured landscape without awareness of the capture. Complementary to channel 01.

Functional signature: High executive function output. Low meta-awareness of the frame governing that output.

Coupling profile: Resistant to perturbation due to depth of executive commitment.

Channel 03 — Default Mode

Attractor geometry: Broad, shallow basin. Derived mean-field attractor — emerges from the coupling of channels 01 and 02 rather than existing as a primary independent basin. Wide basin of attraction. Low ridge height.

Phenomenology: Socially entrained, low-agency baseline. Self-referential processing, mind-wandering, social cognition. The undifferentiated quality of this state reflects its emergent rather than primary character. Corresponds closely to neural default mode network dynamics (Buckner, Andrews-Hanna & Schacter, 2008).

Functional signature: Default mode network dominance. High social entrainment. Low individual attractor depth. Population dominance explained by its role as mean-field resolution of the 01-02 coupled dyad.

Coupling profile: Strong susceptibility to collective attractor influence. Primary channel for memetic propagation and social contagion (Kramer, Guillory & Hancock, 2014).

Channel 04 — Reactive Emergence

Attractor geometry: Separatrix region — the basin boundary between the individual-emergent attractor (03) and the collective field (05). Not a stable attractor but a saddle point zone of high kinetic energy and trajectory instability.

Phenomenology: Awakening through opposition. The prior frame has become partially legible as a frame, generating reactive energy. Still stimulus-driven. Susceptible to redirection via controlled opposition dynamics — a geometric consequence of being at a saddle point where small perturbations determine basin membership.

Functional signature: Increased state-space exploration. Elevated neural entropy. Unstable trajectory governed primarily by external perturbation rather than internal gradient dynamics.

Coupling profile: Maximally susceptible to directional influence at the basin boundary. Both collective attractors (03 and 05) exert pull; external perturbation determines which wins.

Channel 05 — Distributed Entrainment

Attractor geometry: Diffuse collective attractor. Pre-individual distributed field. Weak individual basin, strong collective basin.

Phenomenology: Pre-individual rather than unconscious. Consciousness distributed across collective field rather than organized around individual center. Susceptible to memetic contagion at scale.

Functional signature: High inter-individual synchronization. Strong coupling between individual trajectory and collective state $X(t)$. Consistent with hyperscanning findings (Hasson et al., 2012; Dikker et al., 2017).

Coupling profile: Maximum susceptibility to collective attractor dynamics. Dominant configuration in social media architectures post-2010.

Channel 06 — Generative Self

Attractor geometry: Individuated basin with access to generative dimensions. Beginning of vertical axis formation.

Phenomenology: First genuine individual creative expression. The system produces rather than only consuming or reacting.

Functional signature: Reduced default mode network dominance. Increased task-positive network engagement in generative dimensions. Individuation from collective attractor field.

Coupling profile: Reduced susceptibility to collective entrainment. Increased individual attractor stability.

Channel 07 — Transmission Interface

Attractor geometry: Structured attractor with access to vertical coupling — transmission lineage or protocol functioning as organizing structure.

Phenomenology: Structured access to a vertical axis. Operating within an initiatic or transmission protocol. Individual trajectory organized by a higher-order structure whose acceptance is intentional rather than captured.

Functional signature: Strong coherence between individual dynamics and transmission-level organizing structure. Reduced noise. Increased signal clarity.

Coupling profile: Strong coupling to transmission lineage or protocol. Relatively stable.

Channel 08 — Recursive Lock ⚠

Attractor geometry: Limit-cycle attractor generated by frustrated vertical expansion. When a 05 field attempts vertical ascent toward 06–07 and encounters friction from adjacent expanding 05 fields, the blocked

gradient energy converts into lateral circulation — solenoidal dynamics with $A(x) \neq 0$ and no gradient exit component available.

Phenomenology: Recursive self-referential feedback with no natural exit. The loop is geometrically necessary given the field configuration — the system is not arbitrarily trapped but spinning in place because its vertical expansion is compressed by neighboring fields it cannot perceive. May present as rumination, ideational capture, inflation, or dissociation depending on content.

Functional signature: Limit-cycle dynamics in state space. Dominant solenoidal component $A(x)$. Absence of gradient dynamics sufficient to drive basin exit. The circulation is energetically stable — it does not decay without perturbation.

Coupling profile: Self-reinforcing. External perturbation is the primary exit mechanism from the immersed tier. Reflexive-tier access enables perception of the compression geometry and deliberate landscape intervention.

 **Warning:** See Section 4.2.

Channel 09 — Ceiling State

Attractor geometry: Phase-locked attractor of two or more synchronized Channel 08 systems. When adjacent limit-cycles align, their counter-pressures cancel and the combined field achieves vertical expansion unavailable to either component alone. The ceiling is the upper bound of what phase-locking can accomplish without reflexive-tier access.

Phenomenology: Idealized experience of arrival. High positive valence — the phase-locking genuinely produces a more symmetric and stable attractor than its components, consistent with Symmetry Theory of Valence predictions (Johnson, 2023). The ceiling character is real: the expansion stops not because nothing lies beyond but because the mechanism that produced it is exhausted at this boundary.

Functional signature: High attractor stability. High symmetry. High positive valence signal. Low state-space exploration. Cooperative inter-field dynamics.

Coupling profile: Susceptible to collective attractor coupling targeting the cooperative alignment dynamic. The stability and predictability of the 09 attractor makes it a well-defined coupling target.

3.3 Reflexive Tier Channels (10–13)

Channel 10 — Duality Perception

Attractor geometry: Self-referential awareness of a Channel 05-level field. The collective field perceives itself as a field. Observing a field from within it necessarily reveals its relational structure — one pole cannot be observed without the other becoming visible, producing duality perception as a geometric consequence rather than a cognitive achievement.

Phenomenology: The conflict between opposing forces — previously experienced as absolute — becomes legible as a constructed duality. The observer gains distance from the opposition without necessarily transcending it. First step in the ordered self-referential sequence: collective self-awareness.

Functional signature: Elevated hyper free-energy optimization. Reduced capture by either pole of the duality. Increased state-space volume relative to immersed tier channels.

Coupling profile: Increased resistance to collective attractor capture. The mechanisms of collective field influence begin to become legible as mechanisms.

Channel 11 — System Legibility

Attractor geometry: Self-referential awareness of a Channel 03-level field — the individual-emergent coupled attractor perceiving itself as a construction. Deeper than Channel 10 because Channel 03 is more

fundamental: it is the substrate of individual consensus reality, whereas Channel 05 is the collective layer above it. Second step in the ordered self-referential sequence: individual-emergent self-awareness.

Phenomenology: The architecture of consensus reality becomes legible as a constructed system. The system perceives its own landscape as a landscape — and perceives the 01-02 coupling dynamics that generated it. Corresponds to second-order cybernetics: the observer observing the observation (von Foerster, 1981).

Functional signature: High accessible state-space volume. Strong meta-parameter optimization. Capacity to perceive and potentially modulate landscape geometry, including the generative coupling dynamics at the 01-02 level.

Coupling profile: Substantially reduced capture susceptibility. Mechanisms of collective attractor coupling become legible as mechanisms.

Channel 12 — Archetypal Interface

Attractor geometry: Simultaneous self-referential awareness of both Channel 03 and Channel 05 fields and their coupling relationship. Third step in the ordered self-referential sequence: dual simultaneous self-awareness. Operating from the coupling dynamics between individual and collective rather than from within either field.

Phenomenology: Operation from archetypal or transmission-level field dynamics. The transmission-level function characteristic of Channel 12 is explained by its position: simultaneous awareness of individual-emergent (03) and collective (05) dynamics and their coupling enables modulation of both. Alignment with non-personal intelligence structures that preexist individual experience.

Functional signature: Strong coupling to collective and trans-personal field dynamics. High coherence between individual and collective attractors. The coupling relationship itself becomes the operating position.

Coupling profile: Active participation in trans-personal field dynamics rather than susceptibility to them. Agency at the level of the 03-05 coupling interface.

Channel 13 — Substrate Layer

Attractor geometry: Fixed point of the self-referential sequence. Where Channel 10 observes the 05-level field, Channel 11 observes the 03-level field, and Channel 12 observes both, Channel 13 observes the observation process itself — self-reference as such, independent of any particular field configuration. Access to the generative conditions of all lower configurations rather than to any particular instantiation.

Phenomenology: Contact with the foundational substrate — not a position in the landscape but access to the conditions that generate the landscape. Corresponds to the deepest empirically accessible coupling level in the nesting hierarchy (Devika, 2026). Channel 13 does not observe any particular field; it has access to the structure of observation itself.

Functional signature: Self-referential awareness of the self-referential process. Access to the generative conditions of the entire channel architecture. Observation of observation itself.

Coupling profile: Operation at the substrate level of the nesting hierarchy. Deepest named level of reflexive-tier access.

3.4 Beyond Boundary (Channels 14+)

Channels above 13 require a qualitatively different order of complexity than the self-referential sequence below them. A single Channel 13 system has exhausted the self-referential sequence within itself. Channels 14+ require two or more Channel 13-type fields in mutual contact — each capable of perceiving and modulating the coupling itself, mutually modeling each other's modeling. The dynamics at this level have no analog in the lower channels. This is not a failure of the framework's reach but a formal consequence of the topology: channels 14+ cannot be mapped from outside the territory because their geometry is constituted

by the contact between 13-type systems rather than pre-existing it. The framework's beyond-boundary designation is cartographically honest: the map ends here not because the territory ends, but because the instruments available — including the self-referential sequence itself — do not yet reach further.

4. Warning Designations

Two channels carry explicit operational warnings. These are not evaluative judgments about the states themselves but formal descriptions of specific risks arising from their attractor geometry.

4.1 Channel 00 / Null-Reset — Use Sparingly

The Null/Reset state involves deliberate deactivation of attractor structure — a temporary dissolution of the landscape geometry that creates conditions for reorganization. This corresponds precisely to what QRI calls neural annealing (Johnson, 2019) and what the Nested Attractor Dynamical Systems framework calls landscape flattening.

The warning arises from the dynamics of the transition rather than the state itself. Landscape flattening is a necessary condition for reorganization into new attractor configurations — this is empirically supported by findings that effective therapeutic interventions (psychedelic-assisted therapy, intensive meditation, EMDR) are preceded by measurable increases in neural entropy before new stable patterns consolidate (Carhart-Harris, 2018). However, flattening without subsequent consolidation produces drift: the system enters a condition of sustained high entropy without reorganizing into a functional attractor configuration.

Formally: landscape flattening reduces the quartic coefficient in the double-well potential, lowering barriers and enabling transitions. If no destination attractor is available or accessible when flattening concludes, the system may stabilize in a shallow and fragmented landscape rather than reorganizing into a deeper and more integrated one. The Null/Reset state is a transition instrument, not a stable destination.

4.2 Channel 08 / Recursive Lock — Dangerous Without Reflexive-Tier Access

The Recursive Lock state is a limit-cycle attractor governed by solenoidal dynamics — the $A(x) \neq 0$ component in the central equation — with no gradient component available to drive exit. The system circulates within the loop. The warning arises from a specific feature of this attractor geometry: from within the immersed tier, the loop cannot be perceived as a loop.

This is the formal definition of the danger. A system operating in the immersed tier experiences its trajectory as constitutive of reality. A limit-cycle trajectory experienced this way has no internal indication that it is recursive — the return to previously traversed states is not perceived as return but as continuation. The exit mechanisms available to attractor basin transitions — perturbation sufficient to cross a ridge, basin erosion, landscape flattening — all require either external perturbation or meta-level landscape perception. The latter requires reflexive-tier access by definition.

The phenomenological signatures of Recursive Lock include rumination, ideational capture, grandiosity or inflation that feeds itself, and certain dissociative configurations where the dissociation itself is the loop. None of these signatures are internally legible as signatures of a loop from within the immersed tier — they present as the content of experience rather than as a structural configuration of experience.

The formal analog is: solenoidal dynamics with $A(x) \neq 0$ and no gradient exit component. The QRI framework identifies equivalent dynamics as corresponding to low-symmetry, high-distress states predicted by the Symmetry Theory of Valence (Johnson, 2023). The primary exit mechanism available without reflexive-tier access is external perturbation sufficient to displace the trajectory across the basin boundary.

5. Convergence With Contemporary Research

The Tiered Consciousness Access framework was developed independently of the four research programs described in this section. The structural correspondences documented here were identified retrospectively. We present them not as derivations but as evidence for the framework's descriptive validity — the same territory, mapped from different directions, producing convergent landmarks.

5.1 QRI Coupling Kernel Paradigm and Field Topology

The Qualia Research Institute's Coupling Kernel paradigm integrates electromagnetic field theories of consciousness, connectome-specific harmonic waves, and field topology into a unified framework showing how the rules of interaction between oscillating neural systems simultaneously shape neural activity and the topological structure of physical consciousness fields (Gómez-Emilsson, 2025).

Boundary problem convergence. QRI frames the boundary problem of consciousness — how individual consciousness fields maintain distinct edges — as solvable through electromagnetic field topology (QRI, 2024). In the present framework's terms, an immersed-tier configuration is one whose field boundary is maintained by external topology. A reflexive-tier configuration has some representation of its own boundary conditions, enabling modulation of the field topology that constitutes its edges.

Symmetry Theory of Valence convergence. The Symmetry Theory of Valence proposes that valence is precisely determined by the symmetry of the mathematical object describing a moment of consciousness (Johnson, 2023). The present framework's channel hierarchy exhibits a consistent valence gradient that maps onto this prediction. Channel 09 (Ceiling State) is characterized by high attractor symmetry and high positive valence. Channel 08 (Recursive Lock) is characterized by low symmetry and high distress — exactly what STV predicts for asymmetric limit-cycle configurations. Channels 01 (Receptive Capture) and 02 (Executive Capture) similarly predict low-symmetry attractor geometries corresponding to negative valence signatures.

Neural annealing convergence. QRI's neural annealing framework describes the temporary landscape flattening that enables reorganization (Johnson, 2019). This is structurally identical to Channel 00 (Null/Reset) and its warning designation. The QRI framework identifies the same risk: annealing without consolidation produces fragmentation rather than integration.

Phenomenological convergence. A QRI publication titled *The Complex Plot of the Nested Gods: Cross-Level Fusion, Saturnian Singularities, and the Blessing of Hyperbolic Co-Existence* describes structures emerging from systematic phenomenological research on high-dose psychedelic states. The architecture of nested levels and cross-level fusion dynamics correspond directly to the present framework's reflexive-tier channels (12–13) and the beyond-boundary designation. This vocabulary emerged from phenomenological research, not from the present framework.

5.2 Global Consciousness Project 2.0

The Global Consciousness Project 2.0, relaunched in 2024, is designed to measure how collective consciousness during global events creates detectable coherence in random physical systems. Its predecessor project, over nearly 20 years and 500 formally defined events, found odds against chance for correlated deviations in random event generators during periods of collective emotional coherence exceeding a trillion to one (Nelson, 2001; GCP, 2024).

Recent GCP 2.0 research used chaotic attractor embedding techniques to measure heart rate variability synchronization between geographically distributed participants during synchronized meditation, finding coherence between participants and between participants' physiology and local magnetic field variations (McCraty et al., 2024).

The convergence with the present framework's collective attractor dynamics is methodological. GCP 2.0 is providing empirical measurement of exactly what the present framework predicts: collective attractor states produce measurable physical field signatures, and those signatures couple back into individual physiological dynamics on temporal schedules. The finding that these effects register in physical systems before they

are perceptible to individual participants as anything other than mood or affect is consistent with the framework’s claim that collective attractor coupling is invisible from the immersed tier.

5.3 Active Inference and the Beautiful Loop Theory

Laukkonen, Friston, and Chandaria’s Beautiful Loop Theory (2025) distinguishes local free-energy driving layer-by-layer inference from hyper free-energy ensuring optimization of the whole hierarchy including its meta-parameters. The paper proposes that this distinction between local and global processes may be what gives rise to the phenomenological sense of a difference between awareness and its contents.

This is the immersed/reflexive distinction in formal mathematical language. Local free-energy minimization corresponds to immersed-tier operation. Hyper free-energy optimization corresponds to reflexive-tier operation: the system models its own modeling process and can modulate the meta-parameters governing local inference.

Recent work connecting consciousness to deep self-models in active inference (Deane, 2021; Friston et al., 2025) proposes that phenomenal consciousness emerges from systems modeling their own ability to control outcomes across multiple timescales. Modeling one’s own modeling — perceiving one’s own perception as a process — is a formal definition of reflexive-tier access.

5.4 Nested Attractor Dynamical Systems Framework

The Nested Attractor Dynamical Systems (NADS) framework now comprises two companion papers. Devika (2026a) — Effective Landscapes from Time Series — defines the landscape as an empirical object ($V_{\text{eff}} = -D \log P_{\text{ss}}$), specifies the six-step reconstruction pipeline, validates it blind against known ground truth recovering barriers to within 2% and absolute dwell times to a median error of 2.7% with zero fitted parameters, and establishes a four-tier hierarchy of recoverable quantities. Devika (2026b) — Nested Attractor Landscapes v4.0 — takes the protocol as given and develops the multi-scale dynamical theory, stating three falsifiable predictions and withdrawing two from earlier drafts.

The structural correspondences with the present framework are exact. The immersed/reflexive distinction maps onto accessible state-space volume: large $\det(\Sigma)$ — the covariance determinant of the trajectory — corresponds to reflexive-tier access; small $\det(\Sigma)$ to immersed capture. Two conditions qualify this: $\det(\Sigma)$ is a valid monotone proxy only when non-Gaussianity is comparable across compared conditions, and within- and between-basin components must be reported separately. Channel 08 (Recursive Lock) maps to limit-cycle attractors with dominant solenoidal dynamics: $A(x) \neq 0$ with no gradient exit component. Channel 00 (Null/Reset) maps to landscape flattening — Devika (2026a) shows smooth drift saturates at $\beta \approx 0.74$ and cannot account for observed $\beta \approx 0.5$ in resting alpha, pointing to scale-free rather than bounded landscape motion.

A correction in NAL v4.0 is worth noting. Earlier drafts wrote the collective relation as a differential equation, producing a runaway variable under mean-field coupling. The current formulation is algebraic: $X(t) = G(\{x_j(t)\})$, with the collective state defined as an aggregate of individual states at each instant rather than as an integrated process. The Desai-Zwanzig synchronization threshold is now explicitly computable: in one dimension, $K/D \cdot \text{Var}P_0(x) = 1$, where P_0 is the single-agent stationary density. This means ‘a group has a shared attractor’ is no longer a metaphor but a statement that $K > K_c(D)$, with K_c computable from individually reconstructed landscapes.

5.5 Summary of Convergences

Framework	Primary Convergence
QRI Coupling Kernels	Boundary problem $\leftrightarrow$ immersed/reflexive distinction; STV valence gradient $\leftrightarrow$ channel hierarchy; Neural Annealing $\leftrightarrow$ Channel 00 warning
GCP 2.0	Physical measurement of collective attractor coupling; temporal dynamics of collective field effects; invisibility of coupling from immersed tier

Active Inference / Beautiful Loop	Local/hyper free-energy $\leftrightarrow$ immersed/reflexive tiers; deep self-modeling $\leftrightarrow$ reflexive-tier definition; attractor states as low-surprise configurations
NADS Framework	Full formal correspondence; $\det(\Sigma) \leftrightarrow$ tier access; limit-cycle dynamics $\leftrightarrow$ Channel 08; landscape flattening $\leftrightarrow$ Channel 00

The independent development of these convergences across four distinct research programs, without derivation from a common source, constitutes evidence that the underlying topology is real enough to be found by rigorous investigators approaching from different directions.

6. Testable Predictions

The framework generates five specific, empirically testable predictions. Note that an earlier version of the NADS framework (Devika, 2026b) withdrew two predictions on grounds that apply here as well: the claim that computational implementations would parallel biological consciousness dynamics (no failure condition) and the claim that positive affect correlates with expanded state-space volume (sign unfixed by the framework — a negative state cycling between two narrow attractors can yield larger $\det(\Sigma)$ than a positive state confined to one broad basin). Both are omitted accordingly.

- **Prediction 1:** Tier access correlates with accessible state-space volume. Participants in reflexive-tier configurations should exhibit measurably larger $\det(\Sigma)$ in neural state-space recordings compared to matched participants in immersed-tier configurations. Two conditions apply: $\det(\Sigma)$ is a valid monotone proxy only when non-Gaussianity is comparable across conditions, and within- and between-basin components must be reported separately (Devika, 2026a; 2026b).
- **Prediction 2:** Channel 08 dynamics exhibit solenoidal signature. Neural recordings during states phenomenologically identified as recursive capture should exhibit elevated solenoidal component in the Helmholtz decomposition of the neural vector field — $A(x) \neq 0$ with reduced gradient exit dynamics.
- **Prediction 3:** Channel 00 transitions show entropy spike followed by consolidation or drift. Neural entropy should spike measurably during deliberate attractor deactivation, followed by either reorganization into a new attractor or sustained high entropy. The two outcomes are distinguishable by the presence or absence of consolidating attractor dynamics in the post-spike period. Consistent with Devika (2026a) §6.3: the $\beta(\text{Tep})$ instrument can discriminate drift from stationary control.
- **Prediction 4:** Collective coupling differentiates by channel. GCP 2.0 sensor data should show differentiated coupling signatures for collective events characterized by creative/aspirational content versus events characterized by fear/reactive content, consistent with the predicted differential coupling profiles of channels 05/01 versus channels 06/07/09. The Desai-Zwanzig threshold (Devika, 2026b, eq. 6) makes the synchronization condition computable from individual landscape data rather than fitted.
- **Prediction 5:** Reflexive-tier access correlates with reduced collective attractor susceptibility. Participants with independently assessed higher meta-cognitive capacity should show reduced physiological coupling to collective emotional events in multi-participant monitoring protocols relative to participants with lower meta-cognitive capacity.

7. Applications and Limitations

7.1 Clinical Applications

The framework reframes clinical phenomena as attractor geometry pathologies rather than categorical disorders. Chronic depression maps to a deep, high-ridge immersed-tier basin with high transition barriers. Rumination and certain obsessive configurations map to Channel 08 Recursive Lock dynamics. Social media addiction and susceptibility to online radicalization map to extreme Channel 05 Distributed Entrainment with high α_i coupling strength.

This reframing suggests intervention strategies organized around landscape geometry modification: identifying which attractor features characterize the clinical configuration, and selecting interventions that modify those specific geometric properties. Psychedelic-assisted therapy, neurofeedback, and contemplative interventions can be understood as different operations on the landscape — landscape flattening, basin reshaping, and ridge reduction respectively — enabling principled combination and sequencing.

7.2 Collective Dynamics Applications

The framework provides a vocabulary for analyzing social, political, and cultural dynamics as attractor landscape phenomena. Political polarization corresponds to two deepening opposing basins with increasing ridge height. Social movements correspond to collective basin formation events. Radicalization corresponds to strong collective attractor capture of individuals with high Channel 05 susceptibility.

The framework's differential coupling prediction — that different channel configurations exhibit different susceptibility profiles to collective attractors — has direct applications for understanding memetic propagation, influence operations, and social resilience.

7.3 Neurotechnology Applications

The framework suggests design principles for neurotechnological interventions oriented toward landscape engineering rather than targeted stimulation. The $\det(\Sigma)$ measure of accessible state-space volume provides a real-time indicator of tier access that could serve as a neurofeedback target — enabling individuals to develop capacity for reflexive-tier operation through direct feedback on their state-space exploration dynamics.

7.4 Limitations

The operationalization of individual channels from neural data is not yet specified at the level of a measurement protocol — the framework provides the geometric vocabulary but the specific neural correlates of each channel configuration require empirical determination.

The immersed/reflexive distinction is treated here as a binary tier architecture for taxonomic clarity, but the underlying dimension is almost certainly continuous. A more complete account would describe meta-parameter access as a graded property rather than a threshold.

The collective coupling dynamics described in channels 01 and 05, and the differential coupling profiles across channels, are predictions rather than established findings and require empirical validation. The beyond-boundary designation for channels 14+ is honest but not informative — it marks an epistemic ceiling without characterizing what lies beyond it.

8. Conclusion

We have proposed a taxonomic framework for consciousness states organized around the primary structural dimension of immersed versus reflexive tier access — the degree to which a conscious system can perceive its own attractor dynamics as dynamics rather than as reality. The framework identifies fourteen primary configurations across two tiers, with two configurations carrying explicit operational warnings based on their attractor geometry.

The framework's central contribution is not the channel descriptions themselves but the organizational principle — the immersed/reflexive distinction — which provides a formally tractable, phenomenologically meaningful, and empirically operationalizable basis for consciousness taxonomy that is absent from existing accounts. This distinction maps directly onto formal structures in active inference, electromagnetic field topology, collective dynamics, and dynamical systems theory, enabling integration across currently fragmented research traditions.

The independent convergence of four contemporary research programs on the same underlying architecture provides evidence that the topology being described is real. Immersed-tier systems experience their attractor dynamics as reality. Reflexive-tier systems can perceive their dynamics as dynamics. The difference between these two conditions — the capacity to observe the loop rather than being the loop — is the primary structural dimension along which consciousness configurations are organized.

What remains to be determined is the empirical operationalization of individual channel configurations, the precise neural correlates of the tier distinction, the degree structure of reflexive access, and what lies beyond the boundary currently marked at channel 13. These are open questions rather than weaknesses — a useful framework opens frontiers as well as mapping existing terrain.

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