

How Variants Are Derived From the Main SDC Idea

Canonical derivation protocol for SDC variants. Version 1.0, April 2026.

Preface

About this document. This is the canonical frame by which a domain-specific variant of Split-Domain Cognition is derived from the main articulation. It is read before any new variant is drafted. It is a frame, not a formula — the same principle looks different in different domains because the collapse looks different in each, and the variant is the domain's own encounter with the collapse, written in its own terms. When a variant is admitted to the canon, its review record states *"Reviewed against derivation-protocol v1.0"*, making the version of the protocol against which the variant was judged an auditable fact rather than a drifting reference.

Where this sits in the corpus. The canon home is splitdomaincognition.org; this protocol is also rendered at [/derivation-protocol-v1/](#). The principle this protocol applies is in *Split-Domain Cognition* (long form) and *A Principle, Not a Pattern* (position essay). The operational methodology is in *Process*. The catalogue of declared variants — and the six canonical variants currently in the canon — is at [/variants/](#).

Authority and version. Canonical, v1.0. April 2026. Substantive changes produce v1.1 or v2.0 at a new URL; past versions remain live. The website is the source of record. If this PDF and the website disagree, follow the website.

Use. Openly citable. See [Governance](#) for the one-person canon and how variants are admitted.

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What a variant is, and what it is not

A variant is a domain-specific reading of SDC. It takes the principle in `../sdc.md` and shows what the principle means, in that domain, in language a practitioner of the domain can recognise without first learning the AI-pipeline vocabulary.

A variant is **not** a re-explanation of the main idea. The main idea is in `../sdc.md`; the variant assumes it has been read. The variant is also not a proposal for a tool (tool specs live in `tools-scratch/`) and not a grant narrative (proposals live in `grants/`).

A variant is a conceptual document: a description of where SDC cuts in a particular domain, what the collapse produces, and what the separation would look like on the domain's own terms.

A variant exists so that the domain-relevant move of SDC is legible to people inside the domain without translation. A curator reading the curation variant should recognise their own practice. An animal-rights activist reading the animal-rights variant should find their daily battles named. An editor reading the editorial variant should find their own decisions legible. If translation is still required after reading the variant, the variant has not done its work.

The derivation protocol — seven questions

A variant is authored by answering seven questions about a domain. The questions are the bridge between the general principle and the specific practice. Each question corresponds to a component that must be present in the final variant.

1. What is the language work in this domain?

Identify what is being described, interpreted, generated, or articulated. What is the material that the domain's practitioners spend most of their attention *attending to*? In a design studio this is student work. In curation it is the work being considered for inclusion. In animal ethics it is the practice, product, or system being evaluated. In editorial work it is the submission. In hiring it is the candidate's evidence.

The test: could a stakeholder outside the domain, given access to this material, produce a description of it that the domain's practitioners would recognise as fair and useful, even if incomplete? If yes, the language work is well-identified. If no, the variant needs to do more work on what the domain's language layer actually holds.

2. What is the judgement work in this domain?

Identify the verdicts being issued. What does the domain have to decide? What are the outcomes that close a case? In a studio this is assessment against learning outcomes. In curation it is inclusion, exclusion, positioning. In animal ethics it is whether a practice is ethically acceptable under a rights framework. In editorial it is publish / revise / reject. In hiring it is the decision on the candidate.

The test: can the verdicts be named without naming the evidence for them? If they can be named — if "we issue the following kinds of verdicts" can be said without immediately slipping into "because of what we observed" — then the judgement layer is visible as a distinct layer. If the two cannot be separated even in the naming, the collapse is already so advanced that the variant is itself an intervention.

3. Where are the two collapsing in the domain's current practice?

This is the heart of the variant. Describe, with concrete examples, how the language layer and the judgement layer are currently fused in the domain's typical practice. What phrases carry the fusion? What forms enable it? What institutional arrangements reward it?

The concrete examples matter. "Welfare" in animal ethics is a fusion phrase. "Strong piece" in critique is a fusion phrase. "Promising candidate" in hiring is a fusion phrase. Each phrase does evaluative work under cover of descriptive work, which is why the fusion is hard to see: the evaluation has already happened by the time the description is being offered.

4. What is the empirical cost of the collapse?

Name what the domain loses when the two are fused. The cost must be specific to the domain, not a generic cost. In editorial work the cost is author calibration. In curation the

cost is audience re-entry. In animal ethics the cost is that rights violations pass as welfare questions. In hiring the cost is that candidates cannot learn from rejection. In a studio the cost is that students cannot learn what is being taught.

The cost must be a cost the domain itself acknowledges when pressed, even if the collapse is normalised in daily practice. A variant that names a cost the domain would deny is making a claim the domain does not share, which is legitimate but should be noted.

5. What does the separation look like in this domain?

Describe what the three layers would be, on the domain's own terms. Not Stage 1 / Stage 2 / Stage 3 in software language. In the domain's language: what is the descriptive artefact? What is the explicit criterion? What is the narration of the verdict? The five deliverables from `./process.md` (Domain Map, Language Instrument, Rubric, Narration Mechanism, Audit Protocol) are the underlying scaffolding, but a good variant expresses them in domain-native form before naming them in process-native form.

6. What is the relationship between this variant and existing Koher tools, writings, partnerships, or artworks?

Every variant has a landing in Koher's existing output. It may have an associated tool, a published position, a partnership, an artwork, a grant, or a conversation log. The variant names these relationships — not to justify itself, but to place itself in the practice. If a variant has no such landing yet, the variant is an invitation to build one; that status should be named explicitly.

7. What is the deeper philosophical underpinning the variant draws on, if any?

Some domains carry philosophical commitments that ground why the SDC move matters at all in that domain. In animal ethics, the argument in `worth-is-not-hierarchical.md` grounds the rights / welfare distinction structurally. In pedagogy, Freire's distinction between banking and problem-posing education grounds the rubric / critique distinction. In curation, the refusal of the tastemaker grounds the description /

thesis distinction. Where such a grounding exists, the variant names it. Where no such grounding is available, the variant is honest about working from the SDC principle alone.

The variant document structure

Once the seven questions have been answered, the variant is written in a structure that renders those answers visible to the domain. The structure is not rigid; domains carry their own conventions. The suggested skeleton below has worked well for the animal-rights variant and is offered as a starting template, not a mandate.

1. **Opening:** a paragraph that names the domain and the collapse it faces, concretely. The opening should be legible to a practitioner without any SDC vocabulary.
2. **The language work:** what the domain attends to, described in the domain's terms.
3. **The judgement work:** what the domain decides, described in the domain's terms.
4. **The collapse, with examples:** the concrete fusion that SDC identifies in this domain.
5. **The cost:** what is lost when the collapse is accepted as normal.
6. **The separation:** what the three layers would be, in the domain's language.
7. **Philosophical grounding, if any:** the deeper argument the variant rests on.
8. **Relationship to Koher output:** tools, writings, partnerships, artworks, grants.
9. **Closing:** a paragraph about what the variant makes possible.

The document is typically 2,000–4,000 words. Shorter is possible if the domain is narrow. Longer risks becoming a generic treatise on SDC and losing the domain's specificity.

Validating a variant

A variant is valid if it passes four tests.

The recognition test. A practitioner in the domain, reading the variant, recognises their own practice in it. The practitioner need not agree with the variant's argument. The practitioner need only recognise that the variant is talking about the practice they actually do, not a caricature or an outside projection.

The specificity test. The variant could not be written about a different domain with only the nouns changed. If the argument would hold with "studio" replaced by "editorial" and the concrete examples swapped, the variant has not yet reached the domain's own grain.

The cost test. The variant names a cost that the domain itself acknowledges, at least when pressed. If the cost is one the domain would not recognise as a cost, the variant is making a claim from outside the domain, which should be flagged.

The stake test. Koher has genuine stake in the variant's domain — professional, lived, ethical, or intellectual (see `interests.md`). A variant in a domain where Prayas has no stake is outside the scope of the practice. Variants in stake-rich domains are candidates for tools, artworks, partnerships, or grants; variants outside the stake range may be written as intellectual exercises but should not be framed as Koher positions.

The current list of variants

Variants move through three stages: *proposed* (named only, no development yet), *noted* (argument sketched as a pre-variant note in `notes/`), and *drafted* (full variant document in this folder). Archived variants live in `../archive/`.

Drafted variants (full documents in this folder)

Variant	File	Associated Koher output
Animal rights and veganism	<code>animal-rights-and-veganism.md</code>	animalRightsLens; Open Paws partnership; SFF Thematic submission; <code>worth-is-not-hierarchical.md</code>
User research in design	<code>user-research-in-design.md</code>	Prayas's teaching across NID / IIT GN / CEPT / Srishti / Anant; studioMeetingCompanion's

		gated onboarding; Suchman / Geertz / grounded theory
Urban planning and EIA	urban-planning-and-eia.md	CEPT teaching history; Ahmedabad context; The Murmur Engine as political sibling; Scott / Guha / Lefebvre / Jacobs
Psychiatric diagnosis and the DSM	psychiatric-diagnosis-and-the-dsm.md	Maté archive; worth-is-not-hierarchical.md extended inward; Laing / Foucault
Curation	curation.md	Museum of Vestigial Desire (2012–2021) as nine-year worked example; <i>Growing Down, Of Games</i> at Khoj, <i>I Am Present, The Murmur Engine</i> ; ../movd.md (index), ../movd-as-precursor.md (anthology); Hume / Moore / Groys / O'Doherty
Data work in India	data-work-in-india.md	Karya adjacency; Fairwork India framework; ../notes/embodied-data-capture-domain.md (fifth-tier origin notes); April 2026 concept note on the Indian data industry; Polanyi / worth-is-not-hierarchical.md

Noted variants (argument sketched in `notes/` ; full variant not yet drafted)

Variant	Note	Why it is noted rather than proposed
Vocabulary of innovation	notes/vocabulary-of-innovation.md	Hype Studies teaching at Anant is the standing infrastructure for this argument; Koher's own brand refusals already instantiate the position; full variant awaits a writing venue or a course cycle

Proposed variants (named, not yet developed)

Variant	Associated Koher output or stake
Editorial work	(none yet)
Public art	<i>The Murmur Engine</i> ; FICA submission
Hiring / admissions	(none yet; intellectual variant only)
Research evaluation (peer review)	(none yet; intellectual variant only)
The practice itself (Level 1 / Level 2)	<code>positions-source/level-1-living-practice.md</code> (partially drafted there)
Medical diagnosis and clinical consultation	Intellectual (post-Maté); stake is philosophical, not clinical
News journalism and reporting	Hype Studies teaching at Anant
AI alignment / safety evaluation	Koher's XAI / legibility work is already this variant in practice
Content moderation at platform scale	Technology ethics teaching; AI governance
Intelligence analysis and threat assessment	<code>memory/project_iran_war_ai_sycophancy_event.md</code> (Operation Epic Fury as instance)
Film and book criticism	Artistic practice; hype-studies pedagogy; curatorial lineage

Therapy and counselling traditions	Maté archive; sibling of the psychiatric-diagnosis variant
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Archived variants

Variant	File	Reason
Design studio pedagogy	<code>../archive/design-studio-pedagogy.md</code>	Archived 16 April 2026

Lifecycle

Each variant is drafted when the domain has accumulated enough specific material to pass the four validation tests above. Writing a variant prematurely — before the domain has been walked — produces a generic restatement of `../sdc.md` with the nouns changed, which is the failure the specificity test is designed to catch. A *noted* variant is the recommended intermediate stage for domains where the argument is clear but the material or the teaching infrastructure is not yet ready for a full document. When a note is developed into a full variant, the note either stays in `notes/` as the origin record, or is deleted once its content has been absorbed.

How this frame relates to the SDC Process

`../process.md` specifies the *operational methodology* for applying SDC to a domain (diagnosis, separation design, instrument build, interface and audit, commissioning). That document describes what to *do* — the five phases, the five deliverables, the five-phase progression.

This document (`variants/README.md`) specifies the *interpretive methodology* for describing SDC in a domain. It describes what to *write* — the seven questions, the structural skeleton, the four validation tests.

The two are paired. The process takes a domain through a build; the variant describes the domain conceptually. A thorough engagement with a domain typically produces both: a variant that names the domain's collapse and what separation looks like, and a process output that produces the actual artefacts. A variant without a process may be published as a conceptual contribution. A process without a variant usually means the conceptual work is still tacit and has not been written down.

Version 1.0 — 16 April 2026. Read `../sdc.md` first. Then `../principle-not-pattern.md`. Then `../process.md`. Then this document. Then begin the variant.