

living with it

A companion to the
Configurations of Appearance trilogy

Ton Haarmans



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living with it

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Colophon

Living with it. A companion to the Configurations of Appearance trilogy

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Contents

PART I Orientation **8**

Introduction 9
The Diorama 10
No view from nowhere 12
Without ground 13
Anarchism 14
Hierarchism 15
Reality 16
Philosophy 17
Intermezzo I: The college years 18
Intermezzo II: Sannyas or suicide 18
Love is not a subject 19

PART II Configurations **20**

Introduction 21
The Boundary of Experience 22
The World as Construction 24
Experience and Interpretation 26
Mindsets All the Way Down 27
Belief 29
Knowledge 30
Consciousness 31

Distinction 32
Rhizome 33
Hybrid and Virtual Mindsets 34
Agency 34

PART III Dioramas 36
Introduction 37
The Conventional World 38
The Scientific World 43
The Therapeutic World 49
The Hyper-Attuned World 55
The Spiritual World 60
The Non-dual World 67
The Early World 72
The Virtual World 76
The Dreaming World 83
Transitions 88

PART IV Edges 92
Introduction 93
Emptiness as Transparency 95
Darkness as Non-Orientation 97
Death 100

PART V Living With It 104

Introduction 105
Consequences Without Hierarchy 106
Working Worlds 107
Ethics Without Foundations 110
Writing as Construction 114
Why This Is Not Relativism 117
A Practice of Attention 120
Notes From the Workshop 123

Glossary **127**

PART I
Orientation

Clearing the ground

Introduction

Every book quietly suggests a direction.

Some move upward, toward deeper truths. Others move forward, building an argument step by step. Still others promise development, progress, a path that leads from confusion to clarity.

This book does none of that.

It does not climb. It does not descend. It does not try to replace one worldview with a better one. There is no foundation waiting at the bottom and no summit waiting at the top. Instead, everything remains on the same plane.

What we call "reality" is not arranged in levels but in configurations. Not higher and lower, but different. The world does not deepen as we think harder about it. It rearranges itself.

A scientific explanation does not stand above everyday perception. A spiritual insight does not penetrate beneath ordinary life. A dream is not less real while it lasts than waking experience. Each is simply a way in which experience coheres for a while and calls itself the world.

We are used to ranking such ways of seeing. We speak of primitive and advanced, naïve and mature, illusion and truth. Yet these rankings often hide more than they reveal. They suggest a ladder where there may only be a

landscape.

This opening section loosens that reflex. It does not aim at a final standpoint or a view from nowhere. It does not promise bedrock or certainty. It simply slows the movement of thought long enough to notice how many worlds already appear here.

Nothing here is an arrival point.

Think of it as a small adjustment of posture. Instead of digging down for foundations or climbing upward toward conclusions, we remain where we are and look more carefully.

Not above.

Not beneath.

Just here.

The Diorama

When I was a child, we sometimes turned shoeboxes into small worlds. We cut a hole in one side, glued bits of paper and fabric inside, drew a horizon at the back, arranged trees, houses, figures. Nothing sophisticated. Cardboard, glue, scissors.

Yet the moment you looked through the opening something curious happened. The box ceased to be an object and became a space. Not a picture but a scene,

with depth and distance, with foreground and background. For as long as you were looking, you were no longer standing outside it. You were in it.

Only when you pulled your head back did it return to being cardboard.

At the time this felt like a simple visual trick. Much later it began to feel like something else entirely, like a quiet metaphor for the way experience itself works. A world, I slowly came to suspect, is not something that simply exists "out there," waiting to be inspected. It forms together with the act of looking. It is not a container we enter, but a configuration that arises with the one who seems to inhabit it.

What appears as a world already includes orientation. A here and a there, near and far, relevant and irrelevant. It already includes a point from which things make sense. The idea that we could step back from all this and survey it from the outside begins to look increasingly strange. Step back from what, exactly? And from where?

Leaving one diorama never takes you outside all dioramas. It merely places you in another. The table, the room, the house, the street, the sky. Each time what we call "outside" turns out to be just a larger scene with its own frame and its own logic.

The hope that somewhere there might be a final vantage point begins to resemble a childhood fantasy.

Even these pages are nothing more than another small

construction, another box with an opening, inviting you to look through it for a while.

No view from nowhere

Philosophy, science, and religion have each, in their own way, been tempted by the same dream: that somewhere there might exist a view from nowhere. A neutral standpoint from which reality could finally be described as it truly is, free from perspective, free from distortion, free from the accidents of history and embodiment.

It is an understandable desire. Conflicting perspectives are tiring. The promise of a final court of appeal is comforting.

And yet the promise carries an impossible demand.

For any view to be a view at all, something must already matter. Something must stand out against something else. There must be distinctions, orientations, a background of taken-for-granted assumptions that make seeing possible in the first place. Remove these conditions and nothing remains visible. A view without a viewpoint is not a purer view. It is no view at all.

Whenever an account claims to speak from nowhere, it quietly installs another somewhere and calls it universal. What presents itself as neutrality turns out to be simply another configuration of experience, one that has forgotten its own origins.

This does not reduce everything to arbitrariness. Some descriptions are more coherent, more stable, more useful than others. Worlds are not interchangeable. But none of them step outside the field they describe.

Every account belongs somewhere.

Including this one.

To accept that there is no view from nowhere is not to give up on clarity. It is simply to speak from within the scene rather than pretending to hover above it.

Without ground

Closely related to the dream of neutrality is another, even older reflex: the search for a ground. If things appear unstable or contingent, we instinctively assume that something more fundamental must lie beneath them. A foundation. A first cause. A basic substance. Something that explains everything else without itself needing explanation.

The gesture runs deep. Physics looks for elementary particles or forces. Philosophy searches for ultimate principles. Religion speaks of a creator or source. In each case we imagine that somewhere, beneath appearances, something must finally be in charge.

But the more closely one looks, the more peculiar this demand becomes.

Any ground we manage to point to already appears within the world it is supposed to support. It shows up as an idea, a theory, a model, a belief. It is encountered as something among other things. If it appears, it is not outside. And if it does not appear at all, it explains nothing.

The result is an endless regress. Each foundation demands a deeper one. The search never reaches bedrock.

Perhaps this is not a failure but a clue. Perhaps worlds do not hold because they rest on something deeper. Perhaps they hold because their patterns repeat, because habits reinforce themselves, because coherence sustains itself long enough to feel inevitable.

Groundlessness, then, is not chaos. It is simply the absence of ultimate justification.

The world functions perfectly well without a final anchor.

Nothing has been lost. Only a certain kind of reassurance has faded.

Anarchism

Seen from this angle, the absence of foundations is less a philosophical position than a simple recognition. The word "anarchism" may sound dramatic, but here it names something very quiet: the fact that no principle

ultimately rules the whole.

Order appears. Laws operate. Meanings stabilize. Yet none of them carry absolute authority. They function without warrant.

This is not a call for chaos. On the contrary, it describes the condition under which order already exists. Structures form, persist, and dissolve without a final explanation securing them from outside.

Nothing grants permission. Nothing guarantees success.

Things happen anyway.

Hierarchism

Even when foundations disappear, another habit tends to persist. The mind ranks. It arranges differences vertically: higher and lower, deeper and more superficial, closer to truth and further away. Experience becomes a staircase.

This image is seductive because it offers direction. It promises progress. It suggests that somewhere there must be a summit from which everything finally makes sense.

But once we look carefully, the ladder begins to wobble.

A shift in experience may feel more open or more intense. Yet intensity is not evidence of metaphysical depth. A configuration is not closer to truth simply

because it feels special. It is only different.

When the ladder disappears, nothing collapses. The world does not flatten into indifference. What remains is more like a landscape: a field of variations without a summit, without a final point of arrival.

Differences remain, but without vertical order.

Different, not higher.

Reality

Each morning the world quietly assembles itself again. The dark room, the body, familiar sounds, daylight slipping under the blinds. Everything returns with an air of obviousness.

This is real, we say, as if the word settled the matter.

But "real" here does not mean ultimate or absolute. It means stable enough to live in. Reliable enough to act within. Real enough to matter.

Whatever reality may ultimately be, we never encounter it outside experience. Every scientific model, every spiritual interpretation, every philosophical account appears within the very field it tries to explain. We cannot step outside experience to validate experience from the outside.

Reality is what holds here and now under these

conditions.

Real enough to bruise your shin.

Real enough to feed the dog.

Real enough to love and to lose.

Nothing more is required.

Philosophy

I did not always think this way. When I began studying philosophy, I was looking for something far more solid. A framework in which everything could take its place. A coherent picture that would finally make sense of the world, the self, and knowledge itself.

For years I moved from one theory to another, convinced that the right combination of concepts would eventually deliver certainty.

What slowly became visible instead was something more modest. Not the truth about the world, but the way worlds take shape at all. Not foundations, but configurations. Not certainty, but the mechanics of how certainty arises.

Since then philosophy has changed its role for me. It is no longer the construction of systems. It is the careful observation of how systems appear, stabilize, and dissolve.

Less architecture, more weather.

Intermezzo I: The college years

In 1975 I began studying philosophy at the University of Amsterdam. I remember the quiet conviction that this would bring me closer to something fundamental. I attended every lecture, read obsessively, and treated thinking as a serious attempt to get a grip on existence.

What I found were better questions, not answers.

No foundation revealed itself. At the time this felt disappointing, almost like a personal failure. Only later did I see that this absence was not a defect but a clue.

The ground I was searching for was never going to appear.

Intermezzo II: Sannyas or suicide

The search continued elsewhere. For years I looked for someone who already knew, a master who had reached a final state and could show me the way. Communes, retreats, therapies, moments of intensity that seemed to promise a breakthrough. Again and again it felt like this is it. And again and again it faded.

I thought I was not trying hard enough.

Only much later did something simpler become obvious. Experiences disappear because that is what experiences

do. Nothing stays.

The idea of a permanent solution was the problem.

When that idea collapsed, nothing spectacular replaced it.

What remained was simply this moment, ordinary and immediate, without a summit to reach.

Love is not a subject

Lately even the search itself has grown quiet. The grand questions no longer pull the way they used to. What remains is close and ordinary: breathing, dishes, someone moving in the kitchen, dogs asleep, the rhythm of days.

When I try to approach love as a topic, nothing happens. There is no distance from which to observe it. Curiosity needs a gap. Love closes it.

It is not something to analyze but something that quietly carries life along.

Perhaps this book, too, is only another small diorama, a temporary way of arranging what appears.

Something to look through for a while, and then to put down again.

PART II
Configurations

How worlds take shape

Introduction

Once the urge for foundations begins to relax, another possibility opens.

Instead of asking what the world ultimately is, we can ask a quieter question: how does it take shape at all?

Experience never appears raw or neutral. It is always already organized. Certain things stand out, others recede. Some patterns feel obvious, others invisible. Meaning gathers here rather than there. The same situation can be lived in entirely different ways depending on how it is framed.

These framings are what this part calls configurations.

They are not theories about reality but ways reality becomes structured in practice. Habits of attention. Implicit assumptions. Linguistic patterns. Cultural inheritances. Cognitive shortcuts. Each quietly edits the field of experience, highlighting some elements and muting others.

Most of the time we do not notice these edits. The configuration we inhabit simply feels like "the world."

The chapters that follow slow this process down. They do not introduce new doctrines or argue for particular beliefs. They look instead at the mechanics by which a world comes to seem self-evident.

Perception.

Language.

Meaning.

Belief.

Identity.

Memory.

Body.

Culture.

Each can be seen not merely as content within the world, but as part of the way the world is assembled.

If Part I cleared the ground, Part II sketches the machinery.

Not yet walking through worlds, but watching how worlds are built.

The Boundary of Experience

Every inquiry begins somewhere, though we rarely notice where that beginning lies. We tend to imagine that we are looking outward at a world that simply presents itself, as if reality were already finished and we merely had to inspect it carefully enough.

But whatever we speak about, question, doubt, or affirm

shows up within experience.

Not outside it.

Not behind it.

Within it.

This sounds trivial at first. Of course everything appears in experience. Where else would it appear?

Yet the consequences are less innocent than they seem.

We cannot step outside experience to verify experience. We cannot compare appearance with a reality that does not itself appear. Any "outside" we try to describe immediately becomes another appearance, another element within the same field.

Whatever we call "matter," "mind," "God," or "the universe" shows up only in this way: as something experienced, thought, or imagined.

The supposed outside quietly turns into another inside.

This boundary is not a line we can reach or cross. It is structural. Experience has no observable exterior because any exterior we describe already belongs to it.

We are not standing in front of experience, trying to get behind it. We are always already in the middle of it.

The task therefore shifts. Instead of asking what lies

beyond appearances, we begin to ask how appearances organize themselves.

The boundary does not imprison us. It simply defines the only terrain we have ever had.

And that terrain turns out to be rich enough.

The World as Construction

If there is no position outside experience from which the world can be surveyed as a finished whole, then the world cannot simply be given.

Something more active must be happening.

"Construction" can sound deliberate, as if a small engineer inside the head were assembling reality piece by piece. That is not what is meant. The construction of a world is not a project we carry out consciously. It is an ongoing process through which perception, memory, language, and expectation cooperate to produce a coherent field.

What we encounter as "the world" is the result of this organization.

Seeing a room feels immediate and complete. Walls, furniture, light, depth. Yet the eyes sample fragments. The brain fills gaps, predicts continuity, stabilizes movement, suppresses inconsistencies. Colors are corrected, blind spots covered, edges enhanced. What appears as solid

presence is already interpretation.

We do not first see and then interpret.

Seeing is interpretation.

The same holds for memory. We imagine it as storage, yet each recollection is reconstructed in the present. The past is not replayed but rebuilt, shaped by current concerns and available language. Continuity is something we actively maintain.

Language adds another layer. The moment we name something, we carve distinctions into the field: tree, sky, body, thought. Naming does not merely label pre-existing units. It helps create them. It stabilizes certain differences and lets others fade.

Gradually, through countless small operations like these, a stable environment emerges. Objects seem to persist. Causes seem to connect. A self seems to occupy the center.

The construction disappears from view, and the result feels obvious.

This forgetfulness is necessary. If we had to assemble the scene consciously each moment, we would never act. The world needs to feel immediate.

Yet once we look more carefully, the seams show. Expectations shape what we see. Cultures carve the world differently. Technologies create entirely new

environments that soon feel natural.

The solidity of reality begins to look less like a given and more like a set of habits.

Construction does not mean fabrication. It means constraint. Bodies, environments, and histories limit what can appear and how. A world is not invented at will. It is negotiated.

Perhaps it is better understood as an interface: an adaptive surface that allows a form of life to move effectively. What matters is not metaphysical accuracy but viability.

Does it work?

Can we navigate, cooperate, survive?

If so, it stabilizes and becomes what we call reality.

Experience and Interpretation

If the world is continuously composed, then interpretation is not an extra layer added afterwards. It is there from the start.

Perception does not passively receive data. It predicts, filters, selects. The nervous system constantly guesses what is happening and corrects itself when it is wrong. What we call "seeing" is the end result of this activity.

Memory, too, interprets. It reconstructs rather than preserves. Identity depends on these reconstructions, yet we rarely notice how fragile they are.

Emotion participates as well. Fear highlights threats. Desire highlights possibilities. Boredom flattens the field. Joy brightens it. Each mood reorganizes what stands out and what recedes.

What appears is never just "data." It is already meaningful.

To perceive something as a chair is already to understand it as something to sit on. To see a face is already to read intention. Interpretation is not a second step. It is the structure of experience itself.

The body anchors all of this. We do not observe the world from nowhere. We inhabit it from somewhere. Our size, posture, needs, and vulnerabilities shape what can appear. Space is calibrated to action before it becomes geometry.

Gradually a stable environment forms. A center emerges that we call "me." Around it a story gathers.

Experience is interpretation all the way down.

Mindsets All the Way Down

If interpretation operates at every level, then what we call a world cannot be uniform. Different patterns of

interpretation will produce different worlds, even within the same physical surroundings.

This is where the notion of a mindset becomes useful.

A mindset is not a conscious opinion. It is the background configuration that determines what counts as real, relevant, or even thinkable. It shapes perception and language before reflection begins.

Most of the time we do not notice it. It simply feels like the way things are.

Within a scientific mindset, the world appears measurable and lawful. Within a religious mindset, meaningful and purposeful. Within a therapeutic mindset, organized around trauma and healing. Within an economic mindset, around value and exchange.

Each highlights certain aspects of experience while muting others. Each establishes its own standards of evidence and coherence.

These are not merely different interpretations of the same world. They participate in shaping the world itself.

Two people can stand in the same room and inhabit subtly different realities.

This does not mean that anything goes. Mindsets are constrained by bodies and environments. Yet within those constraints there is considerable variation.

There is no ultimate configuration that stands outside all the others.

It is mindsets all the way down.

Belief

Belief marks the moment interpretation hardens.

Up to this point we have been describing experience as fluid. Belief is where it begins to feel necessary.

Most beliefs do not operate at the level of conscious decision. They function quietly as background certainties. The floor will hold. Other people exist. The past happened. Without such assumptions, action would stall.

Belief enables life.

But it also closes the field.

To believe something strongly is to reduce ambiguity. Certain interpretations are reinforced while others disappear from view. The world coagulates around expectations.

At that point belief no longer feels like an interpretation. It feels like reality itself.

We do not notice the stance through which we see.

Beliefs dissolve, reform, migrate. Worlds loosen and

tighten.

Belief is simply how a configuration stays together.

Knowledge

Knowledge is belief under discipline.

Science does not eliminate interpretation. It organizes it. It introduces procedures that reduce individual bias and allow many observers to coordinate their perspectives. Measurements are standardized. Experiments repeatable. Claims publicly testable.

Objectivity is not a view from nowhere. It is a social achievement.

Models work not because they reveal ultimate reality but because they generate reliable expectations. Bridges stand. Vaccines work. Spacecraft navigate.

Success requires adequacy, not metaphysical certainty.

Like maps, theories are interfaces. They help us move. When they fail, they are revised.

This provisionality is a strength. Knowledge institutionalizes doubt. It remains open to correction.

It does not escape experience. It operates carefully within it.

Knowledge, too, is simply another way the world holds together.

Consciousness

Few words carry as much weight as "consciousness." We treat it as a thing, a container in which experience occurs.

Yet when we look closely, we never encounter consciousness apart from experience itself. We find sounds, colors, sensations, thoughts. But nowhere do we encounter something extra called consciousness.

We never perceive consciousness in addition to what appears.

Perhaps the word names nothing more than the fact that something appears at all.

Not a substance.

Not a container.

Simply appearing.

The puzzles arise when we imagine two separate realms, mind and matter, and then wonder how they connect. But both "mind" and "brain" show up within the same field of experience. They are two ways of describing what appears, not two different kinds of stuff.

Neuroscience remains useful. It reveals correlations and regularities. But its models, too, are appearances within the same field.

The need for metaphysical explanations begins to fade.

There is simply this ongoing presentation of a world.

And that is enough.

Distinction

For anything to appear as anything, a difference must be drawn.

This rather than that. Figure rather than background.

Without distinction there would be no form, no object, no world in any recognizable sense.

Language, perception, and thought all operate by drawing such lines. Each distinction highlights something and leaves something else unmarked. From these simple cuts an entire reality grows.

But distinctions are tools, not revelations. Different cultures, disciplines, and practices draw different lines and therefore inhabit slightly different worlds.

A world is nothing more than a relatively stable network of distinctions that has proven workable.

It holds together for a while.

That is enough.

Rhizome

Once distinctions multiply, they rarely arrange themselves into neat hierarchies. Although we often picture knowledge as a tree with roots and branches, lived reality looks more tangled.

Connections form sideways as often as downward. Influences loop back on themselves. Causes become effects.

A better image is a rhizome: a spreading network without a single root or foundation. Any point can connect to any other. Patterns stabilize locally and then shift again.

Languages, cultures, identities, even sciences develop this way. They grow through crossings and borrowings rather than from a single origin.

Worlds overlap and interpenetrate.

There is no final base to which everything can be reduced.

Instead of digging down for foundations, we move sideways, tracing connections.

Hybrid and Virtual Mindsets

If configurations are flexible, they can overlap and combine.

We already live in such hybrids. A courtroom, a hospital, a classroom—each installs a temporary world with its own language and rules. Entering them means entering a different mindset.

Technology makes this even clearer. Digital environments and simulations create convincing spaces that we inhabit almost instantly. Change the inputs and expectations, and another world stabilizes.

Virtual realities dramatize something that is always true: worlds are assembled.

Even without headsets we constantly move between configurations—work, family, online space, memory, imagination. Boundaries blur.

These hybrids are not less real. If they function, if they support action and meaning, they count as worlds.

Reality is not a monolith but a patchwork.

Agency

With all this talk of processes, another intuition wavers: the idea of a central self directing everything.

We assume that somewhere inside there must be a controller who decides and initiates action. Yet when we look closely, actions simply occur. Thoughts arise. Movements happen. The sense of authorship appears alongside them.

The supposed inner commander never shows up directly.

Perhaps agency is not a cause but an interpretation. Perhaps the "I" is a narrative center around which events are organized, a useful fiction that provides continuity and responsibility.

Life continues to function perfectly well. Decisions are made. Consequences matter.

The difference lies only in the story we tell.

Instead of a sovereign self standing outside the process, we find another pattern within it.

Agency is simply one more way a world holds together.

And with that, the circle closes. The one who seemed to stand apart from the world turns out to belong to it after all.

PART III
Dioramas

Worlds from the inside

Introduction

So far we have spoken at a distance.

We flattened hierarchies. We analyzed structures. We examined the mechanisms by which experience organizes itself. Useful work, perhaps, but abstract.

This part does something different.

Instead of talking about worlds, it steps into them.

Each chapter that follows is written from the inside of a particular configuration. Not as an argument, not as an explanation, but as a description of how things look and feel when that configuration quietly takes over. The aim is not to convince but to show.

To let a world appear.

A diorama is a small constructed scene that, when viewed from the right angle, feels complete. A landscape in miniature. A self-contained environment. You do not analyze it first. You simply look, and for a moment you are inside it.

The texts in this section function in that way.

They are not definitions of mindsets. They are not typologies. They are not psychological categories. They are lived worlds: the ordinary day, the scientific gaze, the therapeutic lens, the spiritual search, the non-dual collapse, the virtual environment, the dream, the early

immediacy of childhood, and the quiet shifts between them.

While reading, it helps to suspend the impulse to evaluate. Not to ask which is correct or superior. Each world feels complete from within itself. Each has its own logic, its own values, its own sense of what is real.

The point is not to choose one.

The point is to notice how many there already are.

And how easily we move among them.

The Conventional World

There is a world we rarely notice precisely because it never presents itself as a world. It does not announce itself as a perspective or a framework, let alone as a mindset. It appears simply as reality itself, as the neutral background against which everything else takes place. We do not feel that we enter it each morning. We simply wake up inside it, as if nothing else were possible.

The day begins without ceremony. There is the faint light along the curtain, the weight of the body returning, the quiet recognition of the room. Almost immediately memory settles back into place and with it an entire network of assumptions: who I am, where I live, what today will probably require of me. None of this feels constructed or chosen. It feels given. The room is my room, the house my house, the life already in progress

before any thought about it has formed.

I get up, make coffee, open a window. Outside, the street looks exactly as it did yesterday. A neighbor walks past with a bag of groceries. A car starts somewhere further down the road. A door closes. Nothing about this scene asks to be interpreted. Everything already makes sense. The ordinariness is so complete that it becomes invisible, and that invisibility is precisely what gives this world its peculiar authority. It does not need to justify itself. It simply functions.

In this conventional world, things have stable identities and predictable roles. A chair is something to sit on, a cup something to drink from, money something that counts. Objects rarely surprise us. They behave well enough that we stop noticing them as appearances and begin treating them as facts. The floor supports our weight, water comes from the tap, messages arrive on the phone, and causes lead to effects with sufficient reliability that life can be planned in advance. Planning itself becomes one of the central activities of the day. Calendars, lists, appointments, small negotiations with the future fill the hours almost automatically. At ten I will be there. Tomorrow I will do this. Next week something must change. Time stretches forward like a straight line, and we move along it as if this linearity were simply the nature of reality.

What is striking is how little reflection is required for all of this. Most actions unfold without any clear moment of decision. The hand reaches for the kettle before a thought has fully formed. Shoes are tied, doors are

locked, messages are answered. Only occasionally do I notice that the movement has already begun before any explicit intention appears. Thought arrives afterwards, quietly adding a story: I decided to make coffee. Yet the decision itself is difficult to locate. Things simply happen, and the narrative of authorship follows a fraction of a second later, stitching the sequence together. Still, within this framework everything is attributed to a stable center called "me," and that attribution is enough to keep the day coherent.

The same quiet obviousness governs what counts as important. Work matters. Health matters. Money matters. News matters. These priorities rarely appear as choices. They feel self-evident, almost natural. We get up because there is work to do, and we work because that is what one does. The circularity rarely becomes visible. The conventional world sustains itself through shared assumptions that no one remembers adopting. Because everyone treats certain things as real and necessary, they become real and necessary in practice. Bank accounts, deadlines, traffic lights, contracts—none of these are natural objects in the way trees or rivers are, yet they structure our lives just as effectively. Entire days can revolve around numbers on a screen, and no one finds this particularly strange.

Walking through town in the middle of the day, the pattern becomes almost tangible. People move with a similar urgency, faces angled forward, phones in hand, bags over their shoulders. The same gestures repeat everywhere: waiting at crossings, checking the time, entering shops, paying, leaving again. From a slight

distance it looks less like a collection of separate lives and more like a choreography in which everyone already knows the steps. No one stops in the middle of the street to ask what all this is for. The question itself would seem misplaced, almost naïve, because the purpose is already built into the structure. You work in order to live, you live in order to work, you maintain the small machinery of existence, and the cycle continues without demanding any deeper explanation.

Perhaps the most remarkable feature of this world is precisely how invisible it is to itself. Other configurations tend to declare themselves. A scientific worldview speaks explicitly of models and evidence. A spiritual community speaks of awakening or transcendence. A virtual environment announces its artificiality. But the conventional world has no label. It calls itself simply life. That makes it extraordinarily difficult to see as one configuration among others. Only when something breaks—a loss, an illness, a move to another country—do the seams briefly show. Assumptions that once felt unquestionable reveal themselves as contingent. And yet, as soon as stability returns, the questions fade and normality closes over the cracks.

There is something almost comforting about this blindness. Without it, daily functioning would become nearly impossible. If every action required philosophical scrutiny, nothing would get done. The fact that we take so much for granted allows us to act smoothly and efficiently. We do not need to rediscover gravity each morning or renegotiate the meaning of money before buying bread. The conventional mindset is, in this sense,

a practical solution to the problem of living together. It reduces the overwhelming complexity of experience to a manageable set of expectations and routines.

And still, from the perspective of this book, something else becomes visible. The very naturalness of this world should make us cautious. Anything that never appears as a perspective is probably a perspective. Anything that presents itself simply as reality is likely a construction that has forgotten its own history. The conventional world is not the ground of experience. It is simply the most stable and widely shared arrangement we happen to inhabit, a diorama so familiar that we mistake it for the museum itself.

By the time evening arrives, the structure begins to loosen almost imperceptibly. Work ends, shops close, the street grows quieter, and the urgency that carried the day gradually drains away. Sitting at the table, the objects around me lose some of their functional character. The cup is no longer something to drink from, the chair no longer something to sit on. They are simply shapes in a room, present but strangely neutral. For a brief moment the tight web of purposes relaxes, and the world feels lighter, less defined. Then the next morning everything tightens again. The same room, the same tasks, the same unquestioned assumptions reassemble themselves with quiet efficiency.

And once more I wake up inside this familiar construction without noticing that I have entered anything at all.

Perhaps that is what makes it the most convincing diorama of all: the one that never looks like one.

The Scientific World

If the conventional world presents itself as simple reality, the scientific world presents itself as an improvement on that reality. It does not reject the everyday framework, but refines it, questions it, reorganizes it. Where the conventional mindset takes things at face value, the scientific one hesitates. It assumes that what appears is only a surface, and that the real structure of things lies somewhere underneath.

This shift is subtle at first. Nothing dramatic changes. The same streets, the same houses, the same bodies moving through space. And yet the meaning of what is seen begins to slide. Objects are no longer simply what they seem to be. They become cases, instances, examples of more general laws. The world grows slightly more abstract.

A stone is no longer just a stone. It is mass, density, molecular structure.

Light is no longer just brightness. It is wavelength.

Warmth becomes energy transfer.

The sky becomes atmosphere.

The visible world starts to feel like a thin layer stretched

over something more fundamental.

For someone shaped by this mindset, curiosity easily becomes the default attitude. Not the vague curiosity of wondering what will happen next, but a more pointed, analytical kind. How does this work? What causes this? What is it made of? Questions arise almost automatically, not because anything is wrong, but because appearances never seem sufficient.

The given is treated with suspicion.

It is not that the scientific world distrusts experience; rather, it distrusts first impressions. What something looks like is rarely considered the final word. There is always the possibility of hidden mechanisms, deeper explanations, unseen variables. The real story, it is assumed, lies behind the surface.

This creates a characteristic distance.

Where the conventional world moves directly from perception to action, the scientific world inserts an intermediate step: observation. Instead of immediately using things, one studies them, measures them, compares them. The world becomes something to examine before it becomes something to live in.

You see this posture in small everyday gestures. Someone pausing to check the weather forecast instead of simply stepping outside. Someone reading labels, comparing numbers, tracking steps, calories, sleep cycles. Someone opening a device to see how it is assembled,

not out of necessity but out of a desire to understand the mechanism.

There is pleasure in this, a particular satisfaction in seeing how parts fit together, how complexity can be reduced to simpler interactions. The moment something that looked mysterious becomes explainable carries its own quiet reward. Confusion gives way to clarity. The world feels slightly more ordered, more intelligible.

For many people this attitude begins early. As children, we take things apart, not to destroy them but to see what is inside: radios, clocks, toys. We want to know what makes them tick. The gesture is almost instinctive: if something exists, it must have an internal structure. And if it has a structure, that structure can be known.

Later this impulse becomes more disciplined. Instead of dismantling objects physically, we dismantle them conceptually. We learn to separate variables, to isolate causes, to test hypotheses. The world becomes a kind of laboratory in which events are no longer simply happening, but happening for reasons that can, in principle, be uncovered.

Within this diorama, knowledge has a very specific flavor. It is not enough to say that something is the case. One wants evidence. It is not enough to say that something feels true. It must be demonstrable, repeatable, preferably measurable. Personal experience counts less than publicly verifiable results. What cannot be checked by others remains suspect.

This creates a shared space that feels more stable than private impressions. Numbers, graphs, models—these seem to float above individual perspectives. They promise neutrality. Anyone, anywhere, should be able to arrive at the same result if the method is followed correctly. Truth becomes something impersonal, detached from biography.

In this sense, the scientific world is deeply democratic. It does not privilege revelation or authority. It privileges procedure. Follow the steps and you will see what I see. The individual matters less than the method.

At the same time, this impersonal quality subtly reshapes how the world appears. Things lose some of their immediate intimacy. A tree is not primarily shade or texture or smell; it becomes a biological system, a set of processes: photosynthesis, growth rings, cellular structures. The night sky is no longer simply a field of stars; it becomes distances, masses, trajectories, radiation. Even the body can shift from being lived-from-within to being observed-from-without: organs, chemistry, neural signals.

The more one inhabits this mode, the more everything begins to look like a problem to be solved. Why does this fail? What variable did we miss? How can this be optimized? Life itself can start to resemble an engineering project. Health becomes something to monitor and adjust. Productivity something to maximize. Even emotions are sometimes treated as mechanisms that can be regulated or improved.

There is something undeniably powerful in this orientation. It has transformed the material conditions of existence more than any other mindset. Medicines, bridges, satellites, computers—none of these belong to the conventional world. They arise from this persistent refusal to accept appearances as final. The scientific diorama is immensely generative. It builds.

And yet it also has its blind spots.

Because in treating the world primarily as object, it risks overlooking the simple fact that all knowledge still arises within experience. Models grow increasingly sophisticated, but they remain models. Measurements become more precise, but they are still ways of organizing what appears. The scientific world sometimes forgets that it too is a framing, not a view from nowhere.

Inside the diorama, however, this is rarely felt. From within, it simply seems as if one is getting closer and closer to the real structure of reality. Each discovery feels like peeling back another layer. The metaphor of depth becomes almost irresistible: beneath the visible lies the invisible; beneath the macroscopic the microscopic; beneath matter the quantum; beneath the quantum perhaps something else again. The world stretches downward into ever finer explanations.

It is easy to assume that this descent will eventually reach bedrock, that somewhere the ultimate constituents will be found and everything will finally make sense.

Whether or not such a foundation exists is another question. What matters here is the lived feeling: the sense of participating in an endless investigation, of moving toward greater clarity and precision. For someone inhabiting this world, that movement itself becomes meaningful. To understand is to advance. To measure is to gain control. To explain is to reduce uncertainty.

These values shape not only laboratories and universities but daily life. We consult experts, trust statistics, read studies, adjust behavior according to data. The authority of numbers quietly replaces the authority of tradition or intuition. "Research shows" becomes one of the most convincing phrases available.

And yet, in the evening, when the devices are switched off and the calculations pause, the world sometimes softens again. The graphs disappear. The models recede. What remains is simply the room, the air, the body sitting at a table. For a moment the elaborate explanatory machinery is absent, and things return to their ordinary presence.

The scientific frame relaxes, just as the conventional one does.

Nothing has fundamentally changed. The same world is still here. Only the way of looking has shifted.

Seen from a slight distance, the scientific worldview reveals itself not as the final description of reality, but as another carefully constructed diorama: coherent,

powerful, immensely useful, yet still a configuration among others. A particular way the world shows up when observation, measurement, and explanation take priority over everything else.

It does not replace experience.

It rearranges it.

And like all rearrangements, it both reveals and conceals at the same time.

The Therapeutic World

In the conventional world, things simply happen. In the scientific world, things are explained. In the therapeutic world, things mean something.

Events are rarely taken at face value. They are read as signs, symptoms, expressions of something deeper. What matters is no longer only what happens, nor only how it works, but what it says about the inner life.

The center of gravity shifts almost imperceptibly from the outside to the inside.

A conversation is no longer just a conversation. It becomes communication. A conflict is not merely disagreement but a pattern. Fatigue is not simply tiredness but perhaps stress, or repression, or an unmet need. The visible situation is treated as the surface of an invisible story constantly unfolding beneath it.

In this world, the psyche replaces physics as the primary explanatory field.

Instead of asking what caused something in a mechanical sense, one asks what lies behind it emotionally. Instead of looking for laws, one looks for motives. Instead of structure, history.

How did this come to be?

Where does this reaction come from?

What happened earlier that shaped this?

The past grows longer.

Childhood in particular acquires a special density, as if everything happening now must somehow trace back to those early years. Memories are not simply recollections; they are keys. Each one might unlock an explanation for the present.

The self becomes a layered terrain, not a stable entity but a bundle of experiences, wounds, defenses, desires. Words such as "trauma," "conditioning," "attachment," "projection," and "boundary" circulate with quiet authority. They form a vocabulary through which almost anything can be interpreted.

If someone withdraws, it may be fear of intimacy.

If someone speaks loudly, it may be insecurity.

If someone works too much, it may be avoidance.

If someone does too little, it may be depression.

Nothing is simply what it is. Everything points beyond itself.

There is a particular attentiveness that accompanies this way of seeing, a listening not only to what others say, but to what one says oneself. Slips of the tongue, recurring feelings, small tensions in the body—all of these become meaningful data. The interior life is monitored with the same care that the scientific world gives to measurements.

One learns to scan inward.

How do I feel right now?

What is really going on here?

Is this reaction proportional, or is something older being triggered?

These questions are asked not occasionally, but habitually. The psyche becomes a space that must be continually checked and adjusted, like a complex instrument that easily falls out of tune.

Within this diorama, language changes subtly. Ordinary descriptions give way to interpretive ones. Instead of "I'm angry," one might say "I feel triggered." Instead of "we argued," one might say "we fell into an old pattern."

Instead of "I don't like this," one might say "this crosses a boundary."

The vocabulary does not merely describe experience; it shapes it. Once you have learned to speak this way, you begin to perceive through these categories automatically. Life starts to look like an ongoing process of healing and growth.

Growth, in fact, becomes one of the central values.

The self is not assumed to be finished. It is something to work on, to understand more deeply. There is always another layer to uncover, another blockage to release, another insight waiting to be integrated. The present is rarely sufficient as it is; it becomes the starting point for further development.

Books promise transformation. Conversations promise clarity. Therapy promises integration. The future is imagined not only as a sequence of events, but as a more authentic version of oneself.

In this sense, the therapeutic world shares something with the scientific one. Both assume that problems can be addressed through the right method. But where science looks outward to mechanisms, therapy looks inward to narratives. Instead of experiments and measurements, there are sessions and dialogues. Instead of data points, there are stories.

And stories matter immensely.

Telling one's story, retelling it, reframing it, becomes almost a ritual act. What happened is less important than how it is understood. A painful memory can change character entirely depending on the interpretation placed around it. Meaning itself becomes therapeutic. Explanation becomes relief.

To say "now I understand why I am like this" often carries the same quiet satisfaction a scientist feels when an equation finally balances.

Something has fallen into place.

At the same time, this constant self-examination can create its own tension. When everything is interpreted, nothing is simply allowed to be. A bad day is not just a bad day; it must be traced to an underlying cause. A moment of sadness cannot simply pass; it asks to be processed. Even happiness may invite suspicion: is this genuine, or am I avoiding something?

Experience grows thick with significance.

There is very little neutrality left.

The self, which in the conventional world seemed obvious and stable, now appears fragile and complex. It requires care, maintenance, understanding. One must learn to set boundaries, to communicate needs, to recognize patterns. Life becomes a continuous project of emotional management.

And yet, for many, this world feels more honest than the

others. It acknowledges suffering directly. It takes wounds seriously. It allows vulnerability to be spoken rather than hidden. Where the conventional world might say "just get on with it," the therapeutic one says "something here deserves attention." Where the scientific world might reduce experience to mechanisms, this one insists on meaning.

There is real compassion in that insistence.

Seen from a slight distance, however, the therapeutic mindset reveals itself as another configuration among others. It is not simply the truth about the self, but a particular way of organizing experience, one in which interiority becomes the primary lens. Just as the scientific world sees systems everywhere, the therapeutic world sees stories everywhere. Just as science interprets everything in terms of causes and laws, therapy interprets everything in terms of wounds and growth.

Nothing escapes the frame.

Even the desire to step outside the frame can be interpreted as resistance. At that point the world has become almost perfectly self-sealing.

And yet, like every diorama, it too relaxes at times. There are moments when nothing needs to be analyzed, when a feeling is simply a feeling, when a conversation does not hide a deeper layer. Moments when the self is not a project but just a presence. In those moments the elaborate interpretive machinery falls silent, and the

world becomes lighter again.

Then, quietly, the language returns. The stories return. The work of understanding resumes.

And once more one finds oneself inside this particular arrangement, this landscape of meanings and memories, this careful art of tending to the inner life.

Another world.

Coherent. Persuasive. Livable.

And, like the others, not the only one.

The Hyper-Attuned World

In most of the worlds described so far, perception quietly simplifies things. It filters, groups, and summarizes. The conventional world smooths everything into familiar objects. The scientific world abstracts them into models. The therapeutic world translates them into meanings and stories. Even the spiritual world softens appearances into something like stillness or presence.

In each case, something is reduced. Details fall away so that the world becomes manageable.

The hyper-attuned world moves in the opposite direction.

Here, very little falls away.

Instead of filtering, there is amplification. Instead of summary, density. Experience does not arrive as a small number of stable objects, but as a continuous stream of impressions, each one distinct, each one equally present.

The room does not resolve into "a room." It is light on the wall, the faint buzzing of a lamp, the texture of fabric, a distant car, the pressure of the chair, the temperature of the air on the skin. Everything announces itself at once.

Nothing stays in the background.

In the conventional world, attention is selective. Most of what is present simply disappears from awareness. We see "table," not the grain of the wood, the tiny scratches, the slight asymmetry of the legs. We hear "traffic," not the individual engines, tires, echoes.

In the hyper-attuned world that selection weakens.

The grain, the scratches, the asymmetry are all there, equally sharp. The soundscape does not merge into a single hum but remains a field of separate events. Every small change registers. Every movement catches the eye.

Perception has a kind of high resolution.

The result is not clarity in the intellectual sense, but intensity.

Walking down a street can feel like moving through a storm of information. Light flickers from windows,

reflections slide across glass, footsteps overlap with voices and engines and wind. Nothing blends together. Each sound has its own edge. Each color seems slightly brighter than expected.

The body has less room to relax. There is simply too much happening.

In such a world, the familiar categories that usually guide behavior become less reliable. It is harder to focus on "the conversation" when the rustling of clothing, the ticking of a clock, the hum of electricity are just as present as the words being spoken. It is harder to treat a supermarket as neutral when the lights feel harsh, the echoes sharp, the movement of people unpredictable and close.

Ordinary environments can become overwhelming, not because anything is wrong, but because everything is equally vivid.

Nothing politely steps aside.

This changes the rhythm of life in subtle ways. One becomes careful about where to go, when to move, how long to stay. Quiet spaces are not luxuries but necessities. A silent room can feel like relief, like finally being able to breathe. A crowded space can feel almost physical in its pressure.

Not anxiety exactly, but saturation.

At the same time, this density has another side.

What overwhelms can also fascinate.

Details that others pass by unnoticed become endlessly interesting. The play of light on water. The pattern of leaves. The shifting sound of wind through trees. A small object can hold attention for minutes simply because there is so much to see in it. The world is not flat or generic. It is textured everywhere.

Nothing is merely "background."

In this sense, the hyper-attuned world is both richer and less abstract. Things are not quickly absorbed into concepts. A tree is not immediately "a tree." It remains this particular shape, this movement, this arrangement of shadows. Language arrives late, if at all. Perception stays close to what is given.

It is almost the opposite of the scientific mindset. Instead of reducing complexity to a few explanatory variables, complexity remains intact. Instead of seeking patterns, one is confronted with particulars. The world resists summary.

There is also less distance between body and environment. Sounds are not just heard; they are felt. Light is not just seen; it presses. A sudden noise can pass through the whole system like a shock. The boundary between inside and outside grows thin.

The world does not feel like something observed from a safe position. It feels immediate, sometimes too immediate.

Time can change character as well. When attention is pulled in many directions at once, moments stretch. Small intervals become dense. A few minutes in a noisy place can feel much longer than an hour in quiet. Duration seems to follow intensity rather than the clock.

Planning and narrative, which depend on stepping back and summarizing, become more difficult. It is hard to construct a story when experience keeps interrupting with fresh detail. Life happens close to the senses, not at the level of interpretation.

In that sense, the hyper-attuned world is almost pre-conceptual, though not simple like the early world. It is not naïve or open in a childlike way. It is sharp. Too sharp. Instead of an absence of structure, there is an excess of input.

If the conventional world feels like a soft sketch, this one feels like a drawing in ink, every line visible.

Seen from outside, this way of being might be described in psychological or neurological terms. But from within, it is simply how things are. The world is bright, loud, textured, immediate. There is no alternative for comparison. Only later, perhaps, does one realize that others move through the same spaces with far less intensity, as if half the information had been quietly removed.

From the perspective of this book, the hyper-attuned world reveals something important. It shows that what

we call "reality" depends not only on interpretation or belief, but on filtering—on what is allowed through and what is softened or ignored. Change the filtering, and the world itself changes character.

Not metaphorically. Literally.

The same street becomes either manageable or overwhelming. The same room becomes either calm or saturated. The difference lies not in the environment, but in the resolution of perception.

Another configuration.

Another way the world can assemble itself.

Neither more true nor less true than the others.

Just denser.

Closer.

Almost too real.

The Spiritual World

Where the scientific world looks for mechanisms and the therapeutic world looks for stories, the spiritual world looks for depth.

Nothing is taken as merely what it appears to be. Everything gestures beyond itself. The visible is treated as

a surface, sometimes even as a distraction, behind which something more essential is assumed to be waiting. Ordinary life begins to feel provisional, almost secondary, as if it were only a thin layer covering a more fundamental reality.

In this world, the most important things are not objects or events, but states of being.

Awareness. Presence. Consciousness. Energy. Silence.

Words like these carry a peculiar weight. They do not refer to specific things one can point to. They gesture inward, or perhaps nowhere in particular. And yet they begin to structure experience more strongly than any concrete fact.

The day may look exactly the same as before: the same room, the same street, the same body moving through familiar routines. But the interpretation shifts. What matters is no longer primarily what happens, but how it is experienced, and whether that experience feels aligned, awake, authentic.

A small irritation is no longer just an irritation. It becomes unconsciousness, reactivity, ego, a sign that one has fallen out of presence. Conversely, a quiet moment in which everything feels open and effortless is not just pleasant. It becomes meaningful. A glimpse. A confirmation. Something closer to what is sometimes called truth.

The scale of value changes.

Success, money, status begin to feel strangely superficial. Not necessarily wrong, but less real, less important, as if they belonged to a flatter dimension of existence. What counts now are qualities that cannot easily be measured: clarity, stillness, compassion, awakening.

The center of gravity shifts away from doing and toward being.

Instead of asking, "What should I achieve today?" one asks, "How am I here?" Instead of optimizing productivity, one watches the movement of thought. Instead of solving problems, one sits in silence.

Time itself seems to loosen.

In the conventional world, time stretches forward as a line filled with tasks. In the spiritual world, the present moment acquires a special status. The past and future are treated almost as abstractions, mental constructions that pull attention away from what is immediately here. The word "now" stops being a simple temporal marker and becomes something like a doorway.

Be here now.

It sounds simple, almost trivial. And yet within this diorama it functions as a complete orientation. Everything that pulls attention away from the present—planning, remembering, worrying—starts to look like a form of sleep. To be caught in thought is to be absent. To be fully attentive is to be awake.

Awakening becomes the central metaphor.

Life is no longer just life. It is either waking up or remaining asleep.

This changes how even the most ordinary situations are perceived. Washing dishes can become a practice. Walking down the street can become meditation. Breathing can become an object of careful attention. The smallest acts are reinterpreted as opportunities to return to awareness.

Nothing needs to change outwardly for everything to change inwardly.

At the same time, a new vocabulary quietly organizes the world. Words such as "ego," "identification," "conditioning," "letting go," "surrender," "oneness" begin to shape perception. Once learned, they appear everywhere. A defensive reaction becomes ego. A strong preference becomes attachment. A moment of ease becomes flow or grace.

Language does not merely describe experience; it reframes it.

Gradually the sense of being a separate individual can begin to feel questionable. The boundary between "me" and "world," once taken for granted, becomes something to investigate. Is the self really located anywhere? Or is it just a collection of thoughts and sensations appearing in awareness?

Questions that would sound abstract or philosophical elsewhere feel immediate here, almost practical. Who am I? What is this? What remains if I stop believing my thoughts?

The world is treated less as an external environment and more as a field of experience in which everything, including the body and the sense of self, simply appears.

From within this perspective, even suffering changes character. Pain is not only something to eliminate; it is something to observe. Emotions are watched as movements in consciousness. Thoughts are seen as passing clouds. The aim is not necessarily to control what happens, but to cease identifying with it.

Instead of "I am angry," there is anger.

Instead of "I am afraid," there is fear.

A small grammatical shift, but one that alters the whole landscape.

This can bring a certain lightness. If experiences are just appearances, they lose some of their solidity. Problems become less personal. Situations that once felt overwhelming begin to look transient, almost dreamlike. Life is still happening, but it is happening in a wider space.

That space—sometimes called awareness, sometimes simply silence—takes on the character of something more reliable than the events within it. The background feels more trustworthy than the foreground. What

changes is less important than what remains.

In this sense, the spiritual world reverses many of the priorities of the conventional one. Instead of building a stronger identity, one loosens identity. Instead of accumulating, one simplifies. Instead of seeking more stimulation, one seeks quiet. The direction is inward, or perhaps downward, toward something assumed to be more fundamental than personality.

And yet this world, too, has its own patterns and assumptions.

It assumes that depth is better than surface.

That stillness is better than activity.

That awakening is better than ordinary life.

These values feel obvious from within the frame, just as the values of productivity or knowledge feel obvious within other frames. But they are still values. Still orientations. Still ways of organizing what matters.

Even the idea of "transcending the ego" can become another project, another subtle form of striving. One can compare awakenings, measure progress, seek teachers, collect insights. The very attempt to escape structure can quietly solidify into a new structure.

Communities form. Practices are shared. Certain experiences are elevated and others dismissed. A whole culture develops around the promise of freedom.

Seen from a slight distance, the spiritual world reveals itself not as an ultimate truth but as another beautifully coherent diorama: a world in which everything is interpreted through the lens of consciousness and awakening, just as the scientific world interprets everything through mechanisms and the therapeutic world through stories.

Nothing escapes the frame.

Even the statement "there is no frame" belongs to the frame.

And yet, like the others, it remains deeply livable, for many profoundly meaningful. It offers relief from the heaviness of identity and the pressure of constant doing. It opens a sense of space around experience that can feel both intimate and vast.

One can easily spend years here, exploring subtler and subtler layers of attention, convinced that one is moving closer to something absolute.

Perhaps one is.

Or perhaps one is simply inhabiting another configuration in which the world shows up in a particular way.

Another world.

Coherent. Persuasive. Gentle.

And, like all the others, not the only one.

The Non-dual World

After the spiritual world, one might expect something even deeper, more refined, more elevated. Another layer beneath the surface. A more subtle truth waiting behind consciousness or awareness.

The non-dual world moves in the opposite direction.

It removes layers instead of adding them.

It does not offer a deeper explanation, nor a higher state, nor a more authentic version of oneself. It does not promise growth or healing or awakening. In fact, it quietly undermines the entire idea that anything needs to happen at all.

Nothing is missing.

Nothing needs to be fixed.

Nothing leads anywhere.

At first this sounds almost disappointing, even slightly absurd. After all the effort of searching, meditating, understanding, working on oneself, one expects some kind of conclusion. Some transformation. Some special clarity.

Instead there is something strangely ordinary.

Just this.

The room.

The sound of a car passing.

The body sitting in a chair.

Thoughts appearing and disappearing.

Nothing more.

In the spiritual world, these same elements might be interpreted as expressions of awareness or invitations to presence. In the non-dual world, even that interpretation feels excessive. Words like "awareness" or "consciousness" begin to sound too large, too metaphysical, as if they were trying to turn something utterly simple into a concept.

Here, nothing hides behind anything else.

There is no deeper layer.

There is no surface either.

There is simply whatever appears.

If a thought arises, there is a thought.

If a sensation arises, there is a sensation.

If irritation arises, there is irritation.

No one owns it.

No one manages it.

Events are not happening to a self. They are simply happening.

The assumption that there is a central observer, someone inside the body to whom everything belongs, begins to look less convincing. When searched for directly, this "someone" is difficult to locate. There are sensations, memories, expectations, but no clear entity that stands apart from them.

The self turns out to be mostly a story told after the fact, a convenient summary. Life seems to be moving perfectly well without it.

Walking happens.

Speaking happens.

Thinking happens.

The sense of "I am doing this" appears occasionally, like a subtitle added to the film, but the film runs on its own.

From within this perspective, many of the concerns that dominate other worlds lose their urgency. The drive to improve oneself, to understand one's past, to awaken, to transcend, begins to feel slightly theatrical. Not wrong, just unnecessary. Like rearranging furniture in a house that was never owned in the first place.

Nothing needs to be purified.

Nothing needs to be completed.

This is already complete.

There is a peculiar flatness to this world, but not a negative one. It is not dull or lifeless. It is simply unaccented. No experience is more important than another. Washing dishes has the same status as meditation. Waiting at a traffic light has the same status as a moment of insight. Everything is equally ordinary.

Even the idea of "non-duality" feels somewhat misleading, as if it were pointing to something special. From here, there is nothing special at all. The extraordinary claims of spirituality—enlightenment, higher consciousness, ultimate truth—sound like decorations added to what is already perfectly simple.

What remains is almost embarrassingly plain.

Just this color.

This sound.

This movement of breath.

No hidden message.

No path.

No final understanding.

And yet life continues exactly as before. Work gets done. Conversations happen. Bills are paid. The body grows older. Nothing outwardly changes. The difference, if there is one, lies only in the absence of struggle. The constant attempt to get somewhere relaxes.

There is nowhere to go.

This is not a conclusion reached through reasoning. It is more like the quiet collapse of a question that was never necessary to begin with. The search falls away, not because it has succeeded, but because it no longer makes sense.

What would be found that is not already here?

In this sense, the non-dual world is perhaps the most minimal diorama of all. It adds almost nothing. It removes interpretation after interpretation until only the bare fact of appearance remains. Not framed as sacred. Not framed as psychological. Not framed as scientific.

Just unadorned presence.

Not even "presence," perhaps.

Just this.

And strangely, that seems to be enough.

The Early World

Before the world becomes organized by explanations, interpretations, or personal history, there is a simpler way in which things appear.

It is difficult to describe precisely because it is not structured by any clear ideas. There is no framework yet through which everything is filtered. No theory about how life works. No narrative about who one is supposed to be. Experience has not hardened into positions or viewpoints. Things simply happen, and one moves among them.

Looking back, what stands out is not meaning but immediacy.

Light on a wall.

The texture of sand.

The sound of wind in trees.

The weight of the body running.

Not symbols. Not signs of something else. Just what they are.

In this early world, objects are not yet categorized into abstract groups. They are encountered one by one, almost as events. A stone is not an instance of "stone." It is this particular thing, with this shape and this weight. A puddle is not "water on the ground," but something to

step into, to splash, to watch ripple outward.

Everything feels close.

There is very little distance between perception and action. Seeing and touching almost coincide. Curiosity does not take the form of questions but of movement. One does not ask what something is made of or what it means. One picks it up, turns it over, throws it, tastes it. The body investigates directly.

Time, too, behaves differently.

Hours do not stretch forward as a schedule. There is no clear sense of "later" or "next week." There is mostly now, and then another now, and then another. Afternoons can feel endless, not because anything special is happening, but because nothing is measured against anything else. Waiting is not yet a problem. Boredom is brief and quickly dissolves into some new activity.

A hole in the ground can occupy an entire day.

A stick becomes a tool, a weapon, a drawing instrument, without ever needing to be defined. One thing flows into another without clear boundaries. Imagination is not separate from perception. What is seen and what is invented intermingle freely.

A chair might become a ship.

The floor might become a landscape.

A shadow might become a creature.

None of this feels like pretending. It is simply how the situation unfolds. The world is flexible, not yet fixed into rigid categories of real and unreal. Possibility feels close to the surface.

The sense of self is equally loose.

There is a name, of course, and others use it. But inwardly there is little of the ongoing commentary that later becomes constant. Few thoughts about identity, character, future plans. There is no project of becoming someone. There is mostly just doing.

Running. Climbing. Watching. Listening.

Only later does memory stitch these moments together into the story of "me." At the time, there is no such story. There is just participation.

In this sense, the early world is almost pre-psychological. Feelings arise quickly and disappear just as quickly. Anger flares and vanishes. Sadness comes and goes. Joy is immediate and complete. Emotions are not analyzed or interpreted. They do not point to deeper layers. They simply pass through, like weather.

There is little tendency to ask why.

Why am I sad?

Why did this happen?

What does this say about me?

Such questions belong to a later vocabulary. Here, things are more direct. Tears dry. Play resumes. The world resets itself without commentary.

What is also largely absent is the sense that anything must be optimized. There is no self-improvement, no progress to measure, no comparison with others. The idea of becoming better, more successful, more awakened has not yet taken root. Life is not something to manage. It simply unfolds.

Looking back from adulthood, this simplicity can appear almost empty. Nothing much seems to be happening. No great insights, no conclusions, no achievements. And yet, at the time, nothing feels missing. The day fills itself effortlessly. Attention moves from one small detail to another without needing justification.

A patch of sunlight on the floor can be enough.

In that sense, the early world shares something with both the dreaming world and the non-dual one. Like dreams, it does not demand strict coherence. Like the non-dual perspective, it does not center everything around a solid self. But unlike both, it is not recognized as special. It is simply normal. There is no awareness of inhabiting a particular mode of experience.

There is just life, very close to the surface.

Of course this configuration does not disappear

completely. Something of it remains, even later. Certain moments—walking without destination, staring at water, lying in the grass watching clouds—carry the same quality. For a while the heavier frameworks of adulthood loosen, and perception becomes direct again. The world regains a kind of freshness, as if it were being seen for the first time.

Then language returns. Plans return. Interpretation resumes. The more structured worlds quietly reassemble themselves.

From the perspective of this book, the early world is not a paradise to return to, nor a more authentic state. It is simply another way experience can organize itself. Less conceptual. Less mediated. Less concerned with meaning.

A world before explanations.

Light, immediate, almost weightless.

Another diorama, long gone and yet never entirely absent, quietly underlying everything that came after.

The Virtual World

In the previous worlds, the structure of reality still carried a certain weight. The conventional world presented itself as simply given. The scientific world searched for deeper mechanisms. The therapeutic world traced everything back to inner histories. The spiritual

world looked for what lies beneath or beyond appearance.

The virtual world does something simpler and, in a way, more disconcerting.

It builds the appearance from scratch.

Here the world is no longer discovered, interpreted, or transcended. It is designed.

What appears is known, from the beginning, to be constructed. And yet, once entered, it functions with the same immediacy as any other reality. The body reacts. Attention narrows. Emotions arise. For all practical purposes, it is simply another place to be.

That is what makes it so revealing.

A few pixels, a headset, a pair of speakers, and suddenly there is a space. Not metaphorically, but experientially. A room opens around you. Or a landscape. Or a corridor. You turn your head and the world turns with you. You take a step and the ground seems to move under your feet. There may be no physical floor in front of you at all, and still the body hesitates, careful not to step into the apparent void.

Intellectually you know it is an illusion.

Perceptually it does not matter.

The nervous system responds as if the space were real.

This small mismatch is enough to destabilize several quiet assumptions. For most of life we move through environments without questioning their ontological status. A street is simply a street. A wall is simply a wall. We do not usually consider that what we see might be generated rather than given.

In a virtual environment that certainty is gone.

Everything is visibly artificial, and yet completely convincing.

A door opens and there is another room. A sound echoes from the left and the head turns automatically. Shadows fall in the right direction. Objects occupy space. Depth appears. Distance feels measurable. The world behaves coherently enough that action becomes natural.

You stop thinking about the code.

You simply walk.

It is striking how little is required for this to happen. A handful of cues—movement, perspective, sound—are enough to generate a full sense of presence. The mind fills in the rest. What is missing goes unnoticed. What is provided becomes reality.

After a few minutes the distinction between "simulation" and "environment" fades into the background. You duck under a virtual beam. You lean over a virtual edge. Your heart rate increases when something rushes toward you. The body does not wait for philosophical clarification.

It reacts.

In that reaction something becomes obvious that is easy to miss elsewhere: the sense of worldhood does not depend on the material status of what appears. It depends on coherence, on continuity, on the simple fact that perception responds to a structured field.

Give the senses a stable pattern and they will treat it as a world.

Whether it is built from atoms or pixels turns out to be secondary.

This realization has a quiet, almost unsettling effect. If a fully convincing world can be generated artificially, then the authority of the "real" world begins to look slightly different. The difference between natural and constructed no longer feels absolute. It begins to feel like a matter of degree.

Both are organized appearances.

Both are interfaces.

Both are ways in which something shows up for a perceiver.

The virtual world makes this explicit.

Nothing here pretends to be ultimate. Everything is provisional. Environments can be changed instantly. A forest becomes a city. A room becomes outer space.

Gravity can be reduced, colors altered, scale distorted. What elsewhere would be fixed laws become adjustable parameters.

Reality turns into settings.

This fluidity affects behavior in subtle ways. One experiments more easily. Risks feel lighter. Actions become playful. If you fall, nothing really happens. If you fail, you reset. Consequences are softened. The world feels less binding, less heavy.

It is difficult to feel fully trapped in a space you know was assembled five minutes ago.

At the same time, the emotional involvement can be surprisingly strong. A simple virtual height can trigger genuine vertigo. A digital character can evoke sympathy. A simulated loss can feel like loss. The body does not carefully separate fiction from fact. It responds to patterns.

Presence is enough.

This leads to a curious doubling of awareness. On one level you are inside the world, responding to it directly. On another level you remain aware that it is constructed. You are both participant and observer, both immersed and slightly detached.

The two perspectives coexist without canceling each other.

Something similar occasionally happens in dreams or in intense films, but here it is continuous and explicit. The constructed nature of the world is not hidden. It is obvious. And still the experience works.

This obviousness makes the virtual world almost pedagogical. It teaches, without argument, that worldhood itself is a kind of effect. Not a metaphysical guarantee, but something that arises when perception locks into a consistent structure.

A world is what happens when appearances hold together.

Nothing more is required.

Seen from this angle, the other dioramas begin to look different as well. The conventional world is also a construction, only a slower and more stable one. The scientific world is another interface layered on top, translating appearances into measurements and models. The therapeutic world overlays everything with personal meaning. The spiritual world reframes everything as consciousness.

Each of them builds a coherent environment.

The virtual world simply makes the building process visible.

In doing so, it removes some of the seriousness that usually clings to reality. If entire landscapes can be generated, modified, and discarded with a few lines of

code, then perhaps the solidity we attribute to the "real" world is partly a habit. Perhaps what feels fundamental is simply what has remained stable for a long time.

Inside a simulation, this becomes almost obvious. You take off the headset and the room returns. The walls are where they always were. The floor feels heavier. The ordinary world reasserts itself with its familiar authority.

And yet something lingers.

A slight doubt.

Not about whether the room is "real," but about what exactly that word means.

The difference between given and made no longer feels as sharp. Both seem to belong to the same spectrum of appearances. Some are generated by software, others by biology and physics. But experientially they share the same basic structure: a field in which a body moves and responds.

Another world.

Convincing. Functional. Enterable.

And, like all the others, a diorama.

The Dreaming World

Among all the worlds we inhabit, the dreaming world is perhaps the strangest, and at the same time the most familiar. It visits almost every night, requires no special training, no philosophy, no technology, and yet while it lasts it replaces the waking world completely.

Nothing of the bedroom remains. No trace of the bed, the walls, the quiet house. Instead there is suddenly a street, or a house from childhood, or a landscape that has never existed anywhere except here. People appear. Conversations begin. Events unfold. And throughout all of this there is rarely the slightest doubt that what is happening is real.

Only later, upon waking, does the strangeness become visible.

While dreaming, everything simply makes sense.

That is what is so remarkable.

The dreaming world does not feel like imagination or fiction. It feels immediate, given, present in exactly the same way the waking world does. One walks, speaks, runs, hides, searches. The body reacts. Fear accelerates the heart. Relief softens it again. The emotions are not weaker because the world is "unreal." If anything, they are often stronger.

A fall feels like a fall.

A loss feels like a loss.

A reunion feels like a reunion.

Nothing inside the dream carries a label saying simulation.

There is just reality, unfolding.

And yet, from the perspective of waking life, the entire environment was generated without effort, without materials, without construction. No atoms were assembled. No space was occupied. The whole world appeared nowhere and disappeared just as easily.

A complete diorama, created and dissolved in silence.

The speed of this creation is almost absurd. In an instant there is a city. In another instant the city becomes a forest. Distances stretch and collapse without explanation. A door opens onto a childhood home. A staircase leads into the sky. People change identity halfway through a conversation and no one finds it strange.

Continuity, which feels so essential in the conventional world, turns out to be optional.

The dream simply moves on.

What would seem impossible or contradictory during the day passes unnoticed at night. A friend may also be a stranger. A place may be both familiar and unknown. Time

may skip hours or loop back on itself. Causes and effects no longer align neatly. And yet none of this triggers skepticism. The mind accepts everything with extraordinary tolerance.

The question "how is this possible?" never arises.

There is only participation.

In this sense the dreaming world is radically permissive. It does not demand coherence. It does not require stable laws. It does not even require a consistent self. The one who moves through the dream may change character from one scene to the next. Sometimes one is younger, sometimes older, sometimes not clearly anyone at all. Perspective slides around freely. One can be both actor and observer without noticing a difference.

Identity, which in the daytime feels so solid, becomes fluid.

And still the experience holds together.

This suggests something quietly unsettling. Apparently very little structure is required for a world to feel real. A handful of images, emotions, and transitions are enough. The mind does not ask for verification. It simply accepts the field it is given and calls it reality.

Seen from within, the dream is self-evident.

Seen from outside, it is almost nothing.

A few fleeting impressions. Light and memory.

Yet while it lasts, it is indistinguishable from life.

Sometimes, on waking, there is a brief overlap between the two worlds. For a second or two the dream still lingers. The room is slowly returning, but part of the mind is still elsewhere. The logic of the dream has not fully dissolved. In that small gap it becomes clear how easily one world replaces another. There is no dramatic transition, no metaphysical barrier. One configuration fades and another tightens into place.

Reality is simply whichever field currently holds attention.

During the day we rarely notice this, because the waking world is so stable. It returns every morning with remarkable consistency: the same room, the same body, the same history. Compared to the volatility of dreams, it feels almost permanent. But the difference may be one of degree rather than kind. The waking world persists longer and obeys stricter rules, yet experientially it is presented in much the same way: as an unquestioned field of appearances.

The dream makes this visible by exaggeration.

It shows a world with the scaffolding removed. No physics that must be respected. No shared agreement with others. No lasting consequences.

And still: a world.

In fact, the dreaming world may be the purest example of a diorama in this entire book. It is clearly constructed, clearly temporary, clearly dependent on the mind, and yet fully immersive. There is no need to argue that it is a configuration. Its configurational nature becomes obvious the moment one wakes up.

While inside it, however, that obviousness disappears completely.

This is perhaps the most instructive part. Even a world that lasts only a few minutes, built out of fragments of memory, can feel absolutely convincing from the inside. Conviction does not require solidity. It requires only coherence in the moment.

Which raises an uncomfortable possibility: perhaps the certainty we feel in waking life is not proof of deeper reality, but simply the same mechanism operating on a longer timescale.

Perhaps we are always inside some dream or other.

Not because the world is illusory in a dramatic sense, but because "world" itself may simply mean a temporarily stable pattern of experience.

The dreaming world comes and goes without asking permission. Each night it demonstrates how easily an entire reality can arise, how completely we can inhabit it, and how little remains of it afterwards. By morning almost everything has vanished, leaving only a few fading images.

And yet, while it was happening, nothing seemed provisional.

It was just life.

Another world, entered without noticing, left without ceremony.

Fragile. Convincing. Entire.

Transitions

If each of these worlds were sealed off from the others, life would be simple. One would inhabit a single configuration from birth to death, like a fish unaware of water. But that is not how experience works.

We move.

Not dramatically, not with clear borders, but gradually and almost unnoticed. The frameworks that seemed so solid a moment ago loosen and give way to others. What felt self-evident yesterday can feel foreign today.

Most of these transitions are small.

During the day the conventional world dominates: tasks, schedules, practical concerns. In the evening it softens. Sitting quietly, the same room begins to feel less functional, more neutral. A short walk might slide into something like the spiritual world, where attention turns inward and everything seems suspended in presence.

Later, reading an article or adjusting a device, the scientific mindset returns, translating experience into mechanisms and explanations.

Nothing announces these shifts.

They simply happen.

The mind reorients, and with it the entire structure of reality.

Other transitions are more striking. Putting on a headset and entering a virtual environment, the body instantly commits to a constructed space. Falling asleep, the waking world dissolves and the dreaming one takes its place without resistance. Waking again, the dream evaporates just as completely.

Whole realities appear and disappear in a matter of seconds.

Even larger movements occur across years. A period of life dominated by achievement and productivity might slowly give way to therapy and self-reflection. A search for meaning might turn into spiritual practice. A long spiritual effort might collapse into the simplicity of the non-dual perspective. What once felt urgent becomes irrelevant. What once seemed naïve becomes obvious.

Looking back, it is hard to say when exactly the change happened.

There is rarely a single moment of conversion.

More often, the center of gravity simply shifts.

What is striking is how convincing each world feels while we are inside it. When the scientific frame is active, explanation seems like the only serious approach. When the therapeutic frame dominates, everything looks like a story to be understood. When the spiritual frame is present, awareness seems fundamental. When the conventional frame returns, all of that can look abstract or unnecessary.

Each world claims normality.

Each one quietly says: this is just how things are.

And yet we move between them with surprising ease.

This mobility suggests something simple and radical at the same time. None of these worlds is the foundation. None of them is the final layer beneath which nothing else exists. They are more like lenses that slip on and off without our noticing: stable for a while, persuasive while they last, and then replaced.

A life, seen from this angle, is not a single story but a path through many configurations. We inhabit one, then another, sometimes several in the same day. We rarely choose them deliberately. Circumstances, moods, conversations, fatigue, curiosity—all of these tilt the balance one way or another.

The world reshapes itself accordingly.

This is perhaps the simplest conclusion of all. There is not one reality interpreted in different ways. There are many ways in which reality shows up, each coherent on its own terms. What changes is not merely our opinion about the world, but the very structure of what is given.

The ground keeps moving.

And yet, because each configuration feels complete while we are in it, we keep mistaking the current one for the only one.

Until it shifts again.

Then another world appears, just as convincing as the last.

And we wake up inside it, as if it had always been there.

PART IV
Edges

Where structure thins out

Introduction

After moving through many worlds, it is tempting to search for what lies beneath them. A ground. An origin. A final layer from which everything else emerges.

This part does not provide that.

What follows are not foundations but edges.

Extreme configurations. Limit cases. Regions where familiar structures begin to thin out or dissolve: emptiness, silence, darkness, death, groundlessness, the loss of self. Experiences that press against the limits of what can be described.

It is easy to romanticize such territories, to treat them as deeper truths or ultimate realities. But that would only recreate the hierarchy this book has been trying to loosen. These edges are not more fundamental than the worlds described earlier. They are simply sparser, more minimal, sometimes more unsettling.

Less structure, not more truth.

Think of them as the margins of the map, places where the usual coordinates stop working. They do not explain the rest of the landscape. They only show what happens when familiar patterns fall away.

Even here, nothing final is found.

Only another way experience can arrange itself.

Headlessness

In some experiences the sense of being located somewhere behind the eyes falls away. Perception continues, but without a felt center from which it is organized. There is seeing, hearing, sensing, yet no one positioned at the origin of these acts. What vanishes is not the body, and not awareness. What vanishes is the center.

Ordinarily, experience is oriented around a point of reference, a here from which there is a there, an inside from which there is an outside. Even when unnoticed, this center quietly organizes perception. In headless experience this reference point dissolves. The visual field appears without a viewer behind it. Sounds arise without a listener at a location. Sensations occur without being gathered around a core. Experience is no longer arranged around a point in space. This is not a conclusion but a perceptual event.

Although headlessness is sometimes associated with exercises or demonstrations, what occurs is not the result of correct effort. It is not achieved through attention or discipline and cannot be stabilized as a practice. When it appears, it appears without instruction.

The disappearance of the center can easily be mistaken for expansion, as if awareness had widened beyond the body. Yet this still assumes a center that has moved or enlarged. In headless experience there is no enlargement and no "more." What disappears is simply the sense of being located anywhere in experience.

The body does not vanish. Sensations continue and movement occurs, but the body is no longer organized around a central point of ownership. Hands move without being "mine" in the usual way. Breathing happens without supervision. Posture adjusts without command. Agency does not cease. It decentralizes.

Time often flattens as well. Without a center to anchor continuity, experience does not clearly unfold from past to future. Memory may still function, but it no longer organizes the present around a narrative self. What appears does not need to be placed.

This is not liberation, and it does not free experience from structure. Perception still selects, attention still shifts, responses still occur. What is absent is only the sense that all of this belongs to a located observer. The configuration is fragile. Under pressure or reflection the sense of center returns. Nothing has been gained or lost, only a reorientation.

Headlessness belongs here not because it is ultimate, but because it shows how orientation can fall away without replacing itself. It is not a truth about reality and not something to live from. It is simply one way experience can briefly function without a center, and then not.

Emptiness as Transparency

In some experiences what appears does so without weight or resistance. Forms are present, yet they do not assert themselves as solid, independent, or self-sufficient.

Things are there, but nothing feels fixed or substantial. Appearance continues; only the manner of appearing changes.

Objects, sensations, and thoughts arise without claiming depth or permanence. They do not point to an underlying essence and do not suggest that something is hidden behind them. There is no need to look past what is given. What appears seems complete on the surface.

Forms do not seem to rest on a foundation. They appear without requiring explanation, justification, or grounding. A sound is just a sound. A thought is just a thought. A sensation is just a sensation. This "just" does not minimize. It removes surplus. Nothing is added and nothing is taken away.

It is easy to mistake this transparency for an insight into the nature of reality, as if one had discovered that things lack inherent existence. But such descriptions introduce a framework again. Here nothing is revealed behind appearances. There is no deeper layer to access and no hidden structure supporting what is seen. Experience simply presents itself without thickness.

Meaning may still function, but lightly. Associations arise and dissolve without pulling experience into explanation or narrative. Understanding does not accumulate. What appears does not ask to be interpreted.

This sometimes coincides with the vanishing of the center described earlier. Without a point from which appearance is assessed, forms may naturally lose density.

Yet transparency does not depend on that absence. It can occur while a sense of self remains, just as headlessness can occur without transparency. They overlap without relying on one another.

Transparency does not improve experience or make it better. It does not refine perception or promise release. Often it feels neutral, even unremarkable. There is simply less to hold onto and less to conclude.

Under engagement or emotional pressure, opacity returns easily. Forms regain weight, meanings thicken, and the world reasserts itself. Nothing has been gained or lost. Transparency establishes no new baseline.

It is not something to realize or maintain. It offers no guidance and carries no message. It names only a way experience sometimes functions when framing loosens without collapsing, when things appear without depth, without support, and without demand.

Darkness as Non-Orientation

Walking outside at night changes the character of everything. During the day the world is mapped and named. Distances are clear, directions obvious, objects neatly separated from one another. At night that structure loosens.

Streetlights create small circles of visibility, and between them the path becomes uncertain. Shapes blur. Depth is harder to judge. The body slows down, relying less on

sight and more on touch and sound. Each step becomes slightly tentative.

Without noticing it, thinking also simplifies. Plans recede. There is no long horizon to project into. Attention narrows to what is immediately at hand: the next few meters of pavement, the edge of the curb, the sound of someone approaching.

It is not frightening, just less oriented. The usual coordinates of the world no longer guide you with the same confidence. You move through a space that feels thinner, less defined. And in that reduction there is an unexpected quiet. The mind has less to hold together. Walking becomes simply walking, step after step, without a larger story.

In some experiences even the absence of framing offers no relief or clarity. There is no center, no transparency, no sense of openness. What appears does so without orientation and without promise. Experience continues, but nothing organizes it. This is what is named here as darkness.

Darkness is not mystery and not depth. It is not a hidden ground beneath experience and does not conceal meaning waiting to be uncovered. Nothing points anywhere. Nothing explains anything else. Nothing stabilizes what appears.

There are no reference points, no sense of direction, no horizon of understanding, no context that renders what appears significant or insignificant. This is not confusion

in the ordinary sense. Confusion still presupposes an expectation of clarity. Here even that expectation is absent.

Darkness is not headlessness and not transparency. In headlessness there is perception without a center. In transparency there is form without thickness. Here there is neither. What appears does not cohere into a field and does not organize itself as presence or immediacy. There is no sense that anything is being revealed.

Meaning does not collapse dramatically. It simply does not arise. Events do not feel empty in a liberating way but unanchored. Questions lose traction. Answers feel beside the point. There is nothing to hold onto, not even the idea that there is nothing to hold onto.

Darkness cannot be used. It does not teach, instruct, or correct. Attempts to interpret it as purification, surrender, or insight immediately reintroduce orientation and miss what is being described. Darkness carries no message.

While it holds, nothing supports experience. There is no background of openness or neutrality. When orientation returns, as it does, there is no sense of having come back from somewhere. There is only the reappearance of worldhood, the quiet restoration of coherence.

Placed last, darkness may look like a culmination, but it is not. It comes last only because nothing can follow it without framing reappearing. Any continuation would

already be a return to organization. Darkness does not complete anything. It marks the point where organization fails, while experience simply continues on its own.

Death

About 150,000 people die every day. You and I will too. Maybe in five minutes from a ruptured artery. Maybe next year in an accident. Maybe in twenty years. Maybe tomorrow.

I am seventy-three now. 26,691 days. Websites calculate my probable date of death. One says October 2026. Another January 2026. A third claims I already died two years ago. Statistics dressed up as oracles.

I take a blood thinner every day. A cholesterol inhibitor. A stomach-acid reducer. I eat almost no meat. I exercise. I drink less than I used to. It may help. But one day it will not.

I do not want to die.

Not mainly because I fear pain, but because I fear disappearance. The idea that at some moment there will be no experience at all. No seeing. No hearing. No anything. That thought stuns me more than any image of suffering.

Underneath all scenarios lies something simpler: the fear of ceasing to exist. The same panic that rises in the body

when you look over the edge of a high building, before any thought has time to form.

What happens at the final moment? Most likely nothing remarkable. Like going under anesthesia. Lights out. No dream. No darkness. No witness. The heart stops, the brain no longer receives oxygen, and that is that.

I think this. But I do not know.

Some people speak of souls or survival. Perhaps they are right. Perhaps not. I have no solid reason to believe it. Most of these ideas seem to arise from desire. We do not want to disappear, so we imagine that we do not.

And yet experience does not always behave as neatly as our explanations suggest. During a therapeutic MDMA session I once had a vivid image of being beheaded by a friend sitting opposite me. I said nothing, but he described the same scene. We both started crying. I have no idea what this was. Projection, coincidence, suggestion, something neurological. It proves nothing. But it does show how thin the line is between what we think we know and what simply presents itself.

In the end, no one knows what death is like. Nobody stands outside it to report back.

Meanwhile life already contains its own small disappearances. Every exhalation is a letting go. Every sleep a kind of vanishing. Thousands of cells die each moment. The body is not a thing but a temporary pattern in continuous breakdown. Death does not stand at the

end of life. It runs through it.

Still we search for meaning, for a plan, for some larger justification, as if life must be going somewhere in order to be bearable. But how could anyone ever know whether life has an ultimate meaning? That would require standing outside experience itself, and that is impossible.

What is certain is simpler: life is happening.

There is seeing. Hearing. Fear. Breathing. This body aging. This moment presenting itself without reason or explanation.

Not as consolation. Not as an answer.

Simply as a fact.

PART V
Living With It

Living without foundations

Introduction

After all this describing, a practical question remains.

What difference does any of this make?

It is one thing to see that reality can appear in many configurations. It is another to live an ordinary life while knowing this. Work still needs to be done. Conversations still happen. The body still ages. Insight does not exempt anyone from the small logistics of being human.

This last part turns toward that ordinariness.

Not to derive a new philosophy or ethic, and certainly not to propose a method. There is no program to follow. Instead there are reflections on what it might mean to move through these shifting worlds without clinging too tightly to any of them.

If nothing is foundational, how do we act?

If every frame is partial, how do we choose?

If there is no final standpoint, how do we speak, write, decide?

Perhaps the answer is simpler than expected.

We continue.

But a little lighter.

Less certain that our current view is the only one. Less tempted to absolutize our preferences. More willing to treat each world as a temporary construction, useful for a while and then replaced.

Not detachment. Not indifference.

Just a quieter way of participating.

Not above the worlds.

Right in the middle of them.

Consequences Without Hierarchy

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Working Worlds

If there is no final framework and no ultimate ground, this does not mean that nothing can be built. On the contrary. I seem to spend most of my time building things.

Not grand things. Small, provisional ones.

A website. A text. A room arranged in a certain way. A daily routine. A conversation that creates a temporary sense of connection. Little structures that hold for a while and then quietly dissolve again.

I used to think of these as secondary, almost distractions from the "real" questions. Philosophy first, life later. Understanding first, then application. As if building something practical were somehow less serious than searching for truth.

Over time that hierarchy collapsed.

Now it seems the other way around. The building is what actually happens. The thinking merely circles around it.

When I make a page for the website, I am not expressing a worldview. I am moving elements around until they feel workable. This image here, that sentence there, a menu that opens without friction. Nothing absolute is at stake. It either works or it doesn't. I adjust it until it does.

The same goes for writing. A text is not a statement about reality. It is more like a small environment I construct. A space a reader can walk through for a few minutes. If the space holds together, if it has a certain coherence or atmosphere, then it functions. If not, I rewrite.

Calling these constructions "worlds" may sound dramatic, but it is actually very modest. A world, in this

sense, is simply a set of relations that temporarily makes sense. A way things hang together. A situation in which actions become possible.

A kitchen is a world.

A friendship is a world.

A book is a world.

Even an afternoon with a specific mood is a world.

None of them are final. None of them are more real than the others. They are arrangements that work for a time.

I notice that I no longer worry much about whether these worlds are ultimately true. That question has lost its grip. The only thing that matters is whether they function. Can I live here for a while? Can others? Does it create unnecessary tension, or does it allow some ease?

This is less heroic than it sounds. Most of the time it comes down to tinkering. Moving things slightly to the left. Deleting a paragraph. Adding a chair. Removing something that clutters the space.

Trial and error, mostly.

Sometimes I scrap an entire project because it feels forced. Sometimes something small unexpectedly works and I keep it. There is no method. Just a kind of ongoing adjustment.

Seen this way, my life looks less like a search for truth and more like a workshop.

Things on tables. Half-finished attempts. Tools lying around. Some objects carefully made, others abandoned. Nothing sacred. Nothing definitive. Just continuous rearranging.

Strangely, this feels more honest than the old ambition to get things right once and for all.

A working world does not need to last forever. It only needs to work now.

Later it can be taken apart and rebuilt differently.

Which, in fact, is what always happens anyway.

Ethics Without Foundations

For a long time I assumed that ethics required a foundation. A set of principles, or beliefs, or at least some idea of what ultimately matters. Without that, everything would collapse into arbitrariness. If nothing is absolutely true, then anything goes. That seemed obvious.

But in practice nothing like that happens.

Even without foundations, life does not turn into chaos. People still queue at the bakery. They still help each other carry furniture up the stairs. They still apologize, feel guilty, make amends, try again. Most days proceed

according to a quiet, almost boring decency that has very little to do with philosophy.

Whatever ethics is, it seems to function long before we justify it.

I notice this first in small things. Holding a door open. Answering a message. Feeding the cat. Checking whether someone arrived home safely. None of these actions follow from a theory. They are not derived from principles. They simply feel appropriate to the situation.

If I try to explain why, I quickly get stuck.

Why care about anyone at all?

There is no ultimate answer. Not one that convinces intellectually. Yet indifference feels wrong in a very immediate, bodily way. It contracts something. It makes the day heavier. Being even slightly attentive to others tends to make things easier, both for them and for me.

This is not morality as obedience. It is closer to maintenance.

Keeping the shared space livable.

Without thinking about it in those terms, most behavior seems to follow a simple logic: avoid unnecessary damage. Do not create more trouble than there already is. If something small can be fixed, fix it. If someone is struggling and you can help without much cost, help.

It sounds modest because it is.

There is nothing heroic about it. Most of the time it is laziness as much as kindness. Life is complicated enough already. Lying, cheating, or acting aggressively tends to multiply complications. It creates stories that have to be maintained, tensions that have to be managed. Honesty and a bit of care are simply less work.

Seen this way, ethics becomes almost pragmatic.

Not "what is right in an ultimate sense?"

but "what keeps this situation workable?"

Of course this is not pure. I still act selfishly. I still avoid uncomfortable conversations. I still choose convenience over generosity more often than I would like to admit. There is no steady moral character here, only a shifting mix of impulses, habits, and afterthoughts.

Sometimes I do the decent thing. Sometimes I don't. Afterwards I invent reasons.

That too seems to be part of it.

Without foundations, there is also no final self-image to protect. No need to see myself as a good person or a bad one. There are just consequences. This action makes things tighter. That one loosens them a bit. Over time certain patterns become obvious.

It becomes less about virtue and more about friction.

Some ways of acting create a lot of friction, internally and externally. Others make the day flow more smoothly. Not perfectly, just with less unnecessary resistance. Gradually I find myself preferring the latter, not because it is morally superior, but because it is simply easier to live with.

This is a very unromantic view of ethics.

No commandments.

No cosmic justice.

No ultimate score.

Just people trying, more or less clumsily, to get through the day together without hurting each other too much.

Strangely, that seems sufficient.

Perhaps foundations were never required.

Perhaps this quiet, improvised coordination was always how it worked.

Not grounded in truth.

Just grounded in living together.

Writing as Construction

Writing has gradually lost its old seriousness for me. There was a time when every text felt as if it had to say something important, as if it needed to contribute to a larger argument or defend a position. Writing seemed tied to truth. I wrote in order to explain the world, to correct misunderstandings, or to put forward a better view. That pressure has mostly disappeared.

These days writing feels less like arguing and more like arranging things. Moving sentences around, placing one image next to another, removing what is unnecessary, adjusting the rhythm until the whole holds together a little better. The process resembles tidying a room more than constructing a theory.

Somewhere along the way the metaphor of the diorama began to make sense to me. Not as a concept, simply as a description of what I seem to be doing.

A diorama does not explain anything. It does not prove a point. It just presents a small, self-contained world. You look into it and, for a moment, something coheres. A landscape, a scene, a situation. Nothing more is claimed.

That is increasingly how writing feels.

A text becomes a small space a reader can step into. Not a message to decode, not an argument to accept or reject, but a temporary environment. If it works at all, it works because the elements fit together in a certain way: the tone, the pacing, the images, the thoughts. If one

piece is out of place, the whole thing wobbles.

So most of the time I am not thinking about ideas. I am adjusting proportions.

This paragraph too long.

That sentence too heavy.

This section repeating itself.

Something missing here.

It is closer to carpentry than to philosophy.

Cut. Move. Try again.

Occasionally something clicks and the text suddenly feels stable, as if it can stand on its own legs. More often it doesn't, and I keep pushing things around without quite knowing what I am looking for. There is a lot of trial and error. Entire pages get deleted without regret.

Nothing sacred.

I used to worry about whether what I wrote was true. Now I worry more about whether it is honest and workable. Does it correspond to how things actually feel? Can I read it back without cringing? Does it create a space that someone else might recognize, even slightly?

That seems sufficient.

In this sense writing is not separate from the rest of life. It is just another way of building a small, temporary world, like arranging a room or setting up a website. Something is made, used for a while, and eventually dismantled or forgotten.

The text does not need to last forever. It only needs to function now.

Sometimes I look at the growing collection of pages and realize that this is probably all I have really been doing for years: constructing one small diorama after another. None of them definitive. None of them complete. Just attempts to make a corner of experience visible for a moment.

There is something modest about that which I find increasingly comforting.

No grand system.

No final statement.

Just these little constructions, placed side by side.

A workshop rather than a monument.

Things half-finished. Tools lying around. New attempts starting before the old ones are fully resolved.

Strangely, this feels more appropriate to the way life actually unfolds. Not as a single coherent theory, but as a series of provisional arrangements that hold for a while

and then give way to others.

Writing simply happens to be one of the materials at hand.

So I keep building.

Not because it leads somewhere.

Just because this, apparently, is what this body ends up doing.

Why This Is Not Relativism

From time to time someone hears all this talk about shifting worlds, the absence of foundations, the lack of ultimate truths, and draws a quick conclusion. If nothing is fixed, then everything must be equally valid. If there is no ground, then nothing matters. If all perspectives are constructed, then any choice is as good as any other.

On paper that sounds reasonable enough.

In practice it makes no sense at all.

Even without foundations, things are not interchangeable. A chair is not the same as the floor. Drinking water is not the same as drinking bleach. A stone is not an idea. Drop a stone on your foot and it hurts. No philosophy changes that. Some situations are simply more solid and resistant than others.

The world answers back.

That resistance is already structure. It does not need to be justified metaphysically. It is simply there.

Calling experience "configured" or "constructed" never meant that everything becomes dreamlike or optional. The everyday physical world is remarkably stable. Stones keep their weight. Tables don't suddenly dissolve. If I walk into a wall, the wall wins. This consistency is precisely what makes this particular world workable.

Other worlds behave differently. In a dream the same stone may feel heavy and convincing, yet vanish on waking. In virtual reality it may look solid but offer no resistance at all. The differences are obvious once you are there. Each situation comes with its own rules.

Nothing about this suggests that all worlds are equal.

It only suggests that "real" is not a single, absolute category, but something that shows up differently depending on the configuration. Some worlds are fragile and short-lived. Others, like the everyday physical one, are dense, shared, and stubborn. Naturally we treat the latter more seriously. We would be foolish not to.

Relativism imagines a kind of weightlessness, as if all options float freely and one may arbitrarily pick any of them. But experience does not feel weightless. It feels constrained. Some actions work, others backfire. Some environments support you, others exhaust you. Consequences accumulate whether you believe in them

or not.

In that sense life is full of limits.

Not eternal laws handed down from above, but very ordinary constraints. You need sleep. You need food. Relationships break if neglected. Trust disappears when abused. None of this depends on ultimate truths. It is simply how things play out.

What has disappeared for me is not structure but justification. I no longer believe my choices are backed by some final order of reality. They are backed only by their consequences. Things either function or they don't.

That turns out to be enough.

If a way of living repeatedly creates tension, conflict, and exhaustion, I tend to drop it. Not because it is absolutely wrong, but because it is unworkable. If something brings a bit more ease or clarity, I tend to keep it. Again, not because it is eternally true, but because it fits the situation better.

This is less like relativism and more like maintenance.

You try something. You see what happens. You adjust.

Over time patterns emerge. Not principles carved in stone, just habits that make life slightly less complicated. A rough pragmatism.

Perhaps that sounds modest. No grand guarantees. No

final certainty. Just continuous correction.

But it seems closer to how people actually live.

The absence of foundations does not lead to "anything goes." It leads to something much simpler: some things work better than others.

Not everything is equal.

Only everything is provisional.

And that is already structure enough.

A Practice of Attention

Over time I have stopped looking for a way of living and settled into something much smaller.

Nothing that deserves to be called a method. No exercises. No discipline. If anything, the opposite. A gradual loss of ambition.

What remains is simply attention.

Not concentrated attention, not the kind that tries to focus or achieve clarity, but a loose, everyday noticing. More like keeping the lights on than searching for insight.

It sounds trivial because it is.

Most days consist of ordinary scenes. Making coffee.

Letting the dogs out. Filling their bowls. Opening the window to see what the weather is doing. Cycling to the shop. Sitting at the desk and moving words around. None of this requires philosophy. Yet, without noticing it, I used to move through these hours almost abstractly, always slightly ahead of myself, already thinking about the next thing.

Now there is less of that urgency.

Things still happen, but a bit slower, or perhaps I simply interfere less. The kettle boils. One of the dogs wanders through the room and lies down exactly where I was about to step. Outside there is no traffic, only birds, sometimes wind moving through the trees, sometimes rain on the roof. A thought appears, then disappears again. There is nothing to conclude from any of it.

It is not mindfulness in any official sense. I forget about it all the time. Whole mornings pass in distraction. I get lost in news sites or pointless worries just like anyone else. There is no steady state to maintain.

The only difference is that, more often than before, I notice that this is happening.

"Oh, right. Here we are again."

And that is already enough.

Attention, in this loose sense, does not improve anything. It does not make me calmer or wiser. It does not reveal hidden truths. It simply brings experience back to a

human scale, back to what is actually here instead of what might happen later or what should have happened earlier.

When attention is present, even slightly, things feel less theoretical.

The room is just the room.

The body just this body.

This mood just today's weather.

Problems shrink to their actual size.

A large part of suffering seems to come from adding extra layers: stories about how things ought to be, comparisons with imaginary lives, rehearsals of futures that never arrive. Attention does not remove these habits, but it makes them visible as habits. They lose some of their authority.

Again, nothing special follows from this. I still worry. I still complain. I still get irritated. But the grip is looser. The drama slightly thinner.

In a way, this is the most modest "practice" imaginable. No goals, no progress, no transformation. Just occasionally returning to what is already happening.

Looking out over the fields for a moment. Listening to birds. Listening to the wind. Listening to rain when it comes. Feeling the weight of the body in the chair.

Watching our rescue dog Angie run through the orchard, and suddenly feeling tears in my eyes because she is so obviously, uncomplicatedly happy.

Not because it leads somewhere.

Simply because this is where life is taking place anyway.

After everything else has been questioned — truths, foundations, identities, meanings — this small, ordinary noticing seems to be what remains.

Nothing spiritual about it.

Just paying attention to the day as it passes.

Notes From the Workshop

There is nothing serene about any of this.

I don't sit down to work because I have reached clarity. I sit down because something keeps pulling. An idea that doesn't fit yet. A question that won't go away. A small shift in how things appear that I want to understand before it disappears again.

If I ignore that impulse for too long, my mood drops. Days flatten out. I get restless.

So I start a project.

Another page. Another text. Rearranging what is already

there. Moving sentences around until something clicks.

Part of it is necessity. But part of it is simply pleasure. I like the craft of it. Adjusting a paragraph until it holds. Finding the right word. Seeing a page come alive. It feels like working with my hands, even though it is only language.

But it goes further back than that.

As a child I already wanted to know how the world really worked. What this all is. How it hangs together. That curiosity never left. If anything, it grew stronger. I still want to understand. I still want that sense of wonder, that brief moment when something opens and everything looks slightly new again.

So this is what the work really is: a kind of exploration. Not physical, but mental. Looking carefully. Following what shifts. Trying to describe what I find. Making small dioramas out of words. Reports from wherever attention happens to land.

Nothing definitive.

Just: this is how it looks today.

Glossary

Appearance
Anything that shows up in experience: sensations, thoughts, emotions, images, interpretations, memories. Not only "things," but whatever presents itself at all.

Experience
Simply what is happening or appearing, before explanation. The ongoing flow of seeing, hearing, thinking, feeling, acting.

Configuration
A temporary way in which experience hangs together. A particular pattern or arrangement that makes sense for a while.

Mindset
A habitual way of interpreting experience. A lens or orientation that shapes what stands out and what is ignored.

World
The coherent field of experience that feels like "reality" from within. The environment as it shows up to you at a given moment.

Diorama
My term for a world, emphasizing that every world is framed and partial. A way of looking at experience as if it were a small scene or model. Not less real, just limited in scope.

Working world
A world that functions well enough for practical life. Not ultimately true, simply usable.

Edge
A limit case where familiar structures weaken or fall away. Not deeper or more fundamental, just less organized or less stable.

Headlessness
A configuration in which the usual sense of being located behind the eyes disappears. Perception continues, but without a felt center.

Transparency (Emptiness)
A mode of appearance in which things feel light or insubstantial, as if nothing stands behind them. Forms remain, but without weight or depth.

Darkness
A loss of orientation. Experience continues, but without clear reference points or meaning. Not mystery or depth, simply disorientation.

Groundlessness
The absence of any final foundation that guarantees truth, meaning, or identity. Life goes on without such guarantees.

Non-duality
Used descriptively, not metaphysically. Refers to moments where the usual division between "self" and "world" becomes less relevant or less convincing.