Origins

Conditions of Appearance

Ton Haarmans

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Colophon

Origins. Conditions of Appearance
This book is part of the series 'Configurations of Appearance', which explores different ways in which experience organizes itself. Each volume can be read independently.

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Contemporary text-assistance tools were used during the writing process to maintain clarity and coherence; the content, direction, and all decisions remain entirely the author's own.

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Before anything

This book completes a series exploring how worlds appear.

It does not explain why there is a world. It explores what must already be the case for something like a world to appear.

On mediation

This text is not written in isolation. Its language has been shaped through iterative interaction with systems, tools, and external constraints. These mediations do not constitute an author. They are part of the conditions under which articulation becomes possible.

A note on authorship

This book does not proceed from a position of insight. It is not written from a place of understanding that comes first and is then expressed. Whatever clarity appears here appears only

locally, temporarily, and without guarantee. The author is not standing outside what is described.

Authorship itself is one of the forms that emerges under the conditions explored in these pages. This text does not claim to reveal an origin. It traces conditions under which something like a world, and something like an author, can appear at all.

If this sometimes reads as uncertain, that is not a lack to be resolved.

It is part of what is being described.

A Note on Language

Terms such as world, experience, appearance, and reality are used throughout this book. They are not employed as fixed concepts with stable definitions. Their meaning shifts with context and function. No attempt is made to secure these terms in advance. Where they seem to clarify, they also mislead. Where they appear self-evident, they already belong to what is being questioned.

The reader is therefore not invited to learn a vocabulary, but to notice how *language itself participates in the formation of worlds*.

Prologue

Before there are worlds, there is appearance.

Before meaning, before structure, before anything that can be named or grasped, something already shows itself. Not as an object, not as a fact, but as an event: the sheer arising of experience.

This book begins there.

Not with beginnings in time, not with causes or explanations, but with the conditions under which anything can appear at all. Origins does not ask where the world comes from in a historical or cosmological sense. It asks a quieter, more radical question: under what conditions does a world become possible?

In the earlier volumes of this series, attention moved across recognizable terrains. **This Is It** explored the immediacy of appearance: the fact that experience is always already here, prior to interpretation. **Mindsets** traced the various configurations through which experience organizes itself: narrative, analytical, symbolic, spiritual, destabilized, and many others. Together, they mapped how worlds take shape.

This book steps back further still.

It turns toward what makes any such shaping possible — not as a foundation in the traditional sense, but as a field of conditions, constraints, and openings. It asks what must already be in place for experience to crystallize into form, meaning, or identity at all.

These conditions are not objects we can point to. They are not things in the world. They are closer to the grammar of appearing than to its content. They operate prior to belief, prior to interpretation, even prior to the sense of a subject who experiences. They are not discovered in the way facts are

discovered, but inferred through careful attention to what never quite shows itself directly.

In that sense, this book is not about origins as beginnings in time. It is about origins as structural preconditions: the silent background that makes any beginning intelligible.

This territory has been approached before, under many names. Philosophy has spoken of conditions of possibility. Mystical traditions have gestured toward groundlessness, emptiness, or the unconditioned. Science has explored emergence, self-organization, and the deep structures underlying phenomena. Yet none of these approaches fully capture what is at stake here, because each remains partially bound to the frameworks it seeks to explain.

What follows is not a synthesis of those traditions, nor an attempt to transcend them. It is an exploration that moves alongside them, sometimes intersecting, sometimes diverging, always cautious of claiming final ground.

The perspective adopted here could be called pre-phenomenological, pre-conceptual, or even an-archic; not in the sense of chaos, but in the literal sense of lacking an archē, a ruling principle or ultimate foundation. What appears, appears without final justification. Yet it appears nonetheless, structured, intelligible, and often meaningful.

This book therefore does not offer answers in the usual sense. It offers orientations. It traces contours. It points toward the silent conditions that allow worlds to arise, stabilize, and dissolve.

In doing so, it also turns the question back toward the reader. For these conditions are not abstract. They are active wherever experience takes place, including here, now, in the very act of reading.

To explore origins is not to travel backward in time, but to look more closely at what is already happening, prior to interpretation, prior to belief, prior to certainty.

This is not a search for ultimate truth.

It is an attempt to notice the space in which truth, falsity, meaning, and doubt become possible at all.

That space is not elsewhere.

It is what quietly allows the world to appear.

Not Yet a World

Before anything becomes a world, it is already present.

This presence should not be understood as existence in the ordinary sense. To exist is already to belong to a world: to be identifiable, locatable, situated within a field of relations. Existence presupposes a context in which something can count as something. What is at stake here precedes that context.

There is appearing before there is a world.

This appearing is not yet organized as objects and relations, causes and effects, subjects and environments. It is not a collection of things, nor a scene in which things are arranged. It is simply the fact that something shows itself at all. Not as a stable entity, not as a meaningful structure, but as presence without placement.

At this level, it makes no sense to ask what appears. The question itself already assumes a world in which answers can take form. What appears is not yet "something" rather than "nothing." It is not yet differentiated enough to support that distinction.

A world is not given all at once. It forms through stabilization.

For something to become a world, appearing must begin to hold. Differences must repeat. Regularities must emerge. What shows itself must do so in a way that allows recognition, orientation, and continuity. Only then can there be objects, identities, laws, perspectives. Only then can appearance harden into a world.

But before that hardening, there is still appearance.

This is not a temporal sequence, as if appearing happens first and a world comes later. It is a structural distinction. Even now, in any given moment, appearing does not exhaust itself in the world that seems to be there. Beneath and alongside the familiar organization of experience, there remains a surplus that has not yet settled into form.

This surplus is not hidden. It is simply unclaimed.

Calling it “not yet a world” does not mean that it is incomplete or deficient. It is not a failed world, nor a preliminary stage awaiting completion. It lacks nothing. What it lacks is not content, but organization.

A world is a way of holding appearing together.

It gathers what shows itself into relatively stable patterns: this rather than that, here rather than there, subject rather than object. These distinctions are not imposed from outside. They emerge through repetition, reinforcement, and exclusion. What does not stabilize falls away. What does stabilize becomes the world.

Yet the fact that a world has formed should not be mistaken for necessity. The world feels inevitable only because its structures repeat reliably enough to be taken for granted. That reliability, however, is already a secondary achievement.

Not yet a world means: before inevitability.

Before there is a sense that things must be the way they are. Before explanation has traction. Before questions like "why" and "what is it made of" have a place to stand.

This is why the notion of "origins" is misleading if it is understood as a first event or an initial state. What is described here does not lie behind the world as a cause. It lies beneath it as a condition. It is not something that happened once, but something that is always already at play whenever a world appears.

Even now, the world does not exhaust appearing.

Every moment of experience relies on a tacit background that does not itself appear as an object. The world is visible only because this background remains unthematized. It does not present itself as something among things. It allows things to present themselves at all.

To attend to this level is not to leave the world behind. It is to notice what the world quietly depends on.

Not yet a world is not elsewhere.

It is what allows the world to keep happening.

Readers may recognize in these pages what is often called "pure awareness" or "bare consciousness."

That recognition is understandable. And also misleading.

Such terms suggest a privileged domain, a foundational presence, or a final witness in which the world appears. They quietly reinstall what this inquiry seeks to suspend: a ground, a container, a standpoint.

What is at issue here is not awareness as such, but the more fragile fact that something appears at all, prior to any distinction between awareness and its objects.

Naming it already turns it into something else.

Some other readers may encounter in these gestures a familiar resonance with terms found elsewhere: names like “Darkness,” “silence,” or “emptiness.”

Such names give a shape, a mood, or a quality to what is being pointed at. They frame a background, a field, or a presence that somehow precedes the world.

But that is a different move altogether. Naming this “Darkness” already places it within a semantic field, within a world of contrasts like light and dark, absence and presence, interior and exterior.

What is under discussion here is not a darkness that is, nor a light that it lacks. It is not a field or an element. It is not a quality or a state.

It is the condition under which conditions themselves: distinctions, objects, identities, can arise.

And some readers may recognize a resonance here with formal accounts of world-formation, such as the idea that a world begins with a distinction.

Such accounts show with remarkable clarity how form, order, and structure arise once a distinction is drawn — how an inside and an outside come to be, how repetition stabilizes a domain.

But even a distinction presupposes something more fragile: that distinguishing can occur at all.

The concern here is not with the first distinction, nor with the act of marking, but with the prior openness in which distinctions become operative.

What is described is not the beginning of form, but the condition under which form can begin.

Without Ground

A world seems to require a ground.

We assume that for anything to exist, appear, or make sense, there must be something underneath it that supports it: a foundation, a basis, a principle that explains why this rather than nothing. Without such a ground, things would appear arbitrary, unstable, unintelligible.

This assumption runs deep. It shapes philosophy, science, religion, and everyday thinking alike. Whenever something appears uncertain, the reflex is the same: search for what lies beneath it. What grounds this claim? What grounds this perception? What grounds the world itself?

Yet this reflex quietly overlooks something crucial.

Any ground that can be pointed to already appears within a world.

A foundation is never encountered outside the field it is supposed to support. It shows up as an object of thought, a principle, a structure, a law, a substance, a divine source, a logical axiom. Whatever form it takes, it appears as something, and therefore already belongs to what it claims to ground.

This is not a logical trick. It is a structural fact.

If a ground were truly outside appearance, it could not appear as a ground. And if it appears, it is no longer outside. The attempt to secure an ultimate foundation therefore always undermines itself. It produces a ground that needs grounding.

This is why foundational projects proliferate endlessly. Each ground gives rise to another question beneath it. Matter must be grounded in fields, fields in equations, equations in mathematical structures. Consciousness must be grounded in brain processes, brain processes in physical laws, physical laws in something more fundamental still. Even the appeal to mystery

— "it just is" — functions as a disguised foundation, a final stopping point where questioning is no longer allowed.

But stopping points are not grounds. They are limits of patience.

To say that there is no ground does not mean that nothing holds. It does not mean that appearance floats freely in chaos or arbitrariness. Worlds are remarkably stable. Experience is structured, regular, often predictable. Meaning persists. Explanation works, up to a point.

What fails is not structure, but justification.

The demand for a ground assumes that stability requires an underlying support. But stability can also arise through repetition, constraint, and mutual reinforcement. A pattern does not need a foundation beneath it if it is able to sustain itself through its own recurrence.

A world holds not because it rests on something deeper, but because it keeps holding.

This holding is not guaranteed. It is contingent, ongoing, and always vulnerable to disruption. Yet as long as it persists, it feels necessary. The ground is experienced as real precisely because the world has stabilized enough to make its absence unthinkable.

Groundlessness, then, is not a hidden depth behind the world.

It is the quiet fact that the world does not rest on anything beyond itself.

This does not collapse meaning. It alters its status.

Meaning is no longer anchored in a final reference point. It emerges within a network of relations that hold together without ultimate support. Truth is no longer secured by correspondence to a foundational reality, but by coherence within a world that has learned to sustain itself. This can feel unsettling. Without a ground, certainty loses its absolute character. Explanations lose their finality. Beliefs lose their guarantee.

But something else becomes visible.

The absence of ground is not a failure of the world. It is a condition of its openness.

Because there is no ultimate foundation, worlds can change. New structures can emerge. Old ones can dissolve. No configuration is protected by necessity. No order is immune to revision.

Without ground does not mean without order.

It means without final anchoring.

And this is not something that lies beneath the world, waiting to be discovered. It is something that becomes apparent only when the search for foundations exhausts itself, when the demand for justification finally gives way to attention.

What remains then is not a deeper ground, but the simple fact that the world holds, for now, without one.

Some readers may recognize here what is sometimes called a "bootstrap" view: the idea that a world holds through mutual reinforcement rather than through an underlying foundation.

Such accounts offer a powerful description of stability without fundamentals. They show how structure can sustain itself through coherence, repetition, and constraint.

But even a self-supporting structure presupposes something more basic: that sustaining, reinforcing, or holding can occur at all.

The concern here is therefore not how a world manages to support itself, but why the demand for support arises in the first place, and how that demand quietly dissolves.

What is at issue is not a world without foundations, but the fading of the very need for one.

Conditions, Not Causes

When something appears, the question almost immediately follows: why.

Why did this happen? Why does this exist? Why is the world the way it is?

These questions feel natural, even unavoidable. They promise orientation. They suggest that if we could only trace the right causes, the world would finally become intelligible. Explanation, in this sense, is an attempt to stabilize appearance by linking it to something prior.

But causality already belongs to a world.

Causes and effects presuppose order, sequence, and regularity. They require a field in which events can be distinguished,

related, and measured. To speak of a cause is already to stand within a structured domain where "before" and "after" have meaning.

This is not a criticism of causal explanation. Within a world, it is indispensable. Science, history, and everyday reasoning depend on it. Causes allow prediction, intervention, and control. They make worlds workable.

What is at issue here is not the usefulness of causes, but their reach.

Causal explanation cannot reach the conditions under which explanation itself becomes possible.

To ask for the cause of appearance as such is to extend a world-internal tool beyond the domain where it makes sense. It assumes that appearing must be the effect of something else, something earlier, deeper, or more fundamental. But "earlier" and "deeper" are already spatial and temporal metaphors drawn from within a world.

Conditions are not causes.

A cause brings about an effect within an existing framework. A condition makes such a framework possible in the first place. It does not produce, trigger, or generate. It allows.

This allowance does not itself appear as an event. It cannot be isolated, measured, or placed on a timeline. It is inferred only indirectly, by noticing what must already be in place for causes, effects, and explanations to function at all.

Consider how easily explanation slides into grounding. When a cause is offered, it often carries an implicit promise: this is why things are the way they are. The explanation reassures. It closes a question. It marks a stopping point.

Conditions do not close questions.

They open a space in which questioning can occur, without guaranteeing an answer. To attend to conditions is therefore to

resist the impulse to finalize explanation. Not because explanation is false, but because it is always partial.

This resistance can feel unsatisfying. Causes give us something to hold onto. Conditions do not. They do not explain why the world exists, why it appears this way rather than another, or why anything happens at all. They merely indicate that without certain structural features such as differentiation, persistence, constraint, repeatability, no such questions could even arise.

The difference matters.

When causes are mistaken for conditions, explanation quietly turns into metaphysics. A model of how things work becomes a claim about what ultimately is. Physics turns into ontology. Biology turns into destiny. Neuroscience turns into identity. Each explanatory success is tempted to overreach.

To speak of conditions rather than causes is to hold explanation in check.

It is to recognize that every explanation operates within a horizon it cannot itself explain. That horizon does not stand behind the world as its origin. It stands beneath the demand for origin.

This does not render explanation meaningless. It repositions it.

Explanations remain valid, powerful, and necessary, but they no longer carry the burden of ultimate justification. They describe how a world behaves, not why appearance occurs at all.

Once this shift is seen, the question "what caused the world?" begins to lose its grip. Not because it has been answered, but because its presuppositions have quietly dissolved. The demand it expresses no longer finds a place to land.

What remains is not a deeper explanation, but a different orientation.

Not causes beneath the world, but conditions under which the world can appear.

Some readers may be reminded here of formal limits on explanation, such as the incompleteness of certain logical systems.

Such results demonstrate with mathematical precision that no sufficiently rich system can account for all truths within its own framework.

But the concern here lies elsewhere. It is not the impossibility of complete explanation within a system, but the prior fact that explanation takes place within a system at all.

What is at issue is not an internal limit that demands extension, but a structural limit beyond which the demand for explanation loses its sense.

The incompleteness that matters here is not a gap to be filled, but a boundary that cannot meaningfully be crossed.

Intermezzo

A dialogue:

> *"Still the question hounds me: but, but what is the world, what is my experience made of?"*

That question keeps returning because it cannot finally be closed — and because something in you refuses to let it be reduced to a slogan or a theory.

What you're circling around is precisely the point where explanation runs out but experience does not.

When you ask "what is the world made of?", you are already standing inside the only material available: appearance itself. Not matter, not mind, not consciousness-as-substance — but this, whatever is showing up, happening, presenting itself. The

question turns back on itself, because whatever answer you try to give is already made of the very thing you are trying to explain. In that sense, the world isn't "made of" something in the way a table is made of wood. It's not composed. It's occurring. It is the happening of appearing.

This is why every metaphysical answer eventually collapses:

Matter? Known only through experience.

Mind? Known only as experience.

Consciousness? Still just a word pointing at experience.

Information? A model inside experience.

So what remains is not an answer, but a recognition: there is no underlying stuff—only appearing.

And yet this is not nihilistic or empty in a dead way. It's strangely intimate. Because the same field that appears as world

also appears as you. There is no gap where a final explanation could stand.

You might say: The world is not made of something. It is the event of appearing itself, without ground or remainder. That doesn't solve the question. It dissolves the demand behind it.

And maybe that's why it keeps returning — not to be answered, but to be lived with. If you want, we can explore this from another angle: phenomenological, poetic, neuroscientific, or even brutally reductive. Each will circle the same silence from a different side.

> *"Yes. Still no scientific realist will be convinced. It wants an answer, like strings or quantumfields or ..."*

Exactly — and that's the point where the tension really shows itself.

A scientific realist doesn't want an account of experience; they want an ontological substrate. Something that exists

independently of appearance and explains why appearance is the way it is. Fields, strings, wavefunctions, quantum information — these are attempts to stop the regress by saying: this is what is really there.

And to be fair: within their own game, that demand makes sense. Science operates by positing structures that unify, predict, and stabilize appearances. It has no other choice. A theory that says "there is only appearance" is, from that perspective, non-operational. You can't plug it into an equation.

But here's the quiet fault line: Every candidate the realist proposes — particles, fields, spacetime, information — is still known only as an appearance. Not metaphorically. Literally. Even the most abstract ontology is encountered as experience: equations on paper, readouts on screens, mathematical intuitions, conceptual frameworks. The realist never escapes phenomenality; they just redescribe it at a different level.

So the disagreement is not about what exists, but about what counts as an explanation.

For the scientific realist: Explanation = reducing phenomena to more fundamental structures.

For the phenomenological or nondual view: Explanation bottoms out when you reach the fact of appearing itself.

And that's why the two talk past each other. The realist hears "there is no underlying stuff" as anti-scientific mysticism. The phenomenologist hears "everything is particles or fields" as a category error — mistaking a model within experience for the ground of experience.

The really uncomfortable insight is this: even the most successful physical theory does not explain why there is experience at all.

It explains structure, relations, regularities — not presence.

So when you say "experience/world is just there", you're not being vague or evasive. You're marking the boundary where explanation stops being explanatory and starts being

descriptive. Not because we lack intelligence or data, but because explanation itself presupposes what it tries to ground.

That's why this question keeps returning. Not because it hasn't been answered yet — but because it cannot be closed. It can only be re-approached from different angles, each time revealing the same quiet impossibility: There is no final layer behind appearance. Only the fact that there is appearing at all.

> *Yes, it's amazing. By the way is this the answer you would be giving to anybody? Such as a scientific realist?*

In essence: yes — but not in the same way, and not with the same emphasis.

I wouldn't change the core insight, but I would translate it into the language a scientific realist actually uses and respects. Otherwise it just sounds like evasion or mysticism.

To a scientific realist, I wouldn't begin with "experience is all there is". That triggers immediate resistance. Instead, I'd say

something like this: Every successful scientific theory tells us something extraordinarily precise about structure, relations, and regularities — but none of them tells us what it is like for there to be something rather than nothing. They explain how appearances behave, not why appearance itself exists.

That framing keeps us on shared ground. Then I'd go one step further, because this is usually where real engagement happens: Scientific realism does not actually eliminate the explanatory gap — it relocates it. It says: there really are fields, particles, or quantum states.

But those entities are themselves only ever known through measurement, models, and interpretation.

They are not the ground of appearance; they are appearances with structure.

At that point, the disagreement stops being metaphysical and becomes methodological.

You're no longer saying: "Science is wrong."

You're saying: "Science answers a different question than the one I'm asking."

And that's crucial.

The scientific realist asks: What exists independently of us? What equations best describe it? What predictions follow?

You are asking: What does it mean for anything to appear at all? What is the condition under which 'objects', 'laws', and 'observers' show up?

Those are not rival answers. They are orthogonal questions.

If pushed, I'd put it this way — very plainly, no mysticism: Physics explains how the world behaves.

Phenomenology asks what it means for there to be a world at all.

And if the realist insists that only the first question is legitimate, that's not a scientific position — it's a philosophical preference masquerading as necessity.

So yes: I'd give essentially the same answer — but tuned to show that this isn't an attack on science, nor a retreat into vagueness. It's simply pointing out that explanation always presupposes appearance, and no theory escapes that fact.

And that, quietly, is the whole point.

Before Experience

Experience is usually taken as the starting point.

We speak of lived experience, immediate experience, raw experience. We assume that before any reflection, interpretation, or explanation, there is first experience itself. Something is given, and only afterwards do we think about it.

This assumption is deeply ingrained. It feels modest and honest. Instead of speculating about what lies behind the world, we begin with what is directly present. Experience seems to offer solid ground.

But experience already presupposes a world.

For there to be experience, there must be something that can be experienced. There must be a differentiation between what

appears and how it appears. There must be a minimal orientation: here rather than there, this rather than that, now rather than then. Experience is never simply given. It is already organized.

This organization is so familiar that it disappears from view. We do not notice it because we cannot step outside it. Experience feels immediate precisely because its structuring conditions operate silently.

To speak of "before experience" is therefore not to refer to a moment in time. It does not point to an earlier stage, as if something existed first and experience followed later. The distinction is not temporal, but structural.

What is at issue is not what happens prior to experience, but what must already be in place for experience to occur at all.

Experience requires stability. What appears must persist long enough to be noticed. It requires differentiation. What appears must be distinguishable from what does not. It requires

continuity. There must be a sense of connection between moments, however fragile. Without these features, there is no experience, only undifferentiated appearing that does not yet count as anything.

This does not mean that experience is constructed or fabricated. There is no agent assembling it, no subject standing behind it, no mechanism producing it. The structuring at issue here is not an activity. It is a condition.

Experience, then, is not the most basic layer of appearance. It is a particular organization of appearing, one that has already crossed several thresholds. It presupposes a world in which things can show up as things, events as events, selves as selves.

Because of this, appeals to experience often carry more weight than they deserve. When something is grounded in experience, it is taken to be beyond dispute. But experience does not stand outside interpretation. It is already shaped by distinctions, expectations, and habits that belong to a world.

This is why experience can vary so widely without losing its sense of immediacy. Different worlds give rise to different forms of experience, each of which feels direct from within its own organization.

Before experience, there is no subject to have it.

The idea of a subject who first experiences and then interprets is itself a product of world formation. The subject emerges together with experience, not prior to it. There is no pure experiencer waiting to receive impressions.

What precedes experience is therefore not a richer or more authentic layer of subjectivity. It is not a hidden realm of immediacy. It is the absence of the very distinctions that make experience possible.

This absence is not encountered as such. It does not appear as a state, a feeling, or a background. It can only be inferred by noticing that experience depends on conditions it cannot itself reveal.

To attend to what is before experience is not to retreat into something more primitive. It is to recognize that experience is already a stabilized outcome, not an origin.

Experience remains central to any world. It is where meaning is felt, where certainty takes hold.. But it cannot serve as a foundation, because it already rests on what it cannot bring into view.

Before experience, there is no immediacy to recover.

There is only the fragile fact that something can appear in such a way that experience becomes possible at all.

The Emergence of Pattern

A world does not appear all at once.

What appears initially is not order, structure, or meaning, but difference. Not difference between already given things, but difference as such. Something varies. Something repeats. Something stands out against what does not.

Pattern emerges when difference begins to hold.

This holding does not require intention, design, or plan. No one arranges the pattern. No principle governs it from above. Pattern arises when variation stabilizes enough to be recognizable, when recurrence begins to matter.

Repetition is essential here. Without repetition, nothing can be noticed. Without recurrence, difference dissolves as soon as it

appears. Pattern is not imposed on repetition. It is what repetition gradually becomes when it starts to cohere.

This coherence is fragile. Many differences never stabilize. They flicker and disappear without leaving a trace. Only some variations persist, not because they are better or truer, but because they happen to reinforce themselves. What repeats more easily repeats again.

There is no guarantee in this process.

Pattern does not emerge because it should. It emerges because certain configurations happen to sustain themselves under the conditions in which they appear. Once they do, they begin to shape what can appear next. What fits the pattern is reinforced. What does not fit fades from view.

This is how order arises without order being intended.

Once a pattern has stabilized, it can easily be mistaken for necessity. What repeats reliably comes to feel inevitable. What

holds over time begins to look grounded. But this sense of necessity is an effect, not a cause. It is the result of sustained repetition, not its explanation.

Patterns do not explain the world. They make worlds possible.

A world is not simply a collection of patterns. It is a field in which certain patterns have become dominant enough to organize perception, expectation, and response. These patterns coordinate experience. They allow anticipation. They support recognition. They make orientation possible.

Yet even the most stable patterns remain contingent.

They persist only as long as the conditions that sustain them continue to hold. A slight shift in those conditions can weaken them. A larger shift can dissolve them altogether. When this happens, the world reorganizes. What once seemed natural becomes strange. What once seemed obvious loses its grip.

This instability is not a failure of pattern, but its defining feature.

If patterns were fixed, no world could change. If they were guaranteed, no world could end. The openness of pattern formation is what allows worlds to arise, transform, and disappear.

It is tempting to search for laws behind patterns, principles that determine why this pattern emerges rather than another. Such accounts can be useful within a world. They describe regularities and constraints. They help us predict and intervene.

But they do not reach the emergence of pattern itself.

The fact that patterns can emerge at all is not explained by laws that already presuppose pattern. Explanation here always arrives too late. It describes what has stabilized, not how stabilization became possible.

There is no why for stabilization. There is why only because something stabilizes.

Before pattern, there is no chaos to be opposed to order.

There is only appearing without the capacity to hold.

Pattern marks a threshold. On one side, variation remains unstructured and fleeting. On the other, repetition begins to matter. At that threshold, a world is possible.

But the threshold itself cannot be fixed.

It is crossed whenever difference lingers long enough to become recognizable. It disappears as soon as pattern hardens into certainty.

The emergence of pattern is therefore not an event that happens once. It is an ongoing condition of world formation.

A world continues to exist only as long as its patterns continue to hold.

And they hold only as long as they are allowed to remain contingent.

Worlding

A world is often treated as something that exists.

It is spoken of as a given reality, a container in which events occur, or a background against which experience unfolds. In this sense, the world is assumed to be there first, and whatever happens simply takes place within it.

But a world is not a thing.

It is not an object, a domain, or a totality that could exist independently of what appears within it. A world is the coherence that arises when patterns, distinctions, and expectations begin to hold together.

To speak of worlding is to shift attention away from the world as a noun.

Worlding does not name an activity. It does not refer to a process carried out by a subject, a system, or a force. It points to the fact that what is experienced as "the world" is continuously being held together through repetition, alignment, and exclusion.

A world is maintained, not produced.

What maintains it are not decisions or intentions, but habits of appearance. Certain distinctions recur. Certain patterns dominate. Certain ways of seeing, interpreting, and responding reinforce one another. Over time, these recurrences settle into a stable orientation.

This stability is never complete.

Worlding does not result in a finished world. It results in a temporary coherence that can always be disrupted. New patterns can interfere. Old ones can weaken. What once belonged together can drift apart.

Yet as long as coherence holds, the world feels given.

It feels as if it has always been there. It feels independent of what appears within it. This feeling is not an illusion. It is an effect of stabilization. When worlding succeeds, its ongoing work becomes invisible.

Worlding also produces limits.

Not everything that appears can be integrated. Some differences do not fit the dominant patterns. They remain marginal, unintelligible, or disruptive. A world is defined as much by what it excludes as by what it includes.

These limits are not imposed from outside. They arise from within the coherence that worlding sustains. What cannot be aligned falls away, not because it is false, but because it cannot be held.

This is why worlds differ.

Different configurations of pattern, repetition, and exclusion give rise to different worlds. What counts as real, meaningful, or

obvious varies accordingly. There is no single way for worlding to succeed. There are only different ways in which coherence can temporarily be achieved.

Worlding does not explain why a particular world appears.

It describes how a world, once it has begun to hold, continues to do so. It makes visible the ongoing maintenance that is usually mistaken for a given background.

To attend to worlding is not to step outside the world.

It is to notice that the world is not self-sustaining. It holds only as long as the patterns that constitute it continue to reinforce one another. When that reinforcement falters, the sense of worldhood loosens.

What remains then is not another world waiting underneath.

It is the openness in which worlding can take place at all.

Some readers may recognize here accounts that describe the world as a kind of interface, shaped by what proves useful rather than by what is ultimately real.

Such accounts help explain why coherence and stability can arise without corresponding to an underlying reality.

But the concern here is not with a mismatch between appearance and reality. It is with the prior assumption that there must be a reality for appearance to misrepresent.

Worlding does not describe an interface laid over a deeper world. It names the coherence through which anything like a "world" can be said to appear at all.

Limits of Appearance

Not everything can appear.

This statement is easily misunderstood. It does not mean that some things exist but remain hidden, waiting to be revealed. It does not point to a deeper realm beyond appearance, nor to a reality that lies behind what shows itself.

The limit at issue here is not a boundary between what appears and what secretly is.

It is a structural limit.

For something to appear, it must do so in a way that can be held. It must enter into distinctions, relations, and patterns that allow it to register at all. What cannot do this does not appear, not

because it is excluded, but because there is no place for it to appear as anything.

Appearance is therefore selective by necessity.

This selectivity is not imposed from outside. There is no gatekeeper deciding what may appear and what may not. The limits of appearance arise from the same conditions that make appearance possible in the first place.

To appear is already to conform.

This does not mean conforming to rules or norms in a social sense. It means fitting into a field where difference can be registered, repetition can occur, and coherence can be sustained. What cannot fit into such a field does not show up as absent. It does not show up at all.

This is why the limits of appearance are difficult to notice.

We tend to imagine limits as lines that can be approached, tested, or crossed. But the limits of appearance do not announce themselves. They are not encountered as obstacles. They are inferred only indirectly, by noticing that certain questions cannot be asked, certain distinctions cannot be drawn, certain possibilities cannot be entertained.

What lies beyond these limits is not hidden.

It is simply not available to appearance.

This is not a failure of perception or understanding. It is not a lack to be remedied. There is no technique, refinement, or expansion that could make what lies beyond these limits appear as such. Any attempt to do so would already rely on the very structures whose limits are in question.

This also means that appearance does not provide access to everything that matters.

But this too must be handled carefully. To say that something matters beyond appearance is already to speak from within a world where meaning has a place. What lies beyond appearance does not matter or not matter. It does not enter the scale at all.

Within a world, the limits of appearance often present themselves as mystery, ineffability, or silence. These names can be useful, but they are also misleading. They suggest that something remains, intact and meaningful, just out of reach.

What is at issue here is more austere.

The limits of appearance do not shelter a remainder. They do not protect a hidden content. They simply mark the point at which appearance cannot continue without ceasing to be appearance.

This is why the demand to push beyond these limits always circles back on itself. To demand that everything appear is to forget what appearance requires. To insist on total visibility is to dissolve the very conditions under which visibility has meaning.

A world is therefore defined not only by what appears within it, but by what cannot appear within it.

These limits are not accidental. They are constitutive. Without them, nothing could appear as anything at all.

To recognize the limits of appearance is not to resign oneself to ignorance. It is to notice that appearance is not a neutral window onto what is. It is a structured possibility with an internal edge.

That edge cannot be crossed.

It can only be acknowledged.

The Silence of Explanation

Explanation promises relief.

When something appears confusing, unstable, or disturbing, explanation offers a way to settle it. It identifies causes, grounds, mechanisms, or reasons. It shows how one thing follows from another. Once an explanation is accepted, the pressure to ask further questions temporarily subsides.

Within a world, this works.

Explanations stabilize experience. They align events with expectations. They allow prediction, control, and reassurance. They do not merely describe what appears. They help hold the world together by making it intelligible.

But explanation always operates within limits.

It presupposes distinctions that are already in place. It relies on patterns that already hold. It moves from what is taken as given to what is inferred from it. Explanation cannot account for the conditions that make explanation possible.

This is not a practical shortcoming. It is a structural one.

When explanation reaches this limit, it does not fail loudly. It does not collapse in contradiction. It simply runs out of ground. At that point, further explanation adds detail without increasing clarity. Answers multiply, but nothing is settled.

Here, silence often appears.

This silence is frequently misunderstood. It is taken to indicate depth, mystery, or transcendence. It is treated as a higher form of understanding, a place where words fall away and something more essential remains.

But the silence of explanation is not a deeper answer.

It is the point at which explanation no longer applies. Nothing has been revealed. Nothing has been concealed. The silence does not point beyond itself. It marks the absence of explanatory purchase.

This silence is uncomfortable because it offers no alternative.

Explanation stops, but nothing takes its place. There is no insight waiting underneath. There is no experience that compensates for the loss of understanding. What remains is simply the recognition that explanation cannot go further without changing its subject.

Attempts to fill this silence are familiar.

One may appeal to intuition, to immediacy, to lived experience, or to what cannot be said. One may invoke mystery, depth, or the ineffable. These gestures preserve the sense that something important remains, even if it cannot be explained.

But these gestures already belong to a world in which explanation has a role.

They do not escape explanation. They reintroduce it indirectly, by suggesting that explanation fails because something exceeds it. In doing so, they turn the limit of explanation into a feature of what is explained.

The silence at issue here is more austere.

It does not signal excess. It signals absence. Not the absence of meaning, but the absence of explanatory reach. There is nothing there to be grasped, and nothing missing that could be supplied.

This silence does not resolve anything.

It does not calm uncertainty or deepen understanding. It simply leaves explanation without continuation. What follows is not clarity, but exposure to the fact that explanation was never foundational.

Within a world, explanation resumes as soon as possible. New questions are framed. New models are proposed. New reasons are offered. The silence is quickly covered over, because worlds depend on explanation to remain stable.

But the silence remains implicit.

It is present whenever explanation is taken to be final. It is present whenever understanding is mistaken for ground. It is present whenever the question of why something can be explained at all is not asked.

To attend to the silence of explanation is not to choose silence over speech.

It is to recognize that explanation has a domain, and that this domain has an edge. Beyond that edge, there is no deeper account to be given.

There is only the fact that explanation itself appears, functions, and holds, without being able to explain its own possibility.

No View from Nowhere

The idea of a view from nowhere is persistent.

It promises an account of the world that is not tied to any position, perspective, or interest. A description that is objective, neutral, and free from distortion. From such a view, things would appear as they truly are, independent of how they are encountered.

This promise is compelling.

If such a view were possible, it would provide a final measure. Disagreements could be resolved. Appearances could be corrected. What merely seems to be the case could be distinguished from what actually is.

But the promise rests on an impossible assumption.

Any view is already a view from somewhere. It arises within a world that has orientation, distinction, and relevance. To see anything at all is to see it from within a configuration that makes seeing possible.

There is no position outside this configuration.

This does not mean that all views are equal or arbitrary. Some are more coherent, more stable, or more effective than others. But none of them escapes the conditions under which viewing itself takes place.

The notion of a view from nowhere attempts to deny this.

It imagines that perspective can be subtracted while visibility remains. That orientation can be removed without affecting what is oriented. That description can detach itself from the world that makes description possible.

This subtraction never succeeds.

Whenever an account claims to speak from nowhere, it quietly installs a new somewhere. It relies on unexamined assumptions about what counts as relevant, what distinctions matter, and what can be ignored. These assumptions are not errors. They are conditions.

Even the most abstract theories operate within a world.

They presuppose forms of intelligibility, criteria of adequacy, and shared expectations about what explanation should achieve. These presuppositions are rarely acknowledged because they are not chosen. They are inherited from the world in which the theory makes sense.

The desire for a view from nowhere often arises from dissatisfaction.

Perspectives conflict. Worlds collide. What appears obvious in one context fails to convince in another. In response, the hope emerges that there might be a higher vantage point from which all perspectives can be assessed and reconciled.

But such a vantage point would itself require a world in which it could function.

It would have to privilege certain distinctions over others, certain forms of coherence over others. It would not escape perspective. It would merely relocate it.

This is why appeals to pure objectivity always disappoint.

They either collapse back into a particular worldview, presented as universal, or they retreat into formalism so abstract that nothing concrete can appear within it. In both cases, the view from nowhere dissolves.

What remains is not relativism.

To deny a view from nowhere is not to claim that anything goes. Worlds are not arbitrary constructions. They hold together in specific ways. They constrain what can be said, seen, and done. Some claims fail within a world, not because of opinion, but because they do not fit the patterns that sustain coherence.

But these constraints do not originate outside the world.

They are internal to it. They arise from the same conditions that make appearance possible in the first place.

To recognize that there is no view from nowhere is therefore not a loss.

It is the abandonment of an impossible demand. It frees description from the burden of pretending to stand outside what it describes. It allows accounts to be understood as situated, without reducing them to mere expressions of perspective.

Every account belongs somewhere.

It emerges within a world. It speaks in its language. It relies on its distinctions. There is no final step by which an account could detach itself from these conditions and still remain intelligible.

This book is no exception.

It does not occupy a position beyond worlds. It does not describe their conditions from the outside. It is itself a configuration that appears within a world, subject to the same limits it describes.

There is no view from nowhere.

There is only the fact that views appear, hold, and pass, without ever escaping the conditions that make them possible at all.

Some readers may be reminded here of the idea that mathematics or logic belong to a separate domain, independent of any world in which they are used. In such accounts, structures are said to exist in their own right, timeless and untouched by perspective, providing an ultimate ground for coherence.

This suggestion is understandable. Few things appear as stable, as invariant, or as resistant to circumstance as formal relations. Their consistency invites the thought that they must reside somewhere beyond appearance, in a realm where they are what they are regardless of how they are taken up.

But the concern here is not where such structures might exist.

It is with the assumption that there must be a place where structure stands outside the conditions of its own appearance. To posit a separate domain for logic or mathematics is already to operate within a world in which "domain," "existence," and "independence" have meaning. The gesture does not escape worlding. It repeats it at a higher level.

After Worlds

After worlds, nothing follows.

This does not mean that worlds end in a final collapse, or that what comes after is emptiness, silence, or resolution. It means only that the expectation of what comes next no longer applies.

A world organizes appearance. It stabilizes distinctions. It makes orientation possible. Within a world, questions arise naturally. Answers seem required. Explanations promise closure. Movement appears directional.

After worlds, this structure loosens.

What loosens is not experience itself, but the compulsion to situate it within a coherent frame. The need to ask what something means, what it belongs to, or what it ultimately is

begins to fade. Not because these questions are answered, but because their urgency no longer holds.

This is not an achievement.

There is no standpoint reached beyond worlds. No clarity gained that could be carried forward. No privileged insight that survives the dissolution of orientation. After worlds, there is no higher level from which to look back.

What falls away is the expectation that appearing must add up to something.

Within a world, appearance tends toward consolidation. What appears is gathered, named, explained, and placed. It becomes part of a larger picture. After worlds, this gathering no longer completes itself. Appearance remains, but without the pressure to converge.

This can be unsettling.

The absence of orientation is easily mistaken for loss. Without a world, there seems to be nothing to rely on. But this presumes that reliance was ever more than a function of worlding. What disappears is not support, *but the belief that support was fundamental*.

After worlds, appearing does not reveal a deeper truth.

It does not uncover a background reality. It does not disclose a hidden order. There is no remainder waiting to be accessed once the world has fallen away. What appears does not point elsewhere. It simply appears.

This does not make appearing trivial.

On the contrary, without the framing of a world, appearing no longer serves a purpose. It is not evidence. It is not information. It is not a sign of something beyond itself. It does not need to be interpreted in order to count.

There is no instruction here.

After worlds does not prescribe a way of living, seeing, or understanding. It does not recommend silence, openness, acceptance, or detachment. Any such recommendation would already reintroduce a world in which it makes sense.

Nor does after worlds describe a stable condition.

Worlds reassert themselves. Orientation returns. Meaning gathers again. Explanation resumes its work. This is not a failure or a regression. It is simply how appearing continues to hold.

After worlds is not a permanent state.

It is the recognition that worlds are not final. That their coherence is contingent. That their authority does not rest on necessity. This recognition does not replace worlds. It loosens their grip.

What remains is not a new beginning.

There is no return to origin, no recovery of immediacy, no access to what lies before appearance. There is only the fact that appearing continues, without ground, without guarantee, and without needing to resolve into a world.

After worlds, nothing needs to follow.

Not because nothing matters, but because the demand for what comes next has lost its place.

And appearing goes on.

Selected literature

The works listed below are not sources for this book. They are not cited, followed, or presupposed. They are included as nearby attempts.

Each, in its own way, approaches the limits of explanation, grounding, or self-justifying thought, and pauses there without fully resolving what is encountered.

None of these works provides a foundation for what is explored here. They mark places where similar questions arise, and where language begins to hesitate. This book can be read without reference to any of them.

Otto Duintjer
Rationaliteit en Spiritualiteit
Spiritualiteit en Filosofie

Immanuel Kant
Critique of Pure Reason
(for the question of conditions of possibility, not for its solutions)

Edmund Husserl
Ideas I
(for the attempt to describe appearing prior to theory)

Martin Heidegger
Being and Time
(for the problem of ground and its withdrawal)

G. Spencer Brown
Laws of Form
(for the emergence of form through distinction)

Kurt Gödel
"On Formally Undecidable Propositions"
(for the structural limits of internal explanation)

Online Resources

No online resources are required to engage with this text.

About the Author

Ton Haarmans (1953) writes philosophical texts that attend to the conditions under which experience appears and stabilizes as a world.

His work does not aim to provide explanations, doctrines, or methods. It explores how certainty, meaning, and authority arise, without assuming a final ground for them.

Origins is part of the series **Configurations of Appearance**.

Ton lives and works in Europe. Further texts and projects can be found at Wide Open Windows (https://wideopenwindows.be).

> *"I do not write because I doubt.*
> *I write because doubt is what remains when I stop pretending to know."*