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Part I

Part 0 - Orientation

Where This Is Coming From

I didn't start here because I was curious about consciousness.

I started here because my life wouldn't fit the story it was given.

I grew up in a strict Muslim family. God, morality, gender, the future — all of it arrived pre-labelled:

- This is right.
- This is wrong.
- This is who you are.

Inside that, there wasn't much slack.

At the same time, I was attracted to men.

I didn't have theory for it. It was just a simple, persistent fact in my experience. A pull. A way my body and feelings oriented around certain people. And it clashed hard with the story I'd been handed.

If I borrow language from later in the book: the “compressions” I had around self, gender, and morality didn't match what was actually showing up in my field of experience. Story said one thing. Life said another.

You can't live like that forever without something breaking.

My first fix was to burn the story down.

If the official picture says I'm wrong, and I can't stop being what I am, maybe the picture is wrong. So I swung into atheism and “be rational, don't be fooled again.”

That move gave me:

- A way to say “no” to a structure that was crushing me.
- A sense of integrity: I'd rather be honest and damned than obedient and fake.
- A simpler world: no God, no sin, just matter, brains, and social games.

In the language I'll use later: that was a **stabilising move**. I tightened around a new “I” and a new world-model that felt more trustworthy. It worked — up to a point.

Even inside that flat, atheist frame, some things wouldn't stay flat.

Moments in nature, music, connection, intense emotion — they felt *bigger* than “atoms and social conditioning”. Not as proofs of God, just as data my map didn't really explain.

Then came LSD and mushrooms.

I'm not selling them as an answer. But they did blow holes in my maps: - The usual “me” went weirdly transparent or rearranged.

- Reality felt more fluid and constructed than I'd thought.
- There was a wide, non-personal clarity that didn't fit my current story.

They didn't hand me a new religion. They did something more annoying: they made it impossible to fully believe the old *or* the new story.

I couldn't go back to a personal, mythic God handing down rules.

I couldn't fully believe in a flat, emotionally antiseptic materialism either.

Meanwhile, my day job is software engineering / architecture. My brain is trained to think in terms of:

- systems and layers,
- interfaces and invariants,

- messy reality compressed into something usable.

So while all this was happening — religion cracking, atheism cracking, altered states happening — there was also this very nerdy background process running:

What's the *architecture* here?

How is experience wired?

What's stable? What's an implementation detail?

I didn't want a new spiritual “app”. I wanted to understand the runtime.

This book comes out of that mix:

a queer ex-Muslim, ex-atheist software architect trying to write one semi-sane systems doc for lived experience, after several failed designs.

At some point I stopped asking:

“What is ultimately real?”

and started asking:

“What is **appearing, right now**, and how is it organised?”

Not as metaphysics. Just as a way to stop fighting my own experience and to understand why certain patterns of suffering kept repeating.

This book is my current best answer to that question.

Chapter 1

What This Is (And What It's Not)

Before we go further, I want to set some boundaries around what this project is.

1.1 What this is not

This is **not**:

- **A religion.**

No commandments, no special group, no faith requirement. I'm not asking you to believe in a new invisible thing.

- **A scientific theory.**

I care a lot about science, but I'm not doing physics or neuroscience here. I'm not claiming to describe the ultimate furniture of the universe.

- **Therapy.**

Some of this might land in a psychologically helpful way. Some of it might not, depending on where you are. It's not a replacement for actual mental-health care.

- **A promise.**

I'm not promising enlightenment, peace, or a fixed, coherent self. I'm describing patterns and offering experiments.

If you're in acute crisis, suicidal, or traumatised, you deserve real humans and solid support. A book — especially this one — is not emergency equipment.

1.2 What this *is*

You can think of this as:

A user's manual for "what appears" — written by someone who's had to rebuild their firmware more than once.

If you're technical, you can also read it as an architecture document for experience. Not *the* design, but *a* design that seems to match a certain kind of mind that's crossed:

- religious certainty,
- anti-religious certainty,

- altered states,
- and the need for things to actually make structural sense.

A few core ideas that will show up:

- **The field** – a simple way of talking about the whole situation of experience at once: room, body, sounds, thoughts, feelings.
- **Structure** – how some parts of that field feel nearer, more important, or more “me” than others.
- **Compressions** – how things like “tree”, “friend”, “future”, “my personality”, “sin”, “trauma” show up as manageable chunks rather than raw chaos.
- **Two basic moves** the system can make when things are painful:
 - **Stabilise** – tighten around a trustworthy “I”, values, boundaries.
 - **Dissolve** – let the situation breathe, soften hard splits like “in here vs out there”.

None of these are sacred words. They’re just handles I’ve found useful.

The point isn’t that you end up believing “**there is a field and compressions**” as dogma. The point is that **looking at experience in this way** might make some of your tangles more understandable and a bit less punishing.

1.3 Why I’m leaving this trace

I’m mostly writing for people whose lives have been split across big fault lines:

- Religious vs secular.
- Straight vs queer.
- Rational vs mystical.
- Cynical vs hopeful.

The kinds of minds that have tried on several total stories, found each one too small, and are left with weird experiences, old guilt, and no stable lens that doesn’t insult some part of them.

This book is a trace of one lens that eventually stopped tearing me apart.
If your mind rhymes with mine, some of it might be reusable.

Chapter 2

How to Read This

This isn't meant to be consumed as doctrine. It's meant to be played with.

Here are a few ways to do that.

2.1 Basic stance

2.2 1. Compare, don't believe

Whenever I describe something, don't ask:

“Is this ultimately true?”

Ask:

“Does anything like this actually happen in *my* experience?”

If yes, good — now we have shared ground.

If no, also good — now we know we're different somewhere. You don't have to force it.

2.3 2. Stay close to your own field

Especially in Parts I–III, it'll help if you literally look up from the page sometimes and check:

- What's in my visual field right now?
- What's the sense of “here”?
- What's the emotional weather?
- Where do thoughts, memories, plans show up?

Let the text point back to **what appears for you**, not to an abstract diagram.

2.4 3. Treat models as tools, not laws

When I talk about “field”, “compression”, “awareness-mode”, “world-level”, and so on later in the book, I'm not describing cosmic laws.

I'm saying:

"If you look at experience *as if* it were organised like this, some things might hurt less and make more sense."

If a lens doesn't help — or makes you feel more broken — you can put it down. No loyalty oath required.

2.5 Noticing when a lens hurts

Sometimes clever frameworks turn into weapons:

- "If there's no real self, why am I still suffering? I must be doing it wrong."
- "If everything is just appearance, then nothing matters, so I'm an idiot for caring."

If you notice this kind of thing happening while reading, treat that as valuable information:

- Maybe this particular lens is too sharp for this moment.
- Maybe you need more stabilising (clearer "I", clearer boundaries) and less dissolving.
- Or the reverse.

You can always slow down, skip ahead, or close the book. That's not failure; it's the system protecting itself.

2.6 Roadmap

Here's the rough flow of the book:

- **Part I – What Appears**

We start from right now: what's showing up in experience? Field, world, body, self, time, story — described from the inside, without heavy theory.

- **Part II – How Feelings Appear**

We bring in sensation, emotion, mood, and especially uncertainty. How do anxiety, shame, anger, and numbness actually show themselves in the same field?

- **Part III – Working With Difficulty**

We look at what difficult feelings tend to point at, and introduce two basic moves:

- stabilising around a trustworthy "I",
 - letting the situation breathe and soften.
- There are concrete walk-throughs.

- **Part IV – Architecture**

This is the nerd layer. We revisit everything through the lens of field and compression and sketch one possible "architecture of appearance". Optional but connected.

- **Part V – Epilogue**

Where this overlaps with religious, contemplative, and scientific traditions, and some suggestions for further experiments that don't turn this into a new dogma.

2.7 Who I'm imagining as I write

I'm imagining readers who:

- have lived inside a strong, total story (religious, ideological, whatever),

- have parts of themselves that story couldn't digest (sexuality, doubt, strange experiences),
- have gone or are going through the rebel phase,
- maybe have touched altered states or nondual language and don't quite know what to do with them,
- and often have at least a bit of "engineer brain": they want things to actually hang together.

If that's you, you don't need to become "spiritual" or "rationalist" to make use of this. You just need enough curiosity to look at your own experience a bit more closely — and enough self-respect not to force yourself into compressions that don't fit.

From here, we start where we actually are:

not in theory, not in memory, not in someone else's authority — but right now, in what appears.

Part II

Part I Intro: What Appears

In Part 0 I gave you the backstory and the disclaimers.

From here on, we're going to do something much simpler and much stranger:

We're going to look at what's actually showing up in experience.

Not:

- what you've been told is "really there",
- or what your preferred philosophy says exists,
- or what some spiritual book claims is behind appearances.

Just: **what appears.**

Right now, as you're reading this.

The aim of this part is:

- to give you a felt sense of the **field** – the whole situation of experience at once,
- to notice how that field is already **structured** (near/far, important/unimportant, "me"/"not me"),
- to see how things like **world**, **body**, **self**, **time**, and **story** show up in that field.

We're not going to explain any of this yet in terms of "how the brain works" or "what reality really is". There is a time for models. This part is not that time.

Think of it like inspecting a running system before you open the source code.

You don't need any special skills for this. You don't need to meditate for ten years. You don't need to believe anything.

You just need to be willing to:

- pause,
- look at what's here,
- and describe it a little more carefully than usual.

We'll start with the simplest thing we can talk about together:

the sense of "**right now, this whole situation I'm in.**"

In the next chapter, we'll call that the **field** and poke at it from a few angles.

Chapter 3

The Field: Right Now, This Whole Situation

Let's not start with a definition.

Let's start with you, sitting (or lying, or standing) where you are.

Before you keep reading, do this:

- Let your eyes land somewhere — on the page, a screen, a wall, whatever.
- Notice that there's more in view than just the thing you're focusing on.
- Notice sounds. Obvious ones (voices, traffic, birds) and quiet ones (a fan, your own breath).
- Notice your body: pressure where you're supported, temperature, any obvious tension or comfort.
- Notice that there are also **thoughts** happening: maybe about this book, maybe about something else entirely.

All of that together — sights, sounds, body sensations, thoughts, moods — is what I'll call **the field**.

Very simple version:

The **field** is the whole situation of your experience, right now.

Not “your room” as an object.

Not “your brain state” as a theory.

Just: what it's like to be here at this moment, with all of this showing up.

You don't have to see it as a mystical thing. It's the most ordinary thing in the world. You've been living inside it the whole time.

3.1 Zooming out a bit

When you pay attention like this, you might notice a few things:

- There isn't just one narrow “object” – there's a **spread** of impressions.
- Some things are very clear (the text, a sound), others are vague or blurry.
- Some things are obviously “outside” (the room), some feel “inside” (thoughts, emotions, images).
- There is a sense of “**here**” – a kind of centre where all of this is “happening to me”.

We're not going to analyse any of that yet. Just flagging it:

- “Spread”

- “Inside / outside”
- “Here / centre”

We'll come back to them.

For now, the main point is: you can relate to your experience as **one field**, not just as separate objects.

3.2 A quick check: your field is not my field

As you read this, notice:

- Your visual scene is not mine.
- Your body sensations are not mine.
- Your emotional weather right now is not mine.
- Your thoughts about this text are definitely not mine.

Each person has their own field, their own “whole situation”. We can talk *about* the world, compare notes, build shared models. But the raw **appearing** of things is always **first-person**.

This is important, because later we'll be talking about:

- how “world” shows up,
- how “other people” show up,
- how “I” shows up.

All of that is happening **in** this personal field.

3.3 No special state required

You might have a voice that says:

“I don't see any ‘field’, I just see my room. Maybe I'm doing this wrong.”

If that comes up, notice that too. That thought is also part of the field.

You don't have to get into any special, calm, meditative condition. You don't need to slow your breath, clear your mind, or sit in a particular posture.

All we're doing is:

- naming the fact that,
- right now,
- a whole lot is showing up at once.

If the word “**field**” annoys you, feel free to mentally swap it with:

- “the whole situation”, or
- “everything that's going on in my experience right now.”

I'll keep saying “field” for short.

3.4 A tiny exercise

Let's make this less abstract.

Take 30 seconds. (Actually do it if you can.)

1. Look around the space you're in. Let your gaze wander a bit.
2. Without narrating, just notice: colours, shapes, light, movement.
3. Then close your eyes (or soften your gaze) and notice:
 - sounds,
 - body sensations,
 - any obvious emotional tone (neutral, heavy, restless, light),
 - thoughts drifting through.

Now, in a sentence or two, mentally say:

“Right now, my field is like: ...”

You don't need poetic language. It can be as simple as:

- “Quiet room, a bit of tension in my neck, low-level worry in the background, reading this, slightly sceptical.”

That sentence is not the field itself. It's a crude summary. But even doing that once makes the idea more concrete: there *is* such a thing as the “whole situation” of experience, and you can get a feel for it.

3.5 Why this matters later

You might reasonably ask: why bother with this? Why not jump straight to “self” or “trauma” or “nonduality”?

Because everything else we'll talk about:

- world,
- body,
- self,
- time,
- story,
- feelings,
- difficult emotions,

...all show up **inside** this field.

If you only ever look at isolated bits (“my anxiety”, “that person”, “this belief”), it's easy to miss how they're sitting in a larger situation.

By getting a feel for **the field as a whole**, we'll be able to:

- see how some parts of it stand out as important,
- see how some parts become “me” and others “not me”,
- see how time and story get built on top of what's here.

We're not going to rush that. Next, we'll look at how, even inside this one field, some things feel like **figure** and some like **background**, some near and some far.

For now, it's enough if you can occasionally pause and think:

“Okay, this — all of this — is my field right now.”

That’s the base layer we’ll keep coming back to.

Chapter 4

Structure: Figure, Background, Near and Far

In the last chapter we called the whole situation of your current experience **the field**.

Now we'll look at something that's already happening inside that field, all the time, without you doing anything:

It's **structured**.

Some parts stand out.

Some parts fade.

Some feel close.

Some feel far.

Some feel like "me".

Some feel like "out there".

We're not adding anything new. We're just noticing patterns that were already there.

4.1 Figure and background

Pick something you can look at right now. Maybe the screen, a mug, a mark on the wall.

For a moment, let that be the **figure**:

- It's what attention is on.
- It has more detail.
- It feels more important *for this moment*.

Everything else — the rest of the room, sounds, body sensations — fades into **background**. It doesn't vanish; it just becomes less vivid.

Now soften your focus and let the whole room be more equal. Then deliberately pick something else as figure: a sound, or the feeling of your feet, or a thought.

You didn't conjure new objects out of nowhere.

You just shifted **which part of the field is figure and which is background**.

This is one aspect of **structure**:

the field is not flat; it has a figure–background organisation that can shift.

Nothing mystical here. It's the same ordinary thing that lets you read text on a page without being overwhelmed by the rest of your visual field.

4.2 Near and far (without rulers)

Now, notice how some things in the field feel **near** and some feel **far**.

This isn't just about physical distance.

Examples:

- The sound of a car outside might be physically closer than the memory of a fight you had — but the memory might feel “nearer” in terms of emotional impact.
- A notification icon in the corner of your screen is visually tiny, but it might pull more attention than half the room.
- A vague worry about “the future” can feel right up in your face, even though it's not physically anywhere.

So there are at least two kinds of near/far going on:

- **Spatial-ish** – things look or sound “over there” vs “right here”
- **Relevance-ish** – things feel “pressing” or “live” vs “somewhere in the background”.

Both are part of how the field is structured.

If you like visual metaphors: it's like some parts of the field are rendered in high resolution, front-layer, and others are low-res in the back.

4.3 Centre and periphery

Most of the time there is a sense of “**here**” — a centre in the field.

That “here” is where:

- sensations of the body cluster,
- perception seems to be “coming from”,
- actions seem to “go out” from.

Even if you accept intellectually that “there is no solid self”, the field still tends to organise around a **hub**:

- *“Here I am, reading.”*
- *“Here I am, walking.”*
- *“Here I am, feeling anxious.”*

There's nothing wrong or stupid about this. It's just another piece of structure:

the field has a **centre** (a here/hub) and a **periphery** (things that are “over there” relative to here).

We'll come back to this when we talk about body and self. For now, just notice that there is usually some sense of a vantage point, even if it's subtle.

4.4 Inside and outside (as they appear)

Another bit of structure that shows up very early in life:

- Some things feel like they are “**in here**”.
- Some things feel like they are “**out there**”.

“In here” usually includes:

- bodily sensations,
- thoughts, images, inner speech,
- emotions, moods.

“Out there” usually includes:

- the room,
- other people,
- objects,
- the past and future as you imagine them “in the world”.

Even if you philosophically believe “it’s all in the brain” or “it’s all one field”, the **appearance** is still split this way.

We’re not deciding which is “true”. We’re just naming the structure:

There is an **inside/outside** organisation:

some parts of the field appear as “me-ish interior”, some as “world-ish exterior”.

Later, when we talk about nondual clarity, we’ll look at how optional this split is. For now, it’s enough to see that it’s there.

4.5 A small pass over your own field

A quick exercise. Take half a minute if you can.

1. Look around and pick one visual object as **figure**.
 - Notice what falls into **background** as you do.
2. Shift figure to a **sound**.
 - Notice how the visual field drops back.
3. Shift figure to a **body sensation** (e.g. your hands, your chest).
4. Now, briefly bring to mind something emotionally charged (a person, a worry, a hope).
 - Notice how close or far it feels.
 - Notice whether it feels “in here” or “out there”.

See if you can describe (just to yourself):

- What is figure right now?
- What is background?
- What feels near?
- What feels far?
- Where is “here”?
- What counts as “inside” vs “outside”?

You don’t need perfect answers; this isn’t a test. The point is just to **taste** the structure.

4.6 Structure as relational patterning

We've touched a few recurring patterns:

- figure / background,
- near / far,
- centre / periphery,
- inside / outside.

Together, these are examples of what I mean by **structure**:

Structure is the relational patterning inside the field:
how bits of experience stand in contrast, cluster, and line up relative to each other.

This may sound abstract, but you've just *experienced* it:

- When you moved your attention, figure shifted.
- When you thought of someone important, they came “near” in a non-spatial way.
- When you focused on your chest, “inside” lit up more strongly.

In the next chapter, we'll look at another aspect of structure:

how the field doesn't just have loose patterns, but also “**things**” —
chairs, phones, other people, problems, identities —
and how those “things” are a kind of **clumping** of detail into usable chunks.

Chapter 5

Things and Clumping

So far we've talked about:

- the **field** – the whole situation of experience at once,
- **structure** – patterns like figure/background, near/far, inside/outside.

Now we'll look at how the field shows up not just as loose patterns, but as **things**.

Obvious things like:

- this chair,
- that tree,
- my phone,

and less obvious ones like:

- this project,
- that relationship,
- my personality,
- “the future”.

All of these are ways the field **clumps** detail into usable chunks.

5.1 Room as one blob vs room as many things

Try this with the room you're in (or the space around you).

First pass:

- Soften your gaze.
- Don't name anything.
- Let the whole visual field be one **continuous blob** of colour, light, and shape.

You might still know conceptually “that's a table, that's a wall”, but try not to lean on the labels. Just let it all be a spread.

Second pass:

- Now deliberately start naming:
 - “*chair... table... screen... plant... door... cup...*”
- Let each thing pop out as a separate **unit**.

Notice the difference:

- In blob-mode, the room is more like **one field** with variations.
- In thing-mode, it's more like a **collection of objects**.

Nothing about the photons changed between the two modes.

What changed was how the field is **organised**.

5.2 Clumping: from detail to a “thing”

A “thing” is not a raw sense impression. It’s a **clump** of many small bits:

Take “phone” for example.

In experience, “phone” can include:

- the specific shape and outline,
- the weight in your hand,
- the way the surface feels,
- the expectation that it will light up if you press a button,
- a whole bundle of associations (messages, people, work, distraction).

All of that gets compressed into a single usable unit: “**my phone**”.

Most of the time, you don’t consciously access all the micro-details. You just get the one chunk and its affordances:

- “I can pick this up.”
- “I can unlock it.”
- “I can call someone.”
- “I can scroll until I forget I exist.”

That chunking is what I’ll casually call **clumping**.

Later I’ll formalise it more and call it **compression**, but for now the main point is:

Experience shows up as “things” by **clumping a lot of detail into simple, actionable units**.

5.3 Clumping isn’t just for physical objects

The same kind of thing happens for more abstract “things”:

- “**This relationship**”
 - a vast history of interactions, feelings, stories, hopes, fears, all clumped into one unit: “me and X”.
- “**My career**”
 - projects, skills, status, money, images of the future, all clumped together.
- “**My trauma**” or “**my mental health**”
 - many episodes, sensations, reactions, diagnoses, all wrapped into one heavy “thing”.

When you think “I can’t handle my life right now”, often you’re looking at a **huge clump** that’s being treated as one object.

It's not wrong that this happens. It's often necessary. You can't micro-manage every pixel of experience all the time.

But it's useful to see that:

- there's a difference between **the raw richness of what appears**, and
 - the **clumped units** we use to navigate it.
-

5.4 Why clumping is useful

If you had to consciously track:

- every pixel of colour,
- every muscle micro-tension,
- every single association,

you'd never get out of bed.

Clumping gives you:

- **speed** – you don't have to rediscover “cup” from scratch every morning.
- **predictability** – “door” comes with an expectation it will open when pushed.
- **coordination** – other people share many of the same clumps (“tree”, “train”, “meeting”), so you can talk and act together.

From a system design perspective, clumping is a kind of **optimisation**:

- high-resolution data → low-resolution **handles** that are fast to use.

The cost is that handles are coarse. They can hide important differences.
But without them, you'd drown.

5.5 When clumping starts to hurt

The same mechanism that keeps you functional can also make you stuck.

Examples:

- “I am a failure”
 - takes many events, feelings, and stories and fuses them into one object-self.
- “They hate me”
 - compresses a few ambiguous signals into a solid, hostile entity.
- “My life is a mess”
 - clumps together unrelated difficulties into one overwhelming blob.

From inside the field, these clumps feel like **facts**:

- “*I just see that I'm a failure.*”
- “*Obviously they hate me.*”
- “*Look at my life, it's one big mess.*”

But if you deliberately **de-clump** a little — look at the pieces — often the picture shifts:

- Some things are going badly, some are neutral, some are fine.
- Some people dislike you, some are indifferent, some care.
- Some skills you're bad at, some you're decent at, some you're good at.

We'll come back to this in Part III when we talk about working with difficult feelings. For now the key observation is:

Suffering often happens **at the level of clumps**:
when a coarse "thing" absorbs more and more of the field and becomes *the story*.

5.6 A small experiment: de-clumping just a bit

Pick one "thing" that's mildly uncomfortable but not your deepest wound. Maybe:

- "this project I'm avoiding",
- "this person I'm tense around",
- "this habit I'm ashamed of".

Hold that "thing" in mind and notice how it appears in your field:

- Is it a picture? A sentence? A feeling in the body?
- Does it feel near or far? Inside or outside? Heavy or light?

Now ask very gently:

- What **smaller bits** make this up?

For example, "this project" could de-clump into:

- a certain file or task,
- a conversation you're dreading,
- a memory of a past failure,
- a physical feeling in your chest when you think about it.

You don't have to "solve" anything. Just notice how the big clump is actually many smaller appearances glued together.

5.7 Where we're heading

So far, we have:

- The **field** – the whole situation of experience at once.
- **Structure** – patterns like figure/background, near/far, inside/outside.
- **Clumping** – how the field gives us "things" by bundling detail into usable units.

In the next chapters we'll look at a particularly important clump:

- "**here**" and "**this body**", and how a **sense of "me"** grows around that.

We'll keep staying close to how it actually appears, not jumping (yet) into big theories of what the self "really is".

Chapter 6

Here, This Body, and the Sense of “Me”

We've been talking about:

- the **field** – the whole situation of experience at once,
- **structure** – patterns like figure/background, near/far, inside/outside,
- **clumping** – how the field bundles complexity into usable “things”.

Now we'll look at a very particular “thing”:

this *here*, this *body*, this “*me*”.

We're not going to decide what you “really are”.

We're just going to look at how “**me-ness**” **appears** in the field.

6.1 The felt centre: “here”

Most of the time, there's some sense of a **centre** in the field.

Right now, check for yourself:

- There's a sense of “*I am here, reading.*”
- Sounds are “over there” relative to here.
- Objects are “in front of me”, “behind me”, “to the side”.
- Even thoughts sort of “happen to me” or “go through my head”.

This “**here**” isn't usually a precise point. It's more like a fuzzy hub:

- somewhere around the head, face, chest – often shifting and vague.

In terms of appearance:

“*Here*” is a **structural role** – a place in the field everything else is organised around.

It doesn't announce itself with a label. It's just how the field is wired:
there is a *vantage point-feel*.

6.2 The body as the local cluster

Around this “here”, there’s a fairly stable clump: **the body**.

Try this:

- Bring attention to the sense of your **face** (or the space where it feels like your face is).
- Then to your **hands**.
- Then to your **feet**.
- Then to your **whole body outline**, as best you can.

Notice how:

- there is a cluster of sensations that feel **tied together**,
- they move together when you move,
- they form a kind of **local scaffold** in the field.

That cluster is what appears as “**this body**”.

In raw terms, it’s:

- pressures,
- temperatures,
- tensions,
- movements,
- internal sensations.

Wrapped together, clumped, and tagged (usually) as:

“**my body**”

Again, this is describing how it *appears*, not explaining biology. We’re staying in the phenomenological layer.

6.3 Inside the body vs outside the body

Earlier we talked about **inside / outside** in general.

The body gives that split a concrete anchor:

- “Inside” often means *inside-the-body* – chest, gut, throat, head.
- “Outside” often means *outside-the-body* – room, objects, other people.

When you feel:

- “a knot in my stomach”,
- “tightness in my chest”,
- “pressure in my throat”,

those aren’t just neutral sensations. They’re heavily tagged as:

- **in here**,
- **in this body**,
- **happening to me**.

The body is like a **high-priority region** of the field:
things that light up there tend to matter more.

We'll lean on this later when we talk about feelings and difficulty.
For now, just notice how strongly "inside-body" maps to "in here / mine".

6.4 A first pass at "me"

Let's stack what we have:

- a **centre** / **here** in the field,
- a **local cluster** of sensations (the body),
- a sense that things happening here/this-body are "**mine**".

On top of that, there's usually:

- a **name**,
- a **history**,
- roles and identities ("son", "friend", "engineer", "believer", "ex-believer", "queer", etc.).

All of that can clump together into a **proto-sense of "me"**:

"I am this one, here; this body, this centre, with this history."

You don't have to think this sentence consciously.

Most of the time it's just the background assumption of the field:

- actions go out from here,
- experiences come into here,
- this cluster is the **subject** of what's going on.

We don't need to call it an illusion or a truth.

We can just notice:

A lot of the field is organised around a "**me**" **clump**.

6.5 The "me" clump isn't one thing

If you pay closer attention, "me" is not a single object. It's more like a **stack**.

Try sampling a few flavours of "me":

1. Body-me

- Sense of weight, posture, breath.
- "I feel tired / energised / heavy / light."

2. Social-me

- How you appear in the imagined eyes of others.
- "I'm the weird one / responsible one / failure / success."

3. Story-me

- Narrative about your past and future.
- "I am someone who always... / never... / wants to..."

4. Moral-me

- Sense of being good/bad, worthy/unworthy.
- Often shaped by family, religion, culture.

5. System-me (more subtle)

- The feeling of being the one who has to manage it all.
- “I’m the one who has to figure this out.”

All of these are different **compressions** in the field. Together, they’re often treated as a single object: “me”.

It’s useful to see that:

- different situations light up different layers,
- the “me” that shows up in a work meeting is not the same as the “me” that shows up in bed crying at 2am,
- but they’re felt as versions of the **same** underlying someone.

That **continuity-feel** is important. We’ll touch it more when we bring in time and story.

6.6 A quick scan of your own “me-stack”

You don’t have to go deep; just take a snapshot.

Right now:

- What’s the **body-me** like? Any obvious tensions, comfort, restlessness?
- If you imagine someone you respect watching you read this, what does **social-me** feel like?
- If you think the thought “I am someone who...” — what completes that sentence? (**story-me**)
- Is there any sense of being fundamentally good/bad/okay/not-okay? (**moral-me**)
- Is there a feeling of being “the one in charge of this life”? Tight? Relaxed? (**system-me**)

You don’t need to fix or judge any of it.

Just see how many layers are packed into the simple word “**I**”.

6.7 Why this matters

We’re doing all this groundwork because:

- later, when we talk about **difficult feelings**,
many of them cluster *around* this “me” clump.

For example:

- Shame often hits **social-me** and **moral-me**.
- Anxiety often hits **system-me** (“I have to handle a future I can’t predict”).
- Body-level dread can make the entire “here/body” feel unsafe.

If all of that is blurred into one opaque unit, it’s easy to get overwhelmed and think:

“I am bad. I am broken. I am unsafe.”

If you can see **how “me” is put together in appearance**, there’s more room to:

- stabilise the bits that need support,
- soften or reconfigure bits that are too tight.

We're not there yet. One more ingredient is missing:

- **time** – the sense of before/after, and
- **story** – how the field strings moments into “my life”.

That's the next chapter.

Chapter 7

Time, Memory, and “My Life” as They Appear

So far we've mostly looked at what's present:

- the current field,
- its structure,
- things and clumps,
- here/body/me.

But your experience is not just a frozen snapshot.

There's also:

- “**before**” – what has happened,
- “**after**” – what might happen,
- a sense of **flow** – this is going somewhere.

In this chapter we'll look at:

- how **time** appears in the field,
- how **memory** and **expectation** show up,
- how they knit together into a **story**: “my life”.

We're staying close to appearance, not doing physics or neuroscience.

7.1 Before / now / after in the field

Right now, see if you can notice three different flavours:

1. **Now**
 - Sensations, sounds, visuals, thoughts that feel like they are “presently happening”.
2. **Before**
 - Images, stories, bodily echoes that are tagged as “earlier than now”.
3. **After**
 - Scenarios, plans, fears, hopes tagged as “later than now”.

All three can be active **at the same time**.

For example, while reading this you might also be:

- remembering a conversation from this morning, and
- anticipating an email you need to send later.

In appearance, “before” and “after” aren’t somewhere else.

They’re **right here**, as contents of the current field:

- as images,
- as inner speech,
- as bodily feelings,
- as knowing.

Time, as we live it, is not just numbers on a clock.

It’s this pattern of:

different bits of the field carrying “earlier / now / later” tags.

7.2 Memory as something that appears now

Pick a simple recent event: what you had for your last meal, or where you woke up this morning.

Let that memory come up for a moment.

Notice:

- maybe a visual image,
- maybe a vague sense of the space,
- maybe a few words,
- maybe a taste or smell echo.

Whatever shows up is not **the past itself**.

It’s a **present appearance** tagged as “about the past”.

Most of the time we look straight through that and talk as if:

- “the past is behind me, fixed, out there somewhere.”

But in terms of what appears:

- “the past” is a **pattern of current memories**, sitting in the now-field.

This doesn’t mean “nothing really happened”. It just means:

when we talk about “my past”, we’re always talking from **inside the present field**, using current appearances as pointers.

This becomes important later when we touch trauma and old stories.

For now, just notice the basic fact.

7.3 Expectation and imagined futures

Do the same with the future.

Pick something that's coming up: a meeting, a date, a call, a trip.

Let the sense of that future moment appear:

- maybe images,
- predicted words,
- a sense of dread or excitement in the body,
- a general felt “shape” of how it will go.

Again:

- This is not “the future itself”.
- It's a **present appearance** tagged as “about later”.

Expectation and prediction live **in the now-field** as:

- imagined scenes,
- feelings of openness / threat / opportunity,
- action tendencies (“I should prepare”, “I want to avoid this”).

From the inside, it often feels like:

“The future is coming towards me.”

From the perspective of appearance:

“Images and feelings about later are arising now, shaping how I move.”

7.4 Flow and continuity

If you track just a short slice — say the last five minutes — there's also a sense of **flow**:

- You weren't always in this exact state.
- Something led to you reading this.
- Something will follow it.

This **continuity-feel** is part of how “time” shows up.

It comes from multiple sources:

- remembered steps (open browser → click link → start reading),
- sense of momentum (“I'm in the middle of my day”),
- background expectations (“after this I'll do X”).

All of that is yet another **clump**:

a small segment of life treated as one flowing unit.

Zoom out and you get:

- “this morning”,
- “this week”,
- “this year”,
- “my childhood”,
- “my twenties”,
- “my life so far”.

Each of those is a big clump of many moments, represented now by a few compressed pointers.

7.5 From time to story: “I am someone who...”

Take the sense of:

- a “me” (from the last chapter), and
- a flow of “before / now / after”,

and put them together.

You get:

story – a narrative about what kind of someone you are, moving through time.

Examples:

- “I am someone who always messes things up in the end.”
- “I am someone who escaped.”
- “I am someone who disappoints people.”
- “I am someone who survives.”
- “I am someone who used to be religious, then rebelled, then found my own path.”

These sentences are not just abstract beliefs. They are:

- compressed summaries of many memories,
- bound to emotional tones in the body,
- shaping expectations about the future.

In the field, they show up as:

- inner speech,
- images,
- bodily feels,
- immediate interpretations of what happens.

For example:

- If your story is “I screw things up”, a small mistake can instantly light up a whole **story-clump**:
 - memories of past failures,
 - shame in the body,
 - predictions of future disaster.

That story is a **big compression**:

many details → one heavy “thing”: “*me, the screw-up.*”

7.6 Stories as lenses, not just records

An important point:

Stories don't just **describe** life. They also **filter and select** it.

Given hundreds of events, your system can:

- pick out the ones that fit the current story,
- downplay or forget the rest,

- slightly rewrite memories to be more consistent.

So “I am someone who X” is not a neutral summary. It’s a **lens** that:

- highlights some parts of the field (as evidence),
- dims others (as irrelevant or mistakes).

This is not a personal failing. It’s how finite systems manage complexity.

But it means that:

- stories can get **stuck**,
- and feel more solid than the underlying data really warrants.

We’ll dig into this more when we talk about difficult feelings and uncertainty.

7.7 A tiny story-inspection

If you feel up for it, try this very lightly.

Finish the sentence in your head:

“I am someone who...”

Let the first few completions come. Don’t censor.

Notice:

- which one feels emotionally charged,
- what memories or images pop up with it,
- what body sensations go with it,
- what future expectations it carries.

Then ask, just as a question:

- What doesn’t fit this story?
- What moments go *against* it that I tend to ignore?

You don’t have to change the story right now.

We’re just noticing that:

- the “life-story” is a **compression**,
 - sitting in the field as a present appearance,
 - shaping what counts as real for you.
-

7.8 Where we are so far

Let’s recap what Part I has given us up to this point:

- **A field** – the whole situation of experience at once.
- **Structure** – figure/background, near/far, centre/periphery, inside/outside.
- **Clumping** – how “things” appear as units (objects, projects, problems).
- **Here / body / proto-me** – a centre and a stacked “I” built around this body and its history.
- **Time / memory / expectation / story** – how “before / now / after” and “I am someone who...” show up in the field.

We still haven't decided what ultimately exists.
We've just mapped how things **appear** from the inside.

This is the base layer for everything else in the book:

- In Part II, we'll bring **feelings** into this picture.
- In Part III, we'll talk about **difficulty** and **responses**.
- In Part IV, we'll propose an **architecture** that ties it all together.

Before we move on to feelings, we'll do a short recap chapter to pull Part I into one compact view.

Chapter 8

Part I Recap: A Simple Map of What Appears

We've covered a lot in Part I, but it all comes back to something very simple:

Right now, there is a **field** of experience,
and it is already **structured** and **clumped** in specific ways.

This chapter is just a quick map of what we've seen, so we can carry it forward.

8.1 The field

We started with the most basic observation:

- There is **something** present.
- A whole **situation** shows up at once: sights, sounds, body sensations, thoughts, moods, memories, expectations.

We called that:

The field – the whole situation of your experience right now.

Not “the room out there”, not “brain activity in here”.

Just how it **appears from here**, as one spread.

8.2 Structure

Inside the field, things aren't flat.

We saw a few recurring patterns:

- **Figure / background**
 - some parts are in focus, others fade.
- **Near / far**

- some things are spatially close,
- some are emotionally or practically “close” (pressing, live),
- some are “somewhere in the distance”.

- **Centre / periphery**

- there’s usually a fuzzy “**here**” – a vantage point,
- other things are arranged relative to here.

- **Inside / outside**

- some appearances feel “in here” (body, thoughts, emotions),
- some feel “out there” (room, world, other people).

Together, these make up what I called **structure**:

Structure – the relational patterning inside the field:
how bits of experience stand out, cluster, and line up relative to each other.

You don’t have to remember the term. The important part is that:

- experience has an **organised shape**,
 - and that shape can shift.
-

8.3 Clumping into “things”

On top of this structure, the field also gives us **things**.

We looked at:

- **Room-as-one-blob** vs **room-as-many-objects**.
- How “phone”, “tree”, “this project”, “that relationship” show up as **units**.

We called this:

Clumping – bundling a lot of detail and potential into a simple, usable “thing”.

In the background is the idea of **compression**:

- high-resolution, messy data →
- low-resolution, fast-to-use handles.

Most of the time you don’t see the details; you just see the clump:

- “my phone”,
- “this mess”,
- “my trauma”,
- “my whole life”.

That’s efficient and necessary, but it also means:

- suffering often happens **at the level of clumps**,
- when one big “thing” absorbs more and more of the field and becomes *the story*.

Later, in Part III and Part IV, I’ll lean more heavily on the word **compression**, but it’s pointing to the same phenomenon we met here as **clumping** and **granularity**.

8.4 Here, body, and proto-“me”

We then zoomed in on a particular region of the field:

- the **centre / here**,
- the **body cluster**,
- the stack of patterns we call “**me**”.

We noticed:

- A **fuzzy centre** where perception and action seem to be organised from – a “here”.
- A fairly stable clump of sensations around that – **this body**.
- A set of layered self-flavours:
 - **body-me** (how it feels to inhabit this body),
 - **social-me** (how you appear to others),
 - **story-me** (narratives about who you are),
 - **moral-me** (good/bad, worthy/unworthy),
 - **system-me** (the one who has to manage it all).

All of that piles into a **me-clump**:

“I am this one, here; this body, this centre, with this history.”

Again, we didn’t decide whether that’s ultimately real or illusory.
We just noticed that the field is heavily **organised around it**.

That organisation will matter a lot once we bring in feelings and difficulty.

8.5 Time, memory, and story

Finally, we looked at how **time** shows up in the same field:

- **Now** – what’s currently vivid.
- **Before** – memories and echoes tagged as “earlier”.
- **After** – imagined futures tagged as “later”.

All of these appear **now**:

- memories as current images, words, feelings,
- expectations as current scenarios and body-felt threat or possibility.

From this, we get a sense of **flow / continuity**:

- “this morning”,
- “this week”,
- “my childhood”,
- “my life so far”.

And when you combine:

- a sense of **me**, with
- a sense of **before/now/after**,

you get **story**:

“I am someone who...”

Those “I am someone who...” sentences are big clumps:

- many moments of experience →
- one heavy narrative lens.

They don't just **describe**; they also **filter**:

- they highlight some events as "evidence",
 - dim others as irrelevant or flukes.
-

8.6 One picture so far

Very schematically, Part I has given us something like this:

- **Field**
 - the whole situation of experience at once.
- **Structure inside the field**
 - figure / background,
 - near / far,
 - centre / periphery,
 - inside / outside.
- **Clumps / compressions**
 - objects, situations, roles, problems, "my life".
- **Here / body / me**
 - a centre and body-cluster,
 - layered self-compressions.
- **Time and story**
 - before / now / after as present appearances,
 - stories as "I am someone who..." compressions.

We've still said nothing about:

- what ultimately exists,
- how the brain implements this,
- whether there's a soul, or pure awareness, or just matter.

We've stayed with:

how things **appear**,
how that appearance is **structured**,
and how it can be **more coarse or more fine**.

8.7 Where we go next

Two big pieces are still mostly in the background:

- **Feeling** – how sensations, emotions, moods, and valence show up in the same field.
- **Difficulty** – what happens when parts of the field feel unsafe, overwhelming, or unsolvable.

In Part II we'll bring **feelings** into this map:

- how comfort and threat appear,
- how “pull” and “avoidance” feel,
- how uncertainty shows up as a texture, not just as an idea.

We'll keep using the same ingredients:

- field,
- structure,
- clumping,
- here/body/me,
- time/story,

but now with **affect** lit up.

Once that's in place, we'll be able to talk concretely about:

- what anxious, ashamed, angry, numb states are **doing** in the field,
- and later, how the system can re-organise itself in response.

For now, if you take nothing else from Part I, let it be this:

Whatever else is true about reality,
you always have this one honest starting point:
what appears, right now, in your field.

Part III

Part II – How Feelings Appear

In Part I we stayed (mostly) with shapes:

- the **field** of experience,
- how it's **structured**,
- how it **clumps** into "things",
- how **here / body / me** show up,
- how **time / memory / story** hang together.

We've already mentioned feeling here and there, but now we're going to turn the lights up on it.

Because experience is not just:

- "a room plus a body plus some thoughts plus a timeline."

It's also:

- **comfortable or uncomfortable**,
- heavy or light,
- urgent or relaxed,
- hopeful, flat, ashamed, anxious, numb, whatever.

This part is about **how that affective side appears in the same field**.

We'll look at:

- **raw sensations** – simple bodily feels,
- **emotions** – anger, fear, sadness, joy, etc.,
- **moods** – background weather,
- **valence and pull** – pleasant / unpleasant / neutral; approach / avoid,
- **uncertainty** – not just as an idea, but as a felt texture in the system.

We're still not trying to do psychology or neuroscience here.

We're still not claiming "what feelings really are".

We're doing the same thing we did in Part I:

Start from what appears,
notice how it's already structured,
see how coarse or fine it can show up.

Once we have feelings placed in this map, Part III will make more sense:

- what difficult feelings are **pointing at**,
- and how the system can **reorganise** itself (stabilise / dissolve) in response.

For now, we'll start with the basics:

how **sensation, emotion, and mood** show up in the field at all.

Chapter 9

Sensation, Emotion, and Mood in the Field

Let's go back to the **field** from Part I:

- sights, sounds, body sensations, thoughts, memories, expectations, all at once.

Feelings aren't something added on top of that.

They're **part of the field**.

Here we'll separate three layers, not as a theory of the brain, but as a way of noticing:

- **sensation** – local physical feel,
- **emotion** – short-to-medium bursts like fear, anger, joy, shame,
- **mood** – slower, background weather.

In real life they're tangled. We're just teasing them apart a bit so you can see them more clearly when they show up.

9.1 Sensation: the raw-ish physical feel

First, zoom into **body sensation**.

Right now you might notice:

- pressure where you're sitting or standing,
- temperature on your skin,
- tension in your shoulders or jaw,
- your breath moving,
- maybe a knot somewhere, or some lightness.

These are the more "raw" side of feeling:

- They're usually **local** (this part of the body).
- They can be described without much story ("warm", "tight", "buzzing", "dull ache").
- They often change fairly quickly if you move, stretch, adjust posture.

Of course, you can wrap them in story:

- "My chest is tight" → "I'm anxious" → "Everything is falling apart".

But before that story, there's just:

a certain **texture** in a certain **region** of the field.

For now, it's useful to notice that this layer exists at all:

- sensations can be watched as **just sensations**,
- without immediately jumping to identity or narrative.

We'll use this later when we talk about working with difficulty.

9.2 Emotion: organised waves

Now think of something that recently made you:

- angry,
- scared,
- sad,
- joyful,
- ashamed,
- excited.

As you recall it, notice what happens:

- specific body zones light up (chest, throat, belly, face),
- patterns of thought fire up ("how could they...", "this is amazing", "I'm such an idiot"),
- there's a sense of movement:
 - push away,
 - pull toward,
 - collapse inward,
 - rise up,
 - reach out.

Compared to simple sensation, **emotion** tends to be:

- more **organised** – it comes as a pattern: body + thoughts + urge + meaning,
- more **tagged** – "this is anger / fear / joy / shame",
- more **about something** – an object, a situation, a person, a memory.

In the field, an emotion is not just "a feeling in the body" or "a thought".

It's more like a **coordinated mode** the whole system enters.

You can often recognise:

- **fear** by its very specific cocktail of:
 - body: tension, jitter, cold, tightness,
 - thoughts: scanning, "what if", projecting bad outcomes,
 - urges: freeze, run, hide, appease.
- **anger** by:
 - body: heat, expansion in chest/arms, clenched jaw,
 - thoughts: "this is wrong", "how dare they",
 - urges: push, attack, confront, draw a boundary.
- **shame** by:
 - body: collapse, wanting to hide, heaviness, heat in face,

- thoughts: “I am bad / disgusting / unlovable”,
- urges: disappear, fix yourself, placate.

We’re not cataloguing emotions exhaustively.

The important point is:

Emotions are **patterns in the field** that involve:
sensation, thoughts, urges, and a “this is about X” orientation.

9.3 Mood: background weather

Now tune into the **overall tone** of your day so far.

If you’re honest, it’s probably something like:

- low-key okay,
- mildly restless,
- a bit flat,
- quietly content,
- slightly irritable,
- vaguely heavy,
- pleasantly buzzy.

That’s **mood**:

- slower to change than specific emotions,
- not always clearly about something,
- often there even when nothing “big” is happening.

If emotions are like **waves** in the field, moods are more like **the climate**:

- the same event (say, a message from a friend) will land very differently in:
 - a depressed mood,
 - an anxious mood,
 - a playful mood.

In terms of appearance:

- mood is a **background colouring** of the field,
- sometimes with a location (heaviness in the body),
- sometimes more diffuse.

You might not notice a mood until something bumps against it:

- someone invites you out and you feel an immediate “ugh, no” → oh, right, I’m in a withdrawn mood.
 - someone compliments you and it barely lands → oh, right, I’m in a numb/flat mood.
-

9.4 All three at once

In real life, sensation, emotion, and mood are usually layered.

For example:

- You’re in a **low-level anxious mood** all week.

- At work, your boss criticises something → a **burst of shame** and **anger**.
- In the moment, there are **specific sensations**:
 - heat in the face,
 - lurch in the stomach,
 - tightness in the chest.

Or:

- You're in a **neutral-to-good mood**.
- Someone suddenly slams a door → **burst of fear**.
- Sensations: heart rate spike, jolt in the body.
- Emotion fades, mood mostly stays.

It can be useful to ask, when you're overwhelmed:

- What's the **immediate sensation**?
- What's the **specific emotion** pattern?
- What's the **background mood**?

You don't have to force clean boundaries, but even a rough separation can stop everything collapsing into one blob of “I feel like shit and don't know why.”

9.5 Feelings as part of “what appears”

In the original “What Appears” lens, feeling was described as:

the **felt quality** of how the current organisation of experience is going from here.

When:

- the world seems understandable enough,
- the self-story basically matches events,
- the time-story holds together,

the field can feel:

- easy,
- flowing,
- or at least workable.

When:

- there's a mismatch between how things are grouped and what's actually happening,
- stories and reality keep colliding,
- important bits are being ignored or suppressed,

the field can feel:

- tense,
- brittle,
- chaotic,
- stuck.

This isn't a moral judgement. It's a **status signal**.

We'll dig into that more in the next chapter when we talk about **valence** and **pull**.

For now:

- Sensations, emotions, and moods are **part of what appears**.

- They're not noise on top of "real" experience.
 - They are a way the system **senses itself and its fit with the current situation**.
-

9.6 A light check-in

If you want to ground this right now, pause and see if you can name:

- one or two **sensations** (e.g. "tightness in shoulders", "warmth in hands"),
- the current **mood** in 2–3 words (e.g. "a bit foggy, slightly tense"),
- any **emotion** that's around, even subtly (e.g. "trace of worry", "mild irritation", "quiet curiosity").

Then see if you can also feel:

- what kind of **fit** the current organisation seems to have:
 - "mostly workable",
 - "strained but holding",
 - "barely holding",
 - "not workable at all".

You don't need to analyse it.

We're just learning to see feeling as **part of the field's status display**, not as an enemy to get rid of.

Chapter 10

Valence, Pull, and What Stands Out

In Part I we treated feeling as part of the basic picture of experience:

- not some extra layer on top of “real” perception,
- but a way the system **senses how well the current organisation is working from here.**

Roughly:

- when the way things are grouped and storied fits well enough, the field can feel easy, flowing, or at least workable;
- when there’s a strong mismatch, the field feels tense, brittle, chaotic, stuck.

This chapter just adds a bit more resolution to *how* that shows up in the field, using three small handles:

- **valence** – pleasant / unpleasant / neutral feel-tone,
- **pull** – the way something seems to invite approach, avoidance, or stuckness,
- **what stands out** – what the system treats as important right now.

These aren’t new metaphysical objects. They’re just names for aspects of feeling you can already notice, and that make the “fit / mismatch” picture more concrete.

10.1 Valence: how it basically feels

Right now, if you scan your experience, some parts are:

- **pleasant**
 - mild comfort, interest, warmth, ease.
- **unpleasant**
 - tension, pain, dread, irritation, shame, restlessness.
- basically **neutral**
 - the exact feel of your socks,
 - the shape of a random object in the corner,
 - ambient room details you’re not invested in.

This basic “pleasant / unpleasant / neutral” dimension is what I’ll call **valence**.

It shows up everywhere:

- in raw sensations (pain vs warmth),
- in emotion (joy vs shame),
- in mood (buoyant vs flat),
- even in thoughts (“nice idea” vs “ugh no, don’t think about that”).

Valence by itself doesn’t tell you much *why* something feels that way.

But it’s a simple, always-available channel of information about the system’s current read on its own organisation:

- **pleasant** often means: “the way I’m currently holding things is workable enough”,
- **unpleasant** often means: “something about how I’m holding this isn’t working, or feels unsafe”,
- **neutral** often means: “this doesn’t currently matter much for my projects / threats / cares”.

That’s not a law, just a rough phenomenological read.

10.2 Pull: what this seems to want me to do

Feeling is rarely just a colour; it comes with **tendencies**.

If you watch closely, many feelings include a sense of:

- “move closer”,
- “get away”,
- “change this”,
- “don’t touch this”,
- “freeze and wait”.

That tendency is what I mean here by **pull**.

Examples:

- Remembering an unfinished task may bring:
 - slight stomach tension,
 - a thought like “I should really do that”,
 - and a **pull** towards “open the document / app / inbox”.
- Seeing a message from someone you’re scared of may bring:
 - jolt in the chest,
 - thought “later, not now”,
 - and a **pull** towards delaying, avoiding, hiding.
- Thinking of someone you love may bring:
 - warmth in the body,
 - a small smile,
 - and a **pull** towards texting them, remembering more, staying with the image.

From the “fit / mismatch” angle:

- when the current organisation gives you a **clear, safe-enough next move**, the pull can feel:
 - clean,
 - simple,

- like “of course I’ll do X next”.
- when it **doesn’t**, pull often feels:
 - conflicting (“I want to reach out / I want to hide”),
 - stuck (“I should do something but I don’t know what”),
 - or collapsed (“there’s no point, nothing I do matters”).

One way of feeling anxiety is exactly this:

a signal that the current way of grouping self, world, and time
doesn’t yield a clear or trustworthy next move from here.

Pull is being yanked in different directions at once, with no stable pattern the system wants to commit to.

10.3 What stands out: feeling and structure

The field is already structured as figure/background, near/far, inside/outside.

On top of that, feeling adds another layer of **priority**.

Some things become **bright / loud / insistent**:

- they keep coming to mind,
- they grab attention even when you’re doing other stuff,
- they’re loaded with feeling.

Other things fade into **background**.

This “what stands out as important right now” isn’t separate from:

- your current projects and fears,
- your stories about what matters,
- your history.

It’s just the lived side of that.

Examples:

- In a crowded room, your own name spoken quietly can cut through a lot of noise.
- A small notification dot on an app can feel more important than half your visual field.
- A stray comment from someone you care about can sit at the front of your mind for days, while dozens of other events slide off.

From the field’s point of view:

- this is just **structure** again:
 - some patterns are held as more **central / near / figure**,
 - others as more **peripheral / far / background**.

Feeling (especially unpleasant feeling) is often what **pushes something into the centre**:

- pain,
- threat,
- perceived rejection,
- unresolved uncertainty.

So when you feel like:

“This one thing is my whole life right now,”

what's happening structurally is:

- a clump has become hugely **central** in the field,
- valence is likely skewing unpleasant,
- pull is conflicted or frozen.

Again, not a moral failure — just a description of a certain configuration.

10.4 How this all ties back to fit / mismatch

Putting these threads together:

- **Valence** gives a quick read on how the current organisation feels from here:
 - workable / okay-ish,
 - or strained / unsafe / wrong.
- **Pull** shows how the system is trying to move:
 - towards,
 - away,
 - not at all.
- **What stands out** shows where the system has decided:
 - “This is central right now,”
 - often because it’s tied to survival, belonging, identity, or important projects.

When:

- valence is mostly okay,
- pull is reasonably clear,
- you’re not being hijacked by one or two hyper-central clumps,

the **felt sense** of the field is something like:

“This is manageable. Not perfect, but I can see what’s going on and what to do next.”

When:

- valence is mostly unpleasant,
- pull is tangled or frozen,
- one or two issues dominate what stands out,

the **felt sense** is closer to:

“The way I’m holding this doesn’t give me a way through.
I can’t find a safe or honest next move.”

That’s the territory where anxiety, shame, anger, numbness, etc. tend to show up in stronger, more confusing forms — and where Part III’s “stabilise / dissolve” moves will matter.

10.5 A small in-field check

If you want to test this live, pause for a moment and:

1. Notice **one thing** that currently stands out in your field as important.

- It might be this book,
- or a person,
- or a problem,
- or a hope.

2. Sense into its **valence**:

- pleasant, unpleasant, mixed, neutral?

3. Sense into the **pull**:

- closer, away, fix, avoid, freeze, something else?

4. Finally, ask:

- “Does the way I’m currently organising this give me a workable next move from here?”

No need to solve anything.

This is just training the eye for how feeling:

- colours the field,
- tugs at action,
- and highlights where the current setup might not be fitting well.

In the next chapter, we’ll look at **uncertainty** and four familiar difficult states — anxiety, shame, anger, and numbness — as specific patterns in this same space, not as mysterious enemies.

Chapter 11

Uncertainty as a Felt Texture

So far we've talked about:

- feelings as part of the field,
- basic feel-tone (valence),
- how feeling comes with pulls and priorities.

Now we'll zoom in on one particular kind of feel that shows up *everywhere* in modern life:

uncertainty – not as an abstract idea,
but as a **texture** in experience.

We'll look at:

- what it's like when many futures are alive at once,
 - how that shows up in the body and attention,
 - how it interacts with the "me" and "story" we met in Part I.
-

11.1 Many possible compressions, none landed

From the "architecture" side of this lens:

- the field is always in the process of **compressing**:
 - grouping,
 - simplifying,
 - landing on a more stable pattern.

When things are relatively clear:

- one way of grouping the situation stands out as "**how it is**",
- you get a sense of "**okay, that's the story for now**",
- and usually, a **next move** suggests itself.

When you're uncertain, something else is happening:

- there are **many possible compressions** of the current situation,
- none of them feels solid enough to commit to,
- the field hasn't "collapsed" into a single stable story.

In world-terms, that might look like:

- several possible outcomes,
- several ways to interpret what's happening,
- several identities you could inhabit here.

In experience, this shows up as:

- open loops,
 - “what if” branches,
 - fuzziness where you want clarity.
-

11.2 How uncertainty feels in the field

Let's make this concrete.

Think of a situation in your life right now where you genuinely **don't know** how it will go:

- a relationship you're not sure about,
- a job possibility,
- a health thing,
- a move,
- a message you haven't sent yet.

Let it come into your field, then notice:

- **Body**
 - restless energy, or dull heaviness,
 - tightness in the chest or gut,
 - shallow breathing, or a held breath,
 - urge to pace, scroll, refresh.
- **Attention**
 - scanning for more data,
 - replaying the same few facts,
 - jumping into imagined conversations and scenes,
 - difficulty staying with other tasks.
- **Thoughts**
 - branching “if this, then that, but then...” trees,
 - attempts to simulate multiple futures,
 - self-questions (“what if I'm wrong?”, “what if I miss my chance?”).
- **Overall feel**
 - not quite here,
 - slightly ahead of yourself,
 - unsettled, incomplete.

None of that is just “in your head”. It's a **configuration of the whole field**.

11.3 Uncertainty vs simple “not knowing”

It's useful to distinguish at least two flavours:

1. Simple “don’t know, don’t care much”

- You don't know how many leaves are currently on a tree in another country.
- You don't know what your neighbour ate for breakfast.
- And... that's fine.

The system doesn't light up around these. There's no big pull, because:

- they're not tied to your projects,
- they're not tied to your threats,
- they don't matter much for your self-story.

This kind of not-knowing is easy, almost invisible.

2. Loaded uncertainty

- You don't know if someone you care about will stay.
- You don't know if you'll lose your job.
- You don't know if you'll regret a major decision.

Here, the system *does* light up, because:

- different outcomes compress into very different **stories of you**,
- some outcomes feel threatening to your basic sense of okayness,
- you can't find a stable way to group it all that gives a good next move.

This kind of not-knowing is **felt**:

it has weight, friction, sometimes panic.

In this part of the book, when I say **uncertainty**, I mostly mean the second kind.

11.4 Uncertainty and the “me” stack

From Part I, recall some layers of “me”:

- **social-me** – how you appear to others,
- **story-me** – “I am someone who...”,
- **moral-me** – good/bad, worthy/unworthy,
- **system-me** – the one who has to manage it all.

Uncertainty is usually intense when:

- different future compressions give very different fates for one or more of these.

For example:

- “If I leave this relationship, maybe I become ‘someone who abandons people’. If I stay, maybe I become ‘someone who betrays himself.’”
- “If I take this job, I’m ‘someone who sold out’. If I don’t, I’m ‘someone who chickened out and stayed stuck.’”

So the system isn't just choosing between **external outcomes**.

It's choosing between **competing self-stories**.

That's why uncertainty can feel so personal and so loaded:

it's not just “what will happen”,
it's “who am I allowed to be on the other side of this?”

11.5 Open loops and the sense of “no safe move”

Another way uncertainty feels is as **open loops**:

- questions that don’t settle,
- actions that don’t feel safe enough to take,
- no move that doesn’t violate some value or story.

If you listen for it, there can be a low-level message like:

“Whatever I do, something important will break,
and I don’t have a story that makes that survivable.”

This is very close to the shape of **anxiety** we’ll talk about in the next chapter:

- many possible compressions,
- no trusted one,
- “me” and “future” tangled up in each of them.

The felt sense is something like:

- leaning over a gap,
 - no solid ground to push off from,
 - trying to walk on half-built bridges.
-

11.6 When uncertainty is okay

Not all uncertainty hurts.

Sometimes:

- the unknown is spacious,
- multiple possibilities feel like **options**, not threats,
- there’s room to explore.

Experientially, that can feel like:

- curiosity,
- lightness,
- play,
- “let’s see what happens”.

What’s different there?

Roughly:

- The current “me” feels **robust enough**:
 - several futures are compatible with “I can still be me and be basically okay”.
- The system doesn’t need to lock in one specific story to feel safe.

So uncertainty isn’t the enemy by itself.

What hurts is usually:

- **high-stakes uncertainty** around identity, belonging, and basic okayness,
 - combined with no way to find a story that can hold the possible outcomes.
-

11.7 A light exploration

If you want to check some of this in your own field:

1. Bring to mind a situation where you feel **loaded uncertainty**.
 - Not the most traumatic thing; just something real.
2. Notice:
 - Body: what happens in chest, gut, breath, shoulders?
 - Attention: scanning? avoiding? looping?
 - Thoughts: what are the main “what if” branches?
3. Then ask:
 - “What are the **self-stories** attached to the different outcomes?”
 - “Who do I become in each branch?”

You don't have to resolve anything.

We're just getting a feel for uncertainty as:

the field holding **multiple incompatible compressions** of self/world/future,
with no settled place to stand — yet.

In the next chapter, we'll look at how this shows up as more specific difficult states:

- anxiety,
- shame,
- anger,
- numbness.

All as **patterns in the field**, not as mysterious foreign objects.

Chapter 12

Anxiety, Shame, Anger, and Numbness in the Field

We've talked about:

- sensation, emotion, mood,
- valence, pull, what stands out,
- uncertainty as "many futures alive, no safe story".

Now we'll look at four very common difficult states:

- **anxiety**,
- **shame**,
- **anger**,
- **numbness**,

as ways the field can organise itself when the current setup isn't working.

This won't be a full psychology of any of them.

Just a sketch of what they're like from inside this lens.

12.1 Anxiety: “no safe next move”

A simple phenomenological read of anxiety is:

too many live possibilities;
the current way I'm holding things doesn't yield a safe or clear next move from here.

In the field, anxiety often looks like:

- **Body**
 - jittery energy, or buzzing in limbs,
 - tight chest / gut,
 - shallow or held breath.
- **Attention**
 - scanning for more information,
 - looping over the same few scenarios,

- trouble settling on anything.

- **Thoughts**

- “what if... what if... what if...”,
- rehearsing disasters,
- trying to find the one perfect move.

- **Pull**

- urge to act *and* urge to avoid, at the same time,
- start/stop impulses,
- difficulty committing to anything.

Structurally:

- there are many competing compressions of self/world/future,
- none of them feels safe or honest enough,
- the “me” clump is heavily involved (“if this happens, what does that make me?”).

So the field sits in:

- high **uncertainty**,
- high **stake**,
- high **activation**,
- low **trust in any available story**.

Anxiety is not just “an emotion” in the air.

It's the felt side of:

“This configuration doesn't give me a believable way forward.”

12.2 Shame: “my story and this moment don't match”

A simple read of shame:

the way I see myself, and the way this situation seems to “read” me, don't match; something about “me” feels exposed and wrong.

In the field, shame often shows up as:

- **Body**

- collapsing posture, wanting to curl in,
- heat in the face or chest,
- heaviness, urge to hide.

- **Attention**

- fixation on how others see you (real or imagined),
- replaying moments of exposure,
- narrowing around the “awful thing”.

- **Thoughts**

- “I am bad / disgusting / unlovable / broken”,
- “they see the real me now”,
- harsh internal commentary.

- **Pull**

- urge to disappear, avoid, apologise excessively, over-correct,
- sometimes urge to attack or blame outward to escape the burn.

Structurally:

- **social-me** and **moral-me** are under attack,
- a story of “what kind of person I am” gets clobbered by this event,
- the field organises around a single hyper-central clump:
 - the mistake,
 - the flaw,
 - the exposure.

The feel is:

- “I, as a whole, am not okay”, not just “something I did was off”.

Shame often rides on a very tight and unforgiving compression of self:

- small deviations → total verdict.
-

12.3 Anger: “this is wrong; a boundary or pattern must change”

A simple read of anger:

**something about how things are organised here feels wrong or violating;
energy surges to redraw a boundary or change a pattern.**

In the field, anger often looks like:

- **Body**
 - heat, tension, readiness in arms / jaw,
 - expansion in the chest, rising energy.

- **Attention**
 - locking onto the offending person / situation,
 - tracking evidence of wrongness,
 - less sensitivity to nuance.

- **Thoughts**
 - “how dare they”,
 - “this is not okay”,
 - “I won’t let this stand”.

- **Pull**
 - move towards to confront,
 - or away to cut off,
 - or to plan future action.

Structurally:

- a particular pattern in the field is tagged as **intolerable** under your current values,
- the system tries to **reorganise the field**:
 - assert a boundary,
 - change behaviour (yours or others),
 - withdraw resources.

Anger can be destructive, but in this lens it's not automatically a bug.
It's often a signal that:

- your current organisation of self/world includes values and boundaries,
- something is hitting against those,
- energy is mobilising to reconfigure the situation.

It becomes a problem when:

- the clumps are too coarse ("they are entirely evil; I am entirely right"),
 - or when it gets stuck without any workable action.
-

12.4 Numbness: “too much; shut it down”

A simple read of numbness:

**the system judges that feeling this would be too much to handle right now,
so it turns down the volume on experience.**

In the field, numbness can look like:

- **Body**

- dullness, lack of sensation,
- or a distant, cotton-wrapped feel.

- **Attention**

- difficulty caring,
- sliding off topics that would usually matter,
- blankness where there might be emotion.

- **Thoughts**

- “whatever”,
- “I don’t know”,
- sometimes nothing much at all.

- **Pull**

- towards distraction,
- towards sleep,
- towards mechanical action without engagement.

Structurally:

- there may be **too many painful clumps** active at once,
- or one huge clump that feels unfaceable,
- the system chooses to **lower granularity**:
 - fewer distinctions,
 - less contact,
 - less local detail.

It’s a kind of emergency compression:

- “make this whole region of the field less detailed so it hurts less.”

This can be life-preserving in some contexts.

It becomes a problem when:

- it persists long after the acute threat,
 - it blocks any possibility of reorganisation,
 - the system forgets that this is a move it's making, not an unchangeable fact.
-

12.5 These are configurations, not verdicts

Seen through this lens:

- anxiety,
- shame,
- anger,
- numbness,

are not random invaders or moral failings.

They are **ways the field organises itself** under stress:

- anxiety → many futures, no safe story, high activation, stuck pull,
- shame → self-story vs situation clash, self treated as wrong as a whole,
- anger → perceived wrongness, energy to redraw boundaries or change patterns,
- numbness → perceived overload, shutting down detail and contact.

This doesn't make them pleasant.

It just gives you another position to stand in:

instead of "I am anxious / ashamed / angry / numb, therefore I am bad or doomed",
you can start to see:
"The system is in this particular configuration right now."

From there, Part III will have more room to work:

- sometimes the move will be to **stabilise**:
 - clarify self, values, boundaries,
 - find a story that can carry you through.
- sometimes the move will be to **dissolve**:
 - soften clumps,
 - widen the field,
 - loosen tight identifications.

Before we go there, the next chapter will connect these difficult states more explicitly to:

- the "me" stack,
- time and story,

so you can see how they hook into identity and narrative in practice.

Chapter 13

How Feelings Hook Into Self and Story

By now we've got a few layers on the table:

From Part I:

- **field** – the whole situation of experience at once,
- **structure** – figure/background, near/far, inside/outside,
- **clumps** – “things”, projects, problems,
- **me-stack** – body-me, social-me, story-me, moral-me, system-me,
- **time/story** – before/now/after, and “I am someone who...”

From Part II:

- **sensation / emotion / mood**,
- **valence / pull / what stands out**,
- **uncertainty** as many live futures, no safe story,
- **anxiety / shame / anger / numbness** as particular configurations.

This chapter is about how those last ones plug into:

- the **me-stack**, and
- the **stories** you run about your life.

Not as abstract theory, but as “oh, this is how my field rearranges itself when this feeling hits.”

13.1 Feelings as “votes” on who you are

When a strong feeling hits, it doesn't just say:

- “this situation is good / bad.”

It often also says (implicitly):

- “**you** are this kind of person.”

For example:

- A wave of shame after a mistake:

- doesn't just say "that action was off",
 - it often says "you are fundamentally a failure / liar / disappointment."
- A wave of anger:
 - doesn't just say "something wrong happened",
 - it can say "you are the kind of person who has to fix everything", or
 - "you are the righteous one in a world of idiots."
- Numbness:
 - doesn't just say "this is too much right now",
 - it can say "you are someone who can't feel / is broken / doesn't really care."

These are **self-compressions** being proposed by the system:

"Given this feeling, maybe 'I am someone who X' is the right story."

The feeling is not just a reaction.

It's also a **candidate update to your identity**.

13.2 How anxiety hooks into self and time

From earlier:

Anxiety = many live futures, no safe next move;
the current way of holding self/world/time doesn't yield a trustworthy pattern.

Where does that land in the me-stack?

Commonly:

- **system-me** – the one who has to manage everything:
 - "I can't see a way to handle this."
 - "Whatever I choose will be wrong."
- **story-me** – "I am someone who...":
 - "If this goes badly, I'll be the one who ruined things."
 - "If I choose wrong, it proves I'm stupid / naive / selfish."
- **moral-me** – good/bad, worthy/unworthy:
 - "A good person would know what to do here."
 - "A competent adult wouldn't be this stuck."

In the field, that can look like:

- future-branches (time) playing out as different **self-stories**,
- each branch carrying its own emotional weight,
- none of them feeling survivable or coherent.

So anxiety isn't just "I don't know what will happen."

It's:

"I don't know who I will be allowed to be in what happens,
and none of the candidates feel okay."

13.3 How shame hooks into social-me and moral-me

We glossed shame as:

my self-story and this moment's "reading" of me don't match;
something about "me" feels exposed and wrong.

Two layers of the me-stack are especially lit up:

- **social-me** – how I appear to others:
 - "Now they see the real me."
 - "They'll think I'm disgusting / pathetic / ridiculous."
- **moral-me** – good/bad, worthy/unworthy:
 - "Only a bad person would do this."
 - "There is something fundamentally wrong with me."

Shame often proposes very strong identity statements:

- "I am someone who betrays people."
- "I am someone who can't be trusted."
- "I am someone who is never enough."

These compress:

- many events,
- plus current feeling,
- into a single heavy self-clump.

They also reach into time:

- **past**: retelling old events to fit the "I am bad" story,
- **future**: predicting more of the same,
- **now**: reading this moment as proof.

In that configuration, it's easy to miss that:

- shame is a **move** the system is making,
 - not an objective scan of your soul.
-

13.4 How anger hooks into boundaries and agency

We read anger as:

something about how things are arranged feels wrong or violating;
energy surges to redraw a boundary or change a pattern.

Anger tends to plug into:

- **story-me**:
 - "I am someone who doesn't tolerate this."
 - "I am someone who stands up / protects / fights back."
- **moral-me**:
 - "This is unjust."

- “They are violating what’s right.”

- **system-me / agent-me:**

- “I am the one who has to fix this.”
- “If I don’t push back, no-one will.”

Anger reaches into time by:

- replaying past slights and injustices,
- extrapolating futures where this keeps happening,
- aiming at a future where things are different.

When it’s grounded, anger can be:

- “this boundary, not this person, needs to change”,
- “this pattern is not okay, I need to act.”

When it clumps too hard, it can turn into:

- “these people are simply bad, I am simply right”,
- “my only identity here is ‘righteous fighter’”

Either way, it’s reorganising:

- who you are allowed to be,
 - what the world is like,
 - what stories are acceptable.
-

13.5 How numbness hooks into story and horizon

We framed numbness as:

the system judges that feeling this would be too much to handle right now,
so it turns down the volume on experience.

That move can attach to:

- **story-me:**

- “I am someone who doesn’t really feel.”
- “I’m numb / broken / checked out.”

- **time / horizon:**

- the future can collapse into:
 - * “more of the same grey”,
 - * or “blank”,
 - * or “doesn’t matter.”

- **system-me:**

- “I can’t afford to feel this, I wouldn’t be able to function.”
- “My job is to keep the lights on, not to feel.”

In the field, numbness often flattens:

- differences between situations,
- difference between days,
- difference between versions of you.

Everything compresses into:

- “it’s all just... this”,
- with very low resolution.

That can make it harder to imagine any story where:

- you change,
- the world responds differently,
- anything feels vivid again.

Which in turn reinforces the numb identity:

- “this is just what I am now.”
-

13.6 Feelings as story-selectors

From a certain angle, strong feelings are:

story-selectors – they bias which self/world/future compressions get activated.

For example:

- Anxiety tends to amplify stories like:
 - “I’m someone who must not make mistakes.”
 - “I’m responsible for everyone’s outcomes.”
 - “If I choose wrong once, I ruin everything.”
- Shame tends to amplify:
 - “I’m fundamentally bad / disgusting / unlovable.”
 - “If people see the real me, they’ll leave.”
 - “Any flaw reveals the whole rotten core.”
- Anger tends to amplify:
 - “I see the truth and others are blind / malicious.”
 - “I must be the one who stops this.”
 - “If I soften, I’ll be crushed.”
- Numbness tends to amplify:
 - “Nothing will really change.”
 - “I’m not the kind of person who gets good things.”
 - “Caring is dangerous or pointless.”

None of these are neutral descriptions.

They are **compressed narratives** that:

- highlight some facts,
 - ignore others,
 - and shape what actions even feel possible.
-

13.7 A small mapping exercise

If you want to see this live, pick a recent moment where one of these states was strong.

- anxiety,
- shame,
- anger,
- or numbness.

Then:

1. Recall the moment just enough to feel a trace of it again.
2. Ask:
 - Which layers of **me** lit up?
 - body-me, social-me, story-me, moral-me, system-me?
 - What sentence did it suggest?
 - “I am someone who...”?
 - How did it treat **time**?
 - past: what did it highlight?
 - future: what did it predict?
3. See if you can write (just for yourself) the **short story** that this feeling was trying to install.

For example:

- “In that shame spike, the story was:
I am someone who always lets people down, and they will eventually leave when they see the real me.”

or:

- “In that anger, the story was:
I am the only sane one in a world of idiots, and it’s my job to fix everything.”

You don’t have to argue with the story yet.

We’re just making its shape visible.

13.8 Why this matters for what comes next

Part III will be about **working with difficulty**:

- noticing what a feeling is pointing at,
- and responding in ways that don’t just reinforce the tightest, harshest stories.

If you don’t see how feelings hook into self and story, it’s easy to get trapped in:

- “I feel this, therefore this story is true, therefore I should feel this.”

If you *do* see the hooks, you get a bit more room:

- “Oh, this shame is trying to install the ‘I am fundamentally broken’ story again.”
- “This anxiety is trying to convince me I need a perfect move or I’ll be ruined.”
- “This numbness is treating all future possibilities as identical grey.”

From there, you can:

- stabilise the parts of “me” that actually need care,
- loosen or rewrite compressions that are too coarse,
- and gradually give the field more ways to organise itself than just these four emergency modes.

We'll take that up next.

For now, the key takeaway is:

Difficult feelings don't just hurt.

They also **propose identities and stories**.

Seeing those proposals clearly is already a form of freedom.

Chapter 14

Part II Recap: Feelings in What Appears

Part II was about turning up the lights on the affective side of experience.

Not as something separate from “real life”, but as:

one of the main ways the system senses
how well or badly its current organisation is working from here.

Here's a compact map of what we've seen.

14.1 Feelings as part of the field

We started by anchoring:

- **sensation** – local physical textures in the body,
- **emotion** – more organised waves (body + thoughts + urges + meaning),
- **mood** – slower background weather,

all as **appearances in the field**, not add-ons.

We treated feeling as:

- the **felt quality** of how things are going,
 - especially how current groupings and stories fit (or don't fit) the situation.
-

14.2 Valence, pull, and what stands out

We then gave three small handles:

- **valence** – pleasant / unpleasant / neutral feel-tone,
- **pull** – the sense of being drawn to approach, avoid, fix, hide, freeze, etc.,
- **what stands out** – which parts of the field get treated as central and important.

Together they helped track:

- when the current organisation feels **workable**:
 - valence more okay,
 - pull more coherent,
 - central issues not overwhelming everything,

vs

- when it feels **not workable**:
 - valence mostly unpleasant,
 - pull tangled or frozen,
 - one or two clumps dominating what stands out.
-

14.3 Uncertainty as a texture

We looked at **uncertainty** not just as an idea, but as a felt configuration:

- many possible compressions of self/world/future,
- none trusted enough to commit to,
- especially when identity, belonging, and basic okayness are at stake.

In the field, that showed up as:

- restless body,
- scanning attention,
- branching “what if” trees,
- open loops,
- a sense of “no safe move”.

We also saw that:

- some not-knowing is easy (“I don’t know, and that’s fine”),
 - what hurts is *loaded* uncertainty:
 - where each branch implies a different “me”,
 - and no candidate story feels survivable.
-

14.4 Four difficult configurations

We sketched anxiety, shame, anger, and numbness as ways the field can organise itself under strain:

- **Anxiety**
 - many live futures, no clear safe story,
 - high activation, stuck or conflicting pulls.
- **Shame**
 - clash between self-story and perceived “reading” of you,
 - social-me and moral-me under attack,
 - self treated as wrong as a whole.
- **Anger**
 - something in the pattern feels wrong or violating,

- energy to redraw boundaries or change behaviour,
- can clarify values or over-clump into “me right / them bad”.

- **Numbness**

- perceived overload,
- turning down detail and contact,
- everything flattened into “whatever, it’s all the same”.

We didn’t frame these as diagnoses or sins, but as:

particular **configurations** of the field
when the current way of holding things doesn’t seem workable.

14.5 Hooks into self and story

Finally, we saw how these states plug into:

- the **me-stack**: body-me, social-me, story-me, moral-me, system-me,
- **time and story**: “I am someone who...”, and “what kind of future people like me can have.”

Roughly:

- anxiety proposes stories about being the one who must not fail,
- shame proposes stories about being fundamentally wrong,
- anger proposes stories about being the one who must fight or fix,
- numbness proposes stories about being someone for whom nothing really changes.

Each feeling doesn’t just hurt; it also:

- suggests an identity,
- filters memory to support that identity,
- sketches future trajectories consistent with it.

Seeing that mechanism doesn’t magically make the feelings go away, but it does give you a new stance:

“This is a pattern the field is in, and a story it’s trying to install,”
rather than
“This is the unquestionable truth about me and reality.”

14.6 Ready for Part III

With Part I and II together, we now have:

- a map of **what appears** – world, body, self, time, story,
- a sense of **how feelings appear** in the same field,
- and a clearer picture of what’s going on when things feel:
 - confusing,
 - threatening,
 - self-attacking,

– or flat and unreachable.

Part III will take this as starting point and ask:

- Given that this is how the field can get into trouble,
what moves are available from the inside?

We'll look at:

- what difficult feelings are pointing at,
- two broad ways the system can reorganise itself:
 - **stabilising** around a trustworthy “I”,
 - **dissolving** overly tight clumps and splits,

and how to weave those in real situations without turning them into new commandments.

For now, if you had to compress Part II into one line, it could be:

Feelings are not just noise;
they are how experience reports on its own fit or mismatch from here,
and how it tries to steer what kind of “you” shows up next.

Part IV

Part III – Working With Difficulty Inside Experience

So far we've mostly mapped the terrain:

- Part I: **what appears** – field, structure, clumps, self, time, story.
- Part II: **how feelings appear** – sensation, emotion, mood, uncertainty, anxiety/shame/anger/numbness, and how they hook into self and story.

Now we switch emphasis from **description** to **moves**.

Not:

- external techniques to apply *to* yourself from the outside,
- or one magic trick to fix everything,

but:

ways the field can **reorganise itself from the inside**
when it finds itself in painful, stuck, or confusing configurations.

We'll look at three layers:

1. **What difficult feelings point to**
– what they're saying about the current organisation of self/world/time/story.
2. **Two basic moves** the system can make:
 - **stabilising** around a trustworthy “I”,
 - **dissolving** overly tight clumps and splits.
3. **Weaving** those moves in real life:
 - how you can feel which move is needed when,
 - how to avoid the common traps on both sides.

Important:

- I'm not giving you commandments.
- I'm not saying “always stabilise” or “always dissolve”.
- I'm not saying you should be able to do any of this perfectly.

Think of this part as:

a library of **possible reorganisations**
that you can experiment with from inside your own field.

You already make both moves, all the time.

Part III just makes them more conscious, so you can lean on them when things get intense instead of defaulting to the harshest habits.

Chapter 15

What Difficult Feelings Point To

Difficult feelings can look like enemies:

- anxiety,
- shame,
- anger,
- numbness,
- dread,
- jealousy,
- grief.

It's easy to relate to them as:

- glitches,
- moral failures,
- proof that you're not "doing life" correctly.

From the perspective we've built so far, they're more like:

status messages about the current organisation of the field,
especially around self, others, and future.

This chapter is about reading those messages a little more clearly.

15.1 Not random: tied to relationships in the field

Go back to the basic pieces from Parts I and II:

- A **me-stack** – body-me, social-me, story-me, moral-me, system-me.
- A **world** – people, institutions, physical stuff, situations.
- **Time** – past/future stories and expectations.
- **Feelings** – signalling fit/mismatch between how things are grouped and what's actually happening / likely.

Most strong, confusing feelings centre on **relationships between these**:

- me other people,
- me world / institutions,
- me future,
- me my own ideals and histories.

You can think of a difficult feeling as saying something like:

- “The way I’m holding **myself** vs **them** doesn’t work.”
- “The way I’m holding **my life** vs **this reality** doesn’t work.”
- “The way I’m holding **my past** vs **this moment** doesn’t work.”
- “The way I’m holding **my future** vs **my capacity** doesn’t work.”

Not “doesn’t work in some cosmic sense”, but:

“doesn’t yield a live, honest, safe-enough way to move from here.”

15.2 Quick sketches

A few examples in this language:

- **Anxiety**
 - “Given how I’m organising myself + this situation + the future, there is no move that feels safe or acceptable.”
- **Shame**
 - “Given my current self-story and moral frame, this event reads as ‘*I am fundamentally not okay*’”
- **Anger**
 - “Given my current values and sense of self, something in this pattern reads as *intolerably wrong*, and energy is mobilised to redraw a boundary or change the pattern.”
- **Numbness**
 - “Given the amount of pain / contradiction / overload in the current configuration, it feels safer to turn down detail and contact.”

You don’t have to agree with these characterisations.

They’re just invitations to look at what your own difficult feelings *seem to be about*.

15.3 The key question: “What is this pointing at?”

Next time you notice you’re in something hard, you can ask:

“What is this feeling saying
about how I’m currently holding self, others, and future?”

Some prompts:

- What **relationship** feels threatened or impossible here?
 - self other?
 - self world?
 - self future?
 - self my own standards?

- Where is there a sense of **no way to be okay**?
 - “If I say what I think, I’ll be rejected.”
 - “If I don’t say it, I’ll be fake.”
 - “Either way, I lose.”
- What **story** is this feeling trying to install about me?
 - “I am someone who always screws this up.”
 - “I am someone who can never rest.”
 - “I am someone who will always be abandoned.”
 - “I am someone who doesn’t feel anything.”

You don’t need a super-precise answer.

Even a rough sketch like “this feels like a me-vs-them bind” is useful.

15.4 Feeling as pressure to reorganise

From the “compression” angle, difficult feelings are:

pressure on the current compressions of self/world/time/story,
saying “this isn’t cutting it.”

That pressure can aim in (at least) two directions:

- toward **more form**:
 - clearer self, values, boundaries, commitments,
 - so that a next move becomes possible.
- toward **more space**:
 - loosening over-tight identities and stories,
 - widening the field so this isn’t the whole of reality.

We’ll call those:

- **Move One** – stabilise around a trustworthy “I”, and
- **Move Two** – let the situation breathe and dissolve a bit.

Before we spell them out, one more framing:

15.5 You’re not wrong *for* having the feeling

A very common extra layer of suffering is:

- “I shouldn’t be this anxious.”
- “I’m pathetic for feeling shame.”
- “I’m dangerous / bad for being angry.”
- “I’m broken for being numb.”

From this lens, that’s like:

- a monitoring system complaining that the **monitor** is beeping.

You can still disagree with what the feeling recommends.
You can still decide not to act on some of its impulses.

But as a starting stance, you can try:

“Given how things are currently organised in my field,
this feeling makes sense as a status message.”

That doesn’t mean you *like* it.

It just means you stop treating the feeling as a moral failure on top of whatever is already hard.

From there, the question becomes:

- “Okay, if this is a signal about fit/mismatch,
do I need more **stability / form**, or more **space / looseness**, or both in some sequence?”

That’s what the next two chapters are about.

Chapter 16

Move One – Stabilise Around a Trustworthy “I”

The first big move the system can make in difficulty is:

stabilising – firming up a sense of “I”, values, and boundaries so that a next step becomes possible.

You already do this instinctively:

- remembering what you care about,
- talking to someone who “knows you”,
- straightening your back,
- saying “no” or “yes” clearly,
- deciding “okay, I’ll do this, not that”.

Here we’ll look at this move more deliberately, in field terms.

16.1 Why stabilising helps

When the field is in:

- high uncertainty,
- tangled pull,
- blurred or self-attacking stories,

one problem is:

- there’s no clear **centre** from which to act.

“Me” might feel:

- too fuzzy,
- too split,
- too contaminated by everyone else’s expectations,
- or too collapsed into “I am just this one flaw.”

In that situation, stabilising means:

- **clarifying** who is actually here,

- **remembering** what matters to this one,
- **redrawing** a few key boundaries,
- **committing** to small, concrete moves.

It's a way of saying:

“Okay, given this mess,
what can *this* ‘I’ honestly stand for and do next?”

16.2 Stabilising at different layers of “me”

You can stabilise at different levels of the me-stack.

16.3 1. Body-me

Sometimes the first stabilisation is very simple:

- feel the weight of the body,
- feel contact with the ground or chair,
- lengthen exhale a bit,
- let shoulders drop,
- look around the actual room.

This isn't mystical. It's:

- re-anchoring the **centre** of the field,
- reminding the system it has a local, physical base.

You're saying:

“Whatever the stories and futures are,
there is a body here, now, that can be looked after a little.”

16.4 2. Values and preferences

Stabilising also means recalling:

- what *you* actually care about,
- not just what you've been told to care about.

Questions like:

- “If I ignore how I'm supposed to be, what quietly matters to me here?”
- “If I had to choose between being liked and being honest, which do I pick *this time*? ”
- “What kind of person am I trying to be in this specific situation?”

You're giving the system a **local orientation**:

- not “my final life mission”,
- just “in this tangle, this is the direction that fits me better.”

16.5 3. Boundaries

Stabilising often involves making or remembering **boundaries**:

- what you are and aren't responsible for,
- what you are and aren't willing to tolerate,
- what you will and won't say yes to.

Boundary questions:

- “Is this actually mine to fix?”
- “If this were happening to a friend, what would I think is reasonable for them?”
- “What is the smallest line I can draw here that would already be a bit more honest?”

In the field, a boundary shows up as:

- a clearer edge between self and other,
- a clearer “no” or “yes” in the body,
- often some relief, even if it's scary.

16.6 4. Narrative: “the I that is here now”

You can also stabilise at the level of story, but lightly:

- not “this is the final truth about me”,
- more like “given everything so far, here's a working self-description that feels more honest than the shame/anxiety/numbness version.”

For example:

- instead of “I am a failure”, something like:
 - “I'm someone who is overwhelmed here, but who cares and is trying to respond.”
- instead of “I'm broken”, something like:
 - “I'm someone whose system is doing intense things to keep going, and I want to learn how to work with that.”

These are still compressions.

They're just less cruel ones that give you room to act.

16.7 How stabilising feels

When stabilisation is working, even a little, you might notice:

- more sense of “**here-ness**”,
- slightly **slower** inner speed,
- clearer “**yes/no**” in small decisions,
- a feeling of “standing in my own life” rather than floating.

The situation might still be painful.

Nothing magical has been solved.

But the field has:

- a more solid centre,
- a clearer orientation,
- slightly less self-sabotaging narratives.

That's often enough for:

- one email,
 - one boundary,
 - one conversation,
 - one tiny act of care.
-

16.8 A simple stabilising script

This is not a ritual. It's just a rough outline of how this move can look.

When you notice you're in a hard state:

1. Locate the body

- Feel feet / seat / back.
- Look around the physical space.
- Name a few things you see.

2. Name the feeling and the bind

- "This feels like anxiety / shame / anger / numbness."
- "The bind seems to be: if I do X, I'm Y; if I do not-X, I'm Z."

3. Remember what you care about here

- "In this specific situation, what do I quietly care about most?"
- Honesty? Kindness? Self-respect? Safety? Curiosity?

4. Draw one small boundary or orientation

- "I am not responsible for [everything / their feelings / history]."
- "I will not pretend to be okay with X."
- "I will at least not lie about Y to myself."

5. Choose one tiny next move

- send a short message,
- write a few lines in a note,
- drink water,
- schedule a conversation,
- go outside for five minutes.

The size is not the point.

The point is: the field reorients around a slightly clearer "**I, here, going this way.**"

16.9 When stabilising goes wrong

Stabilising can also misfire. Common ways:

- Over-rigidity

- locking into "this is who I am and I must never change."
- turning flexible preferences into absolute identity.

- False self

- stabilising around someone else's values or expectations,
- using "I am this kind of person" to suppress inconvenient feelings.

- **Control frenzy**

- trying to stabilise everything at once: self, others, world, future, all under your thumb.

When that happens, the field often feels:

- brittle,
- defensive,
- easily shattered when reality doesn't comply.

That's where the **second move** comes in:

sometimes what's needed isn't more structure, but more space.

Chapter 17

Move Two – Letting the Situation Breathe (Dissolve)

If Move One is about **tightening** around a trustworthy “I” and clearer boundaries,

Move Two is about:

loosening overly tight clumps and splits,
so the situation has more room to move.

You already do this too, in small ways:

- laughing at yourself and relaxing,
- seeing a fight from the other person’s side,
- zooming out and realising “this isn’t my whole life”,
- touching moments where the usual “me” drama quiets down.

Here we’ll look at this move more deliberately.

17.1 Why dissolving helps

Sometimes the problem is not:

- “I don’t know who I am here,”

but:

- “I am gripping a particular identity or story so hard
that the field has no space to reorganise.”

Examples:

- “I must be the one who fixes everything.”
- “I must never hurt anyone.”
- “I am permanently broken.”
- “They are just evil.”
- “This situation defines my whole life.”

These are extreme **compressions**:

- vast complexity → one rigid clump.

Dissolving, in this sense, means:

- softening those compressions,
- seeing more of the raw field again,
- letting inside/outside, self/other, past/future become a bit less absolute.

Not as a metaphysical claim, but as a way to give more **degrees of freedom**.

17.2 Ways the field can soften

Here are a few kinds of loosening, all within experience:

17.3 1. De-clumping

Instead of “my whole life is a mess”, you gently unpack:

- this job situation,
- this relationship,
- this health thing,
- this internal pattern.

The field shifts from:

- one huge, black “mess” clump

to:

- several more specific, more workable pieces.

Subjectively, that can feel like:

- more **breathing room**,
- less sense of total doom.

17.4 2. De-centering “me”

Instead of:

- “this is *about me* being fundamentally bad / good / doomed”,

you can explore:

- “what if this is a pattern playing out between many factors in the field?”

For example:

- instead of “I am unlovable, that’s why relationships go like this”,
you might start to see:
 - attachment patterns,
 - the other person’s history,
 - cultural scripts,
 - timing,
 - all contributing.

You’re not erasing yourself.

You’re seeing “**me**” as **one process among others**, not the sole cursed centre of everything.

17.5 3. Softening inside/outside

Sometimes the field is split into:

- “in here, the real suffering”,
- “out there, a fixed hostile or indifferent world.”

Softening that can look like:

- noticing how “the world” appears as stories, images, headlines in your field,
- seeing that even other people’s reactions are also **appearances** you interpret,
- realising that some of the harshest voices come from internalised others, not current reality.

Again, you’re not denying that a world exists.

You’re recognising that:

- some of the hardest edges are partly being maintained by inner structure.

17.6 4. Glimpses of non-dual-ish clarity

Sometimes, especially for people who’ve had psychedelic or contemplative openings, dissolving can go further:

- the sense of a separate “subject in here” vs “objects out there” relaxes,
- experience is more like one continuous field of happening,
- “me” is seen more as a local pattern than a solid core.

When this is accessible *and* the system is stable enough, it can be:

- profoundly relieving,
- a way for problems to be held in a much wider context,
- less claustrophobic.

But it can also be disorienting or destabilising if used at the wrong time or in the wrong way. More on that in a bit.

17.7 How dissolving feels

When dissolving is helpful, you might notice:

- less tightness around “I”,
- more sense that multiple things can be true,
- more sense that this situation is part of a larger life,
- sometimes a sense of “this is all happening in a bigger space than I thought.”

The content of problems may not change right away.

But their **grip** does.

The field shifts from:

- one rigid foreground object that eats everything,

to:

- a more open sense of many things coexisting,
 - with more possible ways to relate.
-

17.8 A gentle dissolving script

Again, not a ritual, just a sketch of a move.

When you notice you're gripped by a harsh story or identity:

1. Name the clump

- “Right now the field is organised as:
I am someone who X, and this proves it.”

2. Widen the frame a bit

- “What else is in my field **right now**, besides this story?”
- sights, sounds, body, other concerns, small neutral details.

3. De-clump small pieces

- “What different threads are actually being glued into this big blob?”
 - this event,
 - older memories,
 - someone’s voice in my head,
 - specific bodily sensations.

4. Question absolutes lightly

- “Is it literally true that this moment defines my entire life?”
- “Are there any counterexamples, however small?”
- “If a friend were in exactly this situation, would I see them only through this one label?”

5. If it feels safe, touch a bit of de-centering

- “For a moment, what if this isn’t *about me* as a defect,
but about a pattern happening in this human life, with many inputs?”

You’re not forcing yourself to believe a new positive story.

You’re just letting the current compression loosen enough that:

- other information can enter,
 - other moves can become visible.
-

17.9 When dissolving goes wrong

Dissolving can be misused too. Common ways:

• Spiritual bypass

- using “it’s all one” or “there is no self” to avoid concrete problems,
- skipping necessary boundaries or grief.

• Self-gaslighting

- telling yourself “it’s just a story” when in fact something real and harmful is happening,
- flattening your own values and preferences.

• Destabilisation

- pushing too hard into de-centering when the system is already fragile,
- triggering derealisation / depersonalisation (“none of this is real / I’m not real”).

When that happens, the field can feel:

- unreal,
- ungrounded,
- meaningless,
- or weirdly hollow.

That's often a sign that what's needed is:

- more **stabilising** – more body, more simple “I”, more ordinary life,
 - less aggressive dissolving.
-

17.10 Two moves, not two religions

The main thing I want to avoid is:

- a “stabilise camp” and a “dissolve camp”,
- each treating the other as wrong.

Both moves are part of how human experience already works.

Roughly:

- stabilising = **tightening around form** where there was not enough of it,
- dissolving = **softening form** where it has become too rigid or too small.

In practice, most situations need some of each, in some order.

The next chapter is about the **weaving**:
how to feel into which move to lean on more, when.

Chapter 18

Weaving Responses and Staying Oriented

We now have two big moves on the table:

- **Stabilise** – firm up “I”, values, boundaries, next steps.
- **Dissolve** – loosen rigid clumps and splits, widen the field.

This chapter is about:

- how to sense which move is needed when,
 - how they can support each other,
 - where the edge-cases and traps tend to be.
-

18.1 A crude but useful rule of thumb

This is oversimplified, but helpful:

- When things feel **too loose**, disorienting, unreal, ungrounded → lean more on **stabilising**.
- When things feel **too tight**, claustrophobic, rigid, no-way-out → lean more on **dissolving**.

You can check this in your own experience:

- If you’re spinning in abstractness, identity confusion, or derealisation, dissolving further usually makes it worse. Stabilising helps.
 - If you’re locked into “I am this one terrible thing and this situation proves it”, doubling down on that identity usually makes it worse. Some dissolving helps.
-

18.2 Typical sequences

In many real situations, you’ll do a **sequence**, not a pure move.

18.3 Sequence A: stabilise → then dissolve

Useful when you're fragile, overwhelmed, or close to the edge.

Rough flow:

1. Stabilise the base

- ground in body, place, simple routines,
- clarify a minimal “I” and a few concrete commitments.

2. Once there's some safety, gently dissolve

- question harsh identities,
- de-clump stories,
- explore wider perspectives.

Example:

- You're in a rough depressive/numb patch.
- First, you stabilise:
 - regular meals, sleep, a few people you trust,
 - “I am someone who is going through something hard and still doing small things.”
- Only later do you start dissolving:
 - “maybe the story ‘I am fundamentally broken’ is a very old compression, not the final truth.”

18.4 Sequence B: dissolve → then stabilise

Useful when you're stuck in a very narrow, self-attacking frame.

Rough flow:

1. Dissolve the tightest knot a little

- see the story as a story,
- widen out to the rest of the field,
- see other contributing factors.

2. Then re-stabilise in a less cruel way

- choose a kinder working self-description,
- make concrete moves from there.

Example:

- You're locked in “I ruined everything with that one mistake.”
- First, you dissolve:
 - notice other moments in the relationship,
 - other people's agency,
 - the fact that this is one event among thousands.
- Then you stabilise:
 - “I'm someone who did something that hurt, cares about that, and is willing to repair as best I can.”

18.5 Listening for which move is needed

Some quick self-questions:

- Does my system feel more flooded or more frozen?
 - Flooded → might need stabilising (containment, orientation).
 - Frozen → might need dissolving (space, options).
- Is the current problem “too much chaos” or “too much rigidity”?
 - Too much chaos → stabilise.
 - Too much rigidity → dissolve.
- If I gently imagine dissolving this identity/story, do I feel relief or terror?
 - If it’s sheer terror, maybe stabilise first.
 - If there’s some relief, maybe dissolving is ready to lead.
- If I gently imagine taking a clearer stand or boundary, do I feel relief or suffocation?
 - If relief, stabilising might be primary.
 - If suffocation, maybe something else in the frame needs to loosen first.

You don’t have to get this “right”.

The moves are experiments. The field will give you feedback.

18.6 Common failure modes

A few patterns I’ve seen in myself and others:

18.7 1. All dissolve, no stabilise

- “It’s all stories, man.”
- “There is no self, so none of this really matters.”
- “Everything is empty appearances.”

This can temporarily feel spacious.

But if it ignores:

- your actual needs,
- your values,
- your relationships,
- your nervous system,

it often leads to:

- drift,
- spiritual bypass,
- or quiet despair.

The medicine:

- deliberately **re-entering form**:
 - caring about specific people,
 - making concrete promises,

- letting yourself want things.

18.8 2. All stabilise, no dissolve

- “This is just who I am, full stop.”
- “This is how the world works, everyone else is wrong.”
- “These are my values, they never change.”

Sometimes that's courage.

Sometimes it's fear of change dressed up as integrity.

Without any dissolving, you can get:

- brittle identities,
- chronic conflict with reality,
- no way to grow.

The medicine:

- small, low-stakes experiments in loosening:
 - “What if I'm only mostly like this?”
 - “What if there's one exception to this story?”
 - “What if this other person's perspective contains 5% I missed?”

18.9 3. Using one move to attack the other

- Using dissolving to attack stabilising:
 - “Your boundaries are just ego. Your pain is just a story. Let go more.”
- Using stabilising to attack dissolving:
 - “If you see things as a field, you'll become irresponsible / detached / crazy.”

Both moves are trying to protect something important.

The point is not to pick a side, but to have **both available**.

18.10 Your own style of weaving

Different people and different histories will bias you:

- Some will naturally stabilise first, dissolve rarely.
- Others will dissolve everything and forget to stabilise.

It can help to know your bias:

- “I tend to over-stabilise, so I might experiment with tiny dissolves.”
- “I tend to over-dissolve, so I might experiment with more straightforward commitments.”

Over time, you can develop a feel for:

- what a healthy “baseline” mix feels like for you,
- when you're swinging too far to one side.

The next chapter will ground this in **concrete mini-walkthroughs**, so this doesn't stay abstract.

Chapter 19

Examples and Mini Walkthroughs

To keep this from staying theoretical, here are a few simple scenarios.

They're not meant to cover every situation.

They're just examples of:

- noticing a difficult configuration in the field,
 - sensing what it points to,
 - trying stabilise / dissolve moves,
 - seeing how they can weave.
-

19.1 1. Anxiety about a choice

Situation:

You've been offered a job in another city. If you take it, you leave your current life. If you don't, you're afraid you'll stay stuck.

19.2 How it appears

- Body: restlessness, tight chest, pacing.
- Attention: flips between pros/cons lists, outcome simulations.
- Thoughts: "what if I regret this forever?", "what if I miss my one chance?", "what if I'm making a huge mistake?"

You can name it:

- "This feels like anxiety + loaded uncertainty."
- "The bind: if I go, I might blow up my life; if I stay, I might waste it."

19.3 What it's pointing at

- self future: "who will I be in each branch?"
- story-me: "am I someone who takes risks or someone who stays loyal?"
- system-me: "I must choose perfectly or be ruined."

No wonder the field can't find a safe move.

19.4 Move One – stabilise

- Body:
 - sit down, feel weight, look around the actual room.
- Values:
 - “For me, in this season, what matters more:
 - * adventure and growth,
 - * or continuity and depth?”
- Boundaries:
 - “This one decision does **not** have to carry the entire weight of my worth.”
- Tiny move:
 - set a specific time to decide,
 - or schedule conversations with two trusted people,
 - or write out what “regret” actually means here.

The field gets:

- a clearer sense of “I here, caring about X and Y”,
- some containment for the decision.

19.5 Move Two – dissolve (a bit later)

- De-clump:
 - instead of “my whole life”, see:
 - * work life,
 - * social life,
 - * inner life, as partially separable.
- Soften story:
 - notice the “one mistake ruins everything” compression.
 - ask: “Has that literally been true in my past?”
- De-centre:
 - consider that many people make non-optimal choices and still live meaningful lives.

The field gets:

- more than one acceptable story:
 - “I’m someone who tried something, learned, adjusted,”
 - in multiple branches.

The choice may still be hard, but it’s less like walking a tightrope over the void.

19.6 2. Shame after saying something harsh

Situation:

You snapped at a friend and said something that felt too cruel. Now you’re replaying it.

19.7 How it appears

- Body: heaviness, heat in the face, urge to curl in.
- Attention: looping the moment, zooming in on their expression.
- Thoughts: “I’m a terrible person”, “this is who I really am”, “they’ll never trust me again.”

You can name it:

- “Shame, focused on social-me and moral-me.”
- “The story: I am fundamentally bad and now exposed.”

19.8 What it's pointing at

- your value of not wanting to hurt people,
- a real mismatch between how you want to show up and how you did,
- fear about relationship and self-image.

So shame is at least partly tracking:
“I crossed my own line here.”

19.9 Move One – stabilise

- Body:
 - feel the ground, lengthen exhale a bit, put a hand somewhere that hurts.
- Values:
 - “I do, in fact, care about how I treat people.”
- Narrative:
 - gently adjust from “I am awful” to
“I’m someone who did something that doesn’t match my values and feels pain about that.”
- Tiny move:
 - write a draft apology,
 - or plan a repair conversation,
 - or talk to a third party you trust to reality-check.

Now the field includes:

- a caring “I” who wants to repair,
- not just a condemned sinner.

19.10 Move Two – dissolve

- De-clump:
 - separate:
 - * this specific moment,
 - * your overall character,
 - * other evidence of how you usually act.
- Question absolutes:
 - “Is this really the sole revelation of my ‘true self’, or one revealing but not total episode?”
- De-centre:
 - see how stress, context, the other person’s part, history, etc., contributed.

The purpose is **not** to excuse everything.

It’s to loosen “this proves I am trash” into:

- “this shows something about my patterns, which I can work with.”

Shame becomes:

- a pointer toward change,
- not a permanent identity verdict.

19.11 3. Numbness in a long rough patch

Situation:

Life has been hard for a while. You notice you don't feel much about things that used to matter.

19.12 How it appears

- Body: dullness, tiredness, low energy.
- Attention: sliding off meaningful topics, defaulting to distraction.
- Thoughts: "I don't care", "nothing matters", or nothing very articulate at all.

You can name it:

- "Numbness / flattening."
- "The story: this is just how I am now."

19.13 What it's pointing at

- long-term overload,
- a sense that feeling fully would be too much,
- a protective move: "turn down the volume so we can keep functioning."

19.14 Move One – stabilise

Here stabilising is mostly about **care** and **containment**:

- Body:
 - basic rhythms: food, sleep, daylight, small movement.
- Values:
 - tiny sparks: "Is there *anything* that still feels even 2% interesting or less awful?"
- Boundaries:
 - "I don't have to solve my whole life right now. Surviving this month is enough."

Tiny moves:

- extremely small acts that signal "I still exist and matter a bit":
 - answering one message,
 - taking a shower,
 - going outside for five minutes,
 - doing one small thing you used to enjoy, even if it feels flat.

You're saying:

"Even if I feel nothing, this life is still under my care."

19.15 Move Two – dissolve (gently, slowly)

- De-clump:
 - notice how "nothing ever changes" is a compression:
 - * can you find *any* exceptions, however minor?
- Soften the identity:
 - "Maybe 'I am numb' is more like:
 - 'my system is protecting itself in a blunt way right now.'
- Widen horizon slightly:

- imagine futures where this state is *part* of your story, not the whole of it.

The aim is not to blow open the doors.

It's to gently remind the system that:

- this configuration is a **move**,
 - not the only possible mode.
-

19.16 4. Anger at being mistreated

Situation:

Someone keeps crossing a line (talking over you, criticising harshly, dismissing your needs). Anger flares.

19.17 How it appears

- Body: heat, tension, a sense of “pushing against”
- Attention: locked on their behaviour, past examples.
- Thoughts: “How dare they”, “I’m done with this”, “they never respect me.”

Name it:

- “Anger about a repeated boundary violation.”
- “There’s a sense that something about this pattern is not okay.”

19.18 What it’s pointing at

- your values around respect and dignity,
- a possible mismatch between your current boundaries and how you’re being treated,
- a need for the pattern to change.

19.19 Move One – stabilise

- Body:
 - feel the energy in the body without immediately acting it out.
- Values:
 - “In relationships, I care about mutual respect, being heard, safety.”
- Boundaries:
 - “This pattern — [name it specifically] — is not okay with me.”
- Tiny move:
 - write down concrete examples,
 - talk to a trusted third party,
 - prepare to name the behaviour clearly.

You’re clarifying:

- “I, here, am someone for whom this is not acceptable.”

19.20 Move Two – dissolve

- De-clump:
 - separate:

- * this person,
- * this pattern,
- * your own contributions,
- * old echoes from earlier relationships.
- Loosen “they are just bad”:
 - not necessarily to excuse them,
 - but to see more options than fight or cut-off.
- See yourself as more than “the angry one”:
 - include your hurt, fear, wish for connection, etc.

This opens more possible responses:

- clear conversation,
- restructure the relationship,
- leaving,
- or, in some cases, genuinely letting go.

The point is not to become less honest.

It's to become **less trapped** in only one story of “me vs them”.

These are sketches, not scripts.

The hope is just that you can start to see:

- how stabilising and dissolving moves show up naturally,
- and how you can lean into them deliberately when things are tight.

The last chapter of this part will talk about staying oriented when things get especially weird or intense.

Chapter 20

Staying Oriented When It Gets Weird

Working directly with experience, self, and story can get... weird.

Especially if you've:

- had intense religious or anti-religious phases,
- done psychedelics or deep meditation,
- gone through big identity shifts.

This chapter is a small collection of orientation points — things to keep in mind so the moves in this part stay supportive rather than derailing.

20.1 1. You are allowed to be ordinary

A lot of nondual/spiritual/phenomenology talk can create a subtle pressure:

- to be special,
- to see through everything,
- to live in some extraordinary state.

You don't need any of that for this material to be useful.

You're allowed to:

- care about your job, your friends, your laundry, your next meal,
- be a basically normal human who happens to have an odd lens for experience,
- be more interested in being kind and sane than in being profound.

Stabilising around a simple, ordinary "I" is not a failure.

Sometimes it's exactly the right move.

20.2 2. Don't use the lens as a weapon against yourself

Because this stuff is subtle and powerful, there's a risk of:

- "If everything is just appearance/compression, my pain isn't real."

- “If there’s no solid self, I shouldn’t care about boundaries.”
- “If I were really seeing clearly, I wouldn’t feel this.”

Those are just **new harsh stories** wearing a clever hat.

If you notice you’re using any idea from this book to:

- invalidate your own experience,
- force yourself to stay in harm’s way,
- shame yourself for being human,

that’s a sign to:

- put the idea down for now,
- re-stabilise in simple, human terms,
- or talk to someone outside the framework.

The lens is here to reduce suffering and confusion, not to provide fancier ways to be cruel to yourself.

20.3 3. Beware of sudden, total conclusions

Big experiences (psychedelic, religious, romantic, traumatic, meditative) can come with big conclusions:

- “Nothing is real.”
- “Everything is love.”
- “I’ve been living a lie; I must burn everything down.”
- “This is my destiny.”
- “I’ve seen the final truth.”

Sometimes, these carry important insights.

Sometimes, they’re the field overfitting to one intense configuration.

You don’t have to immediately obey or deny them.

You can treat them as:

- **data points:** “this is one way the field can appear”,
- invitations to **slow testing** over time,
- not final verdicts.

If a conclusion demands that you:

- isolate completely,
- abandon all commitments overnight,
- or hurt yourself or others,

that’s a flag to seek more perspectives and go slower.

20.4 4. When in doubt, zoom back to very simple checks

If you get lost in abstractions, you can reset with:

- What do I actually see / hear / feel in my body right now?
- Am I hungry, thirsty, exhausted?

- Have I talked to another human honestly today?
- Do I need a walk, a meal, a nap, a hug, a break from thinking?

Basic animal-level stabilisation is not separate from “deep work”.
It’s part of it.

20.5 5. Therapy, friends, and other humans are allowed

This might be obvious, but I’ll say it anyway:

- This book is not a replacement for real relationships or professional help.
- Working with experience is not a reason to do everything alone.
- Sometimes the most skillful move is to say “I’m over my head, I need help.”

You can use this lens *and* use:

- therapy,
- medication,
- community,
- art,
- prayer,
- whatever else helps you.

There’s no purity test.

20.6 6. You can drop the whole lens

Finally:

You are absolutely allowed to:

- close this book,
- never think about “field” or “compression” again,
- and live your life using whatever lenses work better for you.

This whole project is just one attempt by one mind to make sense of its own mess.

If it helps you see your experience more kindly and clearly, keep it.

If it starts making things worse, treat that as accurate feedback from your system.

You don’t owe this lens anything.

With that, Part III is done:

- We’ve seen what difficult feelings tend to point to,
- two big ways the field can reorganise (stabilise / dissolve),
- and some ways to weave those in real life.

Part IV will pull back and show one coherent **architecture of appearance** that ties all this together — for the part of you that likes seeing the system as a whole.

Chapter 21

Part III Recap: Working With Difficulty Inside Experience

Part III was about moving from **description** to **doing**.

Given everything from Parts I & II — field, self, story, feelings, uncertainty — we asked:

When the field is in a painful, stuck configuration,
what moves are actually available from the inside?

Here's the compressed version.

21.1 1. Difficult feelings as status messages

Instead of treating anxiety, shame, anger, numbness, etc. as:

- glitches,
- moral failures,
- proof that you're bad at being human,

we treated them as:

status messages about how the current organisation of self / world / time is going from here.

Roughly:

- they're not random;
- they're pointing at **relationships** that feel impossible or unsafe:
 - self others,
 - self world,
 - self future,
 - self own standards.

The key question became:

“What is this feeling saying
about how I'm currently holding myself, others, and the future?”

21.2 2. Move One – stabilise around a trustworthy “I”

First big move:

Stabilise – tighten just enough around a sane, honest “I”
so that a next step becomes possible.

In practice, that looked like:

- **Body-level**
 - coming back to weight, breath, the actual room.
- **Values and preferences**
 - remembering what *you* actually care about in this situation.
- **Boundaries**
 - redrawing edges:
 - * what is and isn't yours to carry,
 - * what you will and won't tolerate.
- **Story**
 - shifting from cruel identities (“I am trash / broken / a monster”)
 - to more truthful, workable ones:
 - * “I'm someone who did X, cares about it, and is trying to respond.”

When stabilising is going well, the field feels:

- a bit more **here**,
 - a bit less chaotic,
 - a bit clearer on “this is me, this is not me”,
 - able to take **one small next action**.
-

21.3 3. Move Two – letting the situation breathe (dissolve)

Second big move:

Dissolve – loosen compressions and splits that are too tight,
so the system has more room to move.

In practice, that meant:

- **De-clumping**
 - breaking “my whole life is a mess” into specific, more workable pieces.
- **De-centering “me”**
 - seeing situations as patterns with many contributors,
 - not just “about me being fundamentally defective.”
- **Softening inside/outside**
 - noticing how “world”, “others”, and “me” appear as patterns in the field,
 - relaxing some of the sharpest edges where they hurt more than they help.

Sometimes, for some people, this includes:

- glimpses where the usual “subject in here vs world out there” framing relaxes,
- a more non-dual flavour:
 - one field, many patterns, fewer metaphysical splits.

When dissolving is going well, the field feels:

- less **claustrophobic**,
 - less organised around one total story,
 - more able to hold multiple truths at once,
 - a little more spacious around the problem.
-

21.4 4. Weaving the two moves

We saw that:

- **all stabilise, no dissolve** → brittle identities, constant collision with reality.
- **all dissolve, no stabilise** → drift, bypassing, “nothing matters” fog.

So in practice you get **sequences**, like:

- **Stabilise → then dissolve**
 - when you’re fragile or overwhelmed.
 - First: body, safety, simple “I”.
 - Later: question harsh stories, widen the frame.
- **Dissolve → then stabilise**
 - when you’re locked in one rigid, self-attacking narrative.
 - First: loosen “this moment defines my whole life”.
 - Then: stabilise in a kinder, more accurate self-story and act from there.

We also noted a rough rule of thumb:

- if things feel **too loose / unreal / ungrounded** → lean on stabilising;
 - if things feel **too tight / no-way-out / over-defined** → lean on dissolving.
-

21.5 5. Concrete mini-walkthroughs

We anchored this with simple examples:

- anxiety about a big choice,
- shame after saying something harsh,
- numbness in a long rough patch,
- anger at being mistreated.

Each one showed:

- the **configuration** of the field (what’s happening in body, attention, story),
- what the feeling seemed to be **pointing at**,
- how stabilising and dissolving could **shift the organisation**.

The aim was not to produce scripts, but to:

- train your eye to see these moves in your own life,
 - give you a few remembered “shapes” to recognise when things flare.
-

21.6 6. Staying oriented when things get intense

Finally, we added some guardrails:

- you’re allowed to be **ordinary**; no obligation to be profound, enlightened, or special,
 - don’t use this lens to **gaslight yourself** (“it’s all just appearances, so my pain isn’t real”),
 - be wary of **sudden total conclusions** (“nothing is real”, “I must burn everything down”),
 - when in doubt, zoom back to **very basic checks**:
 - food, sleep, body, connection, fresh air,
 - other humans, therapy, meds, community are all **allowed**; this book isn’t a purity test,
 - you can **drop the lens entirely** if it stops helping.
-

If you had to compress Part III into one sentence:

When the field is in pain, you can relate to that pain as
a signal about the current organisation —
and you have at least two deep ways to respond from the inside:
stabilise what needs more form, and **dissolve** what’s too tight.

Part V

Part IV – Architecture: Making Sense of It All

If you've read this far, you've already met most of the pieces:

- **field** – the whole situation of experience at once,
- **structure** – figure/background, near/far, inside/outside, centre/periphery,
- **clumps / compressions** – “things”, projects, problems, self-stories,
- **me-stack** – body-me, social-me, story-me, moral-me, system-me,
- **time + story** – before/now/after, and “I am someone who...”,
- **feelings** – how the system senses fit/mismatch from here,
- **difficulty + moves** – how the field responds (stabilise / dissolve) when it's in trouble.

We've mostly stayed close to **what appears from the inside**, using models only as scaffolding.

Part IV is for the part of you that wants to see **one coherent system picture**:

If I take all these ingredients seriously,
what kind of architecture of experience do they suggest?

The plan here is:

1. Lay out **field and compression** as a compact way of talking.
2. Introduce **awareness-mode** and **world-level** as particular regimes of compression.
3. Show how **self, mind, and time** fit as compressions in that same frame.
4. Talk about **differentiation vs duality**, and what nondual clarity looks like in this language.

This is still not metaphysics.

I'm not claiming “this is what reality ultimately is”.

Think of it like:

an architecture document for a running system
that you can check against your own logs (experience).

It should:

- make some things that used to be mysterious feel more workable,
- connect everyday experience, difficult states, and “weird” states without spaghetti,
- stay compatible with both a scientific and a contemplative angle without fully collapsing into either.

If you're already saturated, you can skip this part and go to the epilogue.

If you're still nerd-hungry, let's compress everything into one model and see what breaks.

Chapter 22

Field and Compression as a Way of Talking

Let's start by putting two words right next to each other:

- **field**
- **compression**

We've been using both, but now we'll make them explicit as the basic architecture language.

22.1 Field: the live, unified “all of this”

From earlier parts:

The **field** is the whole situation of your experience, right now:
sights, sounds, body-sense, thoughts, feelings, “world”, “me”, “now” — taken together.

A few important points:

- It's **unified** in the sense that you're not in two experiences at once.
- It's **structured** – figure/background, near/far, inside/outside, etc.
- It's **changing** – new appearances, new patterns, new groupings.

The word “field” doesn't say what “underlies” this.

It just says:

“This is the live feed, as it shows up from here.”

You can plug any metaphysics you like under it (brains, consciousness, God, whatever), but the field is the layer we actually have direct contact with.

22.2 Compression: how the field makes “things”

If the field is raw bandwidth, **compression** is how it:

- groups,

- simplifies,
- and creates **usable units** that can be tracked and acted on.

We already met this as **clumping** and **granularity**:

- **room-as-blob** vs **room-as-many-objects**,
- “this whole project” vs “this one email”,
- “my life is a mess” vs “this specific area is in trouble”.

Formally-ish:

A **compression** is a way of bundling many small details and possibilities into a more compact pattern that the system can handle as a “thing”.

Examples:

- “**Phone**”
 - compresses shape, weight, interface, past use, expectations, etc. into one chunk.
- “**This relationship**”
 - compresses a history of interactions, feelings, images of future, stories about who you are with them.
- “**Me**”
 - compresses body, memories, roles, values, habits, stories into a “someone”.
- “**Tuesday afternoon meeting**”
 - compresses time, place, roles, expectations, imagined outcomes.

Compression is not optional.

A finite system *has* to do it to function at all.

22.3 One field, many compressions

The crucial move is:

same field, different compressions.

You can:

- see the same situation as:
 - a physical scene,
 - a social drama,
 - a personal test,
 - a sacred ritual,
 - a joke,

depending on which compressions are active.

Each of these is:

- a different way of slicing and grouping the same field,
- highlighting some aspects, dimming others,
- offering different “next moves”.

That’s how the same event can be:

- humiliating in one frame,

- liberating in another,
- boring in a third.

The architecture picture is:

- **Field** – the live, unified “all of this”
 - **Compressions** – layered views / groupings / stories that run on top of it.
-

22.4 Compression levels: from fine to coarse

You can loosely order compressions by **granularity**:

- **Fine**
 - lots of detail, slower, more context-sensitive.
 - e.g. “this particular sensation in my chest as I talk to this specific person.”
- **Medium**
 - some detail, some generalisation.
 - e.g. “I tend to get nervous in this kind of meeting.”
- **Coarse / high-compression**
 - low detail, fast, global.
 - e.g. “I’m bad at social situations”, “people are dangerous”, “I’m a mess.”

High-compression patterns are:

- extremely useful for speed and coordination,
- extremely dangerous when taken as The Whole Truth.

They’re like aggressive lossy compression on an image:

- great for loading fast,
- not so great if you need to see subtle shading.

In this language, a lot of suffering is:

getting stuck inside one very coarse compression
and treating it as the only way the field can be.

22.5 Architecture as “what runs on what”

We can now say:

- **Field**
 - the runtime, the live process of appearance.
- **Compressions**
 - layers and modules running on that:
 - * “world with objects and laws”,
 - * “self with identity and history”,
 - * “time with past and future”,

* “social world with roles and norms”.

These modules interact:

- changes in one (e.g. self-story) affect others (e.g. how the “world” looks),
- and vice versa.

What we’ll do in the next chapters is:

- name a couple of specific high-level compressions:
 - **awareness-mode**,
 - **world-level**,
- then show how **self, mind, and time** fit cleanly into this stack.

This is still all talking about how things **appear** and are **organised**, not about what the ultimate ground is.

Chapter 23

Awareness-Mode and World-Level

We've talked about **field** and **compression** in general.

Now we'll name two particularly important regimes the system tends to run:

- **awareness-mode**
- **world-level**

You can think of them as:

- two big "operating modes" of the same field,
 - each with its own style of compression.
-

23.1 Awareness-mode: the hub that acts and predicts

Most of the time, experience is organised around a **hub** that:

- attends,
- chooses,
- predicts,
- updates.

This is what I'll call **awareness-mode**.

From the inside, it feels like:

- "I am here, aware of this, making sense of it, deciding what to do."

In terms of architecture, awareness-mode is:

- a way the field structures itself so that:
 - some patterns are treated as "inputs",
 - some as "internal models",
 - some as "possible actions",
 - some as "outcomes".

It's not a little homunculus in the head.

It's more like a **control loop** woven into the field:

- sensing → modelling → acting → sensing...

When you're in awareness-mode:

- attention tightens around what seems relevant,
- feeling tones (valence, pull) guide choices,
- past experience is consulted to predict futures.

It's the mode you're in when you:

- navigate a conversation,
 - debug code,
 - decide which way to walk home,
 - read this sentence and reflect on it.
-

23.2 World-level: the high-compression “physical world” view

On top of awareness-mode, there's a very fast, very powerful compression:

world-level – treating the field as a world of physical objects, places, and laws.

In world-level:

- you see **things**:
 - cups, doors, phones, cars, streets, clouds.
- you see **spaces**:
 - rooms, cities, skies, interiors and exteriors.
- you see **causal patterns**:
 - “if I push this, it falls”,
 - “if I walk there, I arrive”,
 - “if the sky looks like that, it might rain.”

This is incredibly useful:

- it lets you cross streets without dying,
- design buildings and software,
- coordinate with other people who share similar world-compressions.

World-level is:

- high-compression (it ignores a lot of fine-grained experiential detail),
- extremely stable (most of it doesn't change moment to moment),
- socially shared (we mostly agree on chairs, doors, weather, etc.).

From inside:

- it gives a strong sense of “**there is a world out there that I'm in**”.
-

23.3 Awareness-mode running world-level

Most of ordinary life is:

awareness-mode **running on** world-level compressions.

In that configuration:

- the **hub** (awareness-mode) sees itself as:
 - located in a body,
 - inside a 3D world,
 - moving through time.
- world-level compressions provide:
 - the objects to act on,
 - the constraints (“you can’t walk through walls”),
 - shared reference points with others.

The architecture is something like:

- field →
- compressions that give “world of objects and laws” →
- awareness-mode hub acting inside that world.

This is so default that it’s hard to even notice it’s a specific mode.

23.4 When world-level takes over everything

Problems begin when:

- **world-level** is treated as the only real layer,
- other compressions are forced into its shape.

Examples:

- Treating **emotions** as simple “brain chemicals” and ignoring their structural role in the field.
- Treating **self** as either “a soul-stuff” or “just an illusion”, rather than a compression.
- Treating **meaning, value, and relationship** as nothing but “epiphenomena on physical events”.

World-level is excellent at:

- prediction,
- control,
- engineering,
- shared public reality.

It’s not designed for:

- the full richness of **first-person structure**,
- **ethics and aesthetics**,
- the felt complexity of **self/other** and **inner life**.

When it colonises everything, you can get:

- flatness,
- alienation,
- a sense that nothing deeply matters because “it’s all just particles / neurons / whatever.”

Part of what this architecture is doing is:

giving world-level its full importance
without letting it pretend to be the whole story.

23.5 When awareness-mode stands back from world-level

There are also moments where:

- awareness-mode is still running,
- but it loosens its grip on the world-level story.

Examples:

- looking at a scene and suddenly seeing it as pure colour and shape rather than “objects”,
- being deeply in the body without much sense of “room” or “world”,
- meditative or altered states where subject/object framing goes weird.

In those moments, the field is still there, but:

- different compressions are active,
- world-level is de-emphasised or recontextualised.

This can be:

- disorienting,
- relieving,
- or both.

Part IV is partly about giving you a way to understand those modes as:

different **compression regimes** in the same architecture,
not evidence that one side is fake.

In the next chapter, we'll plug **self, mind, and time** into this picture:

- how they're built as compressions,
- how they run in awareness-mode,
- how they relate to world-level.

Chapter 24

Self, Mind, and Time as Compressions

We've got:

- **field** – live feed,
- **awareness-mode** – hub that senses, models, acts,
- **world-level** – high-compression physical-world view.

Now we'll bring back three big pieces from earlier parts and place them in this architecture:

- **self**,
- **mind**,
- **time/story**.

The claim here is simple:

all three are **compressions** the system runs
to make the field manageable and actionable.

24.1 Self as a high-compression “I”-module

From Part I, recall the **me-stack**:

- body-me,
- social-me,
- story-me,
- moral-me,
- system-me.

You can think of **self** as:

a high-compression module that bundles all of that
into a more or less coherent “I”.

In architecture terms:

- awareness-mode needs a **stable-ish centre** to plan from.
- The system maintains a “self-compression” that says:
 - “This is me: these are my limits, my history, my values, my people.”

That compression:

- uses inputs from the body, memory, language, culture, religion, etc.,
- gets updated by experience,
- tries to keep some continuity across time.

It's not all in one place; it's spread across the field.
But functionally, it behaves like:

- an object the system can refer to: "me".

Strong feelings often propose edits to this module:

- shame tries to install "I am fundamentally bad",
- anxiety tries to install "I am someone who must not fail and isn't up to it",
- anger tries to install "I am the one who must fight / fix this",
- numbness tries to install "I am someone who doesn't feel / for whom nothing changes".

Seeing self as compression means:

- you can respect its role (you need *some* stable I),
 - without treating any one version of it as metaphysically absolute.
-

24.2 Mind as the space of live compressions and proposals

We can also use **mind** in a specific way here.

Instead of "mind" = mysterious substance, think:

mind = the active workspace of compressions and re-compressions
that awareness-mode is currently playing with.

Inside that workspace you have:

- **perceptual compressions:** objects, scenes, faces, voices, inner imagery.
- **conceptual compressions:** ideas, categories, explanations.
- **self-compressions:** identities, roles.
- **story compressions:** "I am someone who...", "this is the kind of situation where...".

"Thoughts" are then:

- micro-proposals for how to compress the current field:
 - "what if they're angry with me?",
 - "what if this is an opportunity?",
 - "what if I'm just broken?"

Awareness-mode:

- samples these proposals,
- checks them against feeling (fit/mismatch),
- chooses some to act on,
- discards or shelves others.

In this view:

- mind is not a separate ghost;
 - it's **what the field is doing** when it experiments with different compressions.
-

24.3 Time and story as trajectory-compressions

Now to **time**.

In Part I we said:

- “past” appears as current memories,
- “future” appears as current expectations,
- “flow” appears as a sense of continuity.

In architecture terms:

time is a way the system **compresses sequences of field-states**
into manageable trajectories.

You don’t store every frame of life.

You store:

- key events,
- turning points,
- repeated patterns,
- plus a rough sense of “how things tend to go”.

Then you compress that into **stories**:

- “I am someone who always...”,
- “people like me usually...”,
- “my life has been a story of X → Y → Z.”

These stories:

- inform prediction (what you expect next),
- shape identity (what roles you see as available),
- filter memory (what you recall as relevant).

They’re not just narratives floating above.

They’re **active modules** in the architecture:

- awareness-mode uses them to simulate futures,
- feelings report on whether these simulations seem survivable or not.

This is why changing a story can feel like:

- changing your past,
- changing your future,
- changing who you are — internally.

You’re editing a core compression that sits right under “self”.

24.4 All together now

If we stack it, one possible picture is:

- **Field**
 - live feed of appearance.
- **Low / mid-level compressions**

- objects, bodies, places, faces, simple actions.

- **World-level**

- stable physical-world model (objects + laws).

- **Awareness-mode**

- hub running on field + world-level + other compressions, doing sensing → modelling → acting.

- **Self-compressions**

- “I” as body + history + roles + values, providing a centre for planning.

- **Story / time-compressions**

- past/future/“my life” as trajectory modules that guide predictions and choices.

- **Mind**

- the active workspace where all these compressions are proposed, updated, tested.

Feelings sit across this whole stack as:

- **fit/mismatch signals:**

- “does this current configuration (self + world + time) give a safe, honest way to move from here?”

In Parts I-III we’ve mostly lived *inside* the field looking out.

Part IV is just zooming out and saying:

“Okay, here’s one way the whole thing might be wired.”

In the last chapter of this part, we’ll talk about:

- **differentiation vs duality** – keeping distinctions without hard metaphysical splits,
- and how **nondual clarity** shows up in this architecture.

Chapter 25

Differentiation, Duality, and Nondual Clarity

We're almost done with the nerd layer.

There's one last tangle that shows up a lot for people who care about this stuff:

- the difference between **differentiation** and **duality**,
 - and how so-called **nondual insight** fits into this architecture.
-

25.1 Differentiation: useful distinctions in the field

Differentiation is simple:

the ability to tell **this** from **that** in experience.

Examples:

- tree vs bench,
- my body vs your body,
- inside of my mouth vs outside air,
- anger vs grief vs fear,
- this situation vs that situation.

Differentiation is:

- built out of compressions,
- absolutely necessary to not walk into traffic and to have any sort of relationship,
- trainable (you can learn to see finer distinctions).

There's nothing spiritually suspicious about it.

It's just the field doing detailed patterning.

25.2 Duality: turning distinctions into two substances

Duality, in the sense I care about here, is a step further:

turning some distinction into a split between two fundamentally different **kinds of being**.

Classic one:

- “in here” (**subject, mind, self**) vs
- “out there” (**object, world, matter**)

Once that split hardens, you get:

- “I, the inner subject, am locked in here looking at an outer world.”
- “Consciousness is a special magic stuff separate from dumb matter.”
- or, flipping it: “Only matter is real, inner life is a weird side-effect.”

In our architecture language, what’s happening is:

- a useful set of compressions (self, world, inner/outer)
- get reified into **two substances**.

Same with:

- “sacred” vs “profane”,
- “spiritual” vs “material”,
- “pure awareness” vs “impure appearances”.

The distinctions can be experientially useful.

The metaphysical splits tend to create extra suffering and confusion.

25.3 Nondual clarity in this model

Nondual clarity, as I’m using the phrase, is not:

- a permanent state you should be in,
- an identity (“I am the awakened one now”),
- a magic trance.

It’s more like:

a way of **reading the field and its compressions**
without turning “self” and “world” into two different substances.

Key aspects in this architecture:

1. **One field, many compressions**
 - Both “self” and “world” are patterns in the same field.
 - They’re made of different compressions, but they’re not ontologically separate realms.
2. **Self as process, not core-stuff**
 - “I” is recognised as a high-compression module:
 - useful, necessary, trainable,
 - but not the ultimate centre of reality.
3. **World-level as a view, not the whole**
 - The physical-world model is honoured as extremely effective,
 - but seen as one powerful compression among others, not the final story on “what there is”.
4. **Awareness-mode seeing its own workings**

- The hub can, at times, see:
 - how it's running on these compressions,
 - how identity and story are assembled,
 - how clumps form and dissolve.

When this is clear *enough* in lived experience, you can have moments where:

- differentiation remains (you still see tree vs bench, traffic vs sidewalk),
- but the heavy “me in here vs world out there” feel is much lighter or gone.

Experience is more like:

- one continuous happening,
 - with local patterns that can be called “me” and “world” for practical purposes,
 - without needing to turn those into metaphysical enemies or prisons.
-

25.4 Why this matters for actual life

You don't need nondual language to live well.

You absolutely don't need to chase special states.

But having this option in the architecture can:

- make extreme experiences (psychedelic, mystical, meditative) less confusing:
 - “oh, that was a temporary reconfiguration of compressions and self/world boundaries”,
 - not “either that was fake or my normal life is fake.”
- make dissolving moves safer:
 - you're not trying to eradicate self,
 - you're letting its compression be a bit more flexible and transparent.
- reduce some extra suffering on top of already-hard things:
 - less “I am a tiny subject trapped in a hostile, meaningless world”,
 - more “this is a painful configuration inside a much larger field.”

It can also soften some stale philosophical fights:

- materialist vs spiritual,
- self vs no-self,
- dualist vs monist,

by showing how each is privileging some compressions over others.

25.5 Keeping what's useful, dropping the rest

To be clear:

- You don't have to buy any of this architecture.
- It's here for minds that really *want* one coherent picture.

If, for you, the experiential parts of the book are helpful but this model feels:

- abstract,
- forced,
- or just not your flavour,

you can ignore it.

If it *does* resonate, the hope is that it:

- gives you a way to hold:
 - everyday life,
 - difficult feelings,
 - strange experiences,
- in **one frame** that doesn't explode into contradictions every ten minutes.

With that, the nerd layer closes.

The epilogue will briefly:

- place this lens in context (religious, contemplative, scientific),
- and suggest ways to keep experimenting without turning any of this into a new religion.

Chapter 26

Part IV Recap: One Possible Architecture of Appearance

Part IV stepped back and said:

“Okay, if we take all of this seriously — field, self, story, feelings, moves — what kind of architecture does this suggest?”

Here's the quick map.

26.1 1. Field and compression

We put two words at the core:

- **field** – the live, unified “all of this” of experience right now.
- **compression** – how the field groups and simplifies into usable “things”.

The field:

- is structured (figure/background, near/far, inside/outside, etc.),
- is constantly changing,
- is the only layer we have direct access to from the inside.

Compression:

- turns raw richness into manageable units:
 - objects, people, projects, problems, self-stories, life-stories,
- comes in different **granularities**:
 - fine (detailed, slow),
 - medium,
 - coarse (fast, lossy).

Suffering often shows up as:

getting stuck inside one **very coarse compression**
and treating it as the whole truth.

26.2 2. Awareness-mode and world-level

We named two big “regimes” the system runs:

- **awareness-mode**
 - the hub that senses, models, predicts, chooses.
 - from the inside: “I am here, aware of this, deciding what to do.”
- **world-level**
 - the high-compression view of a physical world of objects, spaces, and laws.
 - chairs, doors, streets, weather, bodies moving in 3D space.

Most of ordinary life is:

awareness-mode **running on** world-level compressions.

That works extremely well for:

- crossing the street,
- building things,
- coordinating with others.

Trouble starts when:

- world-level is treated as the only real layer,
- everything else (value, meaning, inner life) is forced into its terms.

We also noted:

- there are states where awareness-mode is still functioning,
- but is **less bound** to world-level:
 - more focused on raw sensation,
 - or seeing the room as pure colour/shape,
 - or where subject/object structure gets weird.

Those can be disorienting *or* clarifying, depending on context.

26.3 3. Self, mind, and time as compressions

We then placed three big pieces into this architecture:

- **Self**
 - a high-compression “I”-module built from body, memory, roles, values, etc.
 - needed for planning and continuity.
 - edited all the time by experience and by strong feelings.
- **Mind**
 - not a ghost-stuff, but the **workspace** where compressions are proposed, tested, updated:
 - * perceptual, conceptual, self, story.
 - “Thoughts” as micro-suggestions for how to compress the current field.
- **Time / story**
 - compressions of many field-states into **trajectories**:
 - * “my past”, “my future”, “my life so far”

- provide predictions and identity (“I am someone who...”).
- actively shape what you notice and expect.

Stacked together, a rough picture was:

- field →
- low/mid-level compressions →
- world-level →
- awareness-mode →
- self-compressions →
- time/story-compressions →
- all of this playing out in the workspace we call “mind”.

Feelings run **across the stack** as:

- fit/mismatch signals:
 - “Does this current configuration give us a safe, honest way to move from here?”
-

26.4 4. Differentiation, duality, and nondual clarity

We distinguished:

- **differentiation**
 - useful distinctions in the field:
 - * tree vs bench, body vs not-body, anger vs grief.
 - necessary for any sane life.

from

- **duality**
 - turning distinctions into **two substances**:
 - * inner vs outer, mind vs matter, spiritual vs material.

In this frame:

- **self** and **world** are both compressions in the same field,
- not two metaphysically different realms.

Nondual clarity, here, was:

awareness-mode seeing how its own compressions work
without turning “me” and “world” into separate kinds of being.

That can show up as:

- ordinary differentiation intact (you still don’t step in front of buses),
- but less heavy “me-in-here vs world-out-there” feeling,
- more sense of one continuous happening with local patterns called “me” and “not me”.

You don’t need that to live well.

But having it in the architecture can:

- make weird experiences less confusing,
 - make dissolving moves safer,
 - and reduce some extra loneliness/alienation on top of whatever is already hard.
-

26.5 5. Take it or leave it

Finally:

- This architecture is **optional**.
- If your system finds it helpful, keep it and play.
- If it feels overbuilt, you can drop it and just keep the more experiential parts of the book.

The point of Part IV is not to hand you a new dogma.

It's to offer one possible big-picture that:

- matches a lot of what we've already described,
- gives structure to "strange" experiences without forcing them into old religious or flat materialist frames,
- and stays anchored in **what appears** rather than drifting into pure abstraction.

If you carry nothing else from this part, maybe let it be:

There is one field of appearance,
and many ways of compressing it into worlds, selves, and stories.
None of those compressions are the whole thing,
and they can be reworked.

Part VI

Epilogue: Context and Next Experiments

We've walked through:

- how experience shows up as a **field**,
- how that field is already **structured** and **clumped**,
- how **self, time, and story** appear inside it,
- how **feelings** report on the fit or mismatch of the current organisation,
- how the field can get into painful configurations,
- and two deep ways it can **re-organise itself from the inside**.

Then we sketched one possible **architecture** that ties all that together.

This last part isn't about new concepts. It's about:

- where this lens sits in the wider landscape (religion, spirituality, therapy, science, rationalism, etc.),
- how you might keep experimenting with it **without** turning it into a new religion or a new stick to beat yourself with,
- and a simple closing note from the particular life that produced this thing.

If the book so far was:

“Here’s a way of seeing what appears,
and some moves you can make from inside that,”

this part is:

“Here’s how to **hold the whole thing lightly**.”

Chapter 27

Where This Sits in the Landscape

If you've read other frameworks — religious, spiritual, psychological, scientific — parts of this book probably lit up old patterns.

This chapter is just a quick “coordinates in concept-space” so you don’t have to guess what this is trying to be.

27.1 Not a new religion

This is *not*:

- a revelation from beyond,
- a final word about reality,
- a new thing you have to believe to be okay.

There is no:

- creed,
- membership,
- set of practices you must do,
- special saved group.

What it *is* trying to be:

- a set of **lenses** for looking at experience,
- that you can pick up and put down as needed,
- that should be judged by:
 - “Does this help me see more clearly?”
 - “Does this reduce unnecessary suffering?”
 - “Does this make me more honest and kind, or less?”

If the answer is “no”, you’re not wrong. The lens just isn’t for you right now.

27.2 Not a complete scientific theory

This is also *not*:

- a neuroscientific model,
- a formal theory in physics or cognitive science,
- a rival to anyone doing actual lab work.

The language of “field” and “compression” *sounds* a bit like physics or predictive processing. That’s on purpose, but this book is:

- written from inside **first-person experience**,
- using “field” and “compression” as **bridge words**:
 - precise enough to be useful,
 - loose enough not to pretend we have all the math.

If you want a full account of brains, neurons, generative models, etc., you should go read people who specialise in that. This lens is meant to be:

- compatible with several possible scientific pictures,
 - not leaning too hard on any one of them.
-

27.3 Not a school of therapy (but not anti-therapy)

This is *not* a replacement for:

- psychotherapy,
- trauma work,
- meds,
- support groups.

It overlaps with some therapeutic ideas:

- mapping patterns instead of just symptoms,
- seeing feelings as signals rather than enemies,
- updating self-stories and boundary patterns,
- paying attention to the body and the present field.

If you’re already in therapy, this lens might give you:

- extra language for what you and your therapist are doing,
- a way to notice “oh, we’re doing stabilising here” or “we’re doing dissolving here”.

If you’re not, nothing here should be taken as:

- “you can fix yourself alone now.”

You’re allowed professional help. You’re allowed other humans.

27.4 Overlaps with contemplative and nondual traditions

You might have noticed resonances with:

- mindfulness / vipassanā / insight practice,
- nondual teachings (“no separate self”, “only this”),
- bits of Sufism, Advaita, Dzogchen, etc.

That's not an accident. Those traditions have been poking at "what appears" and the self/world split for a long time.

This book:

- borrows some of the *moves* (looking closely at experience, watching clumps form and dissolve, softening subject/object hardness),
- drops a lot of the mythic scaffolding,
- adds more explicit talk about:
 - modern identity,
 - queerness,
 - tech/rationalist mindsets,
 - psychedelics as hacky shortcuts.

If you know those traditions, you can probably map:

- stabilise/dissolve certain meditation practices,
- nondual clarity "seeing through" hard self/world splits.

I'm not claiming equivalence or "secret true meaning". Just saying: there's family resemblance.

27.5 Overlaps with rationalist / engineering minds

You might also notice the fingerprints of:

- debugging and refactoring,
- architecture diagrams,
- wanting models that actually **compile**.

That's because the mind that wrote this is:

- a software engineering / architecture mind,
- raised inside strict religious structure,
- then pushed into rebellion and atheism,
- then through psychedelic shortcuts and spirituality,
- then into "fine, I'll just write my own lens."

If you come from:

- rationalist / tech / analytic backgrounds,

this book is partly written as:

"Here is a way to take weird spiritual and phenomenological territory seriously,
without having to pretend you don't care about coherence and architecture."

If you *don't* come from that world, you can mostly ignore this and just treat the diagrams as "some guy's favourite way to explain things".

27.6 Overlaps with queerness and leaving rigid frames

There's also a quieter overlap with:

- being queer in a frame that doesn't allow it,

- leaving a strict religious context,
- rebuilding a sense of self from scratch.

That shows up in:

- sensitivity to shame, exile, and identity fractures,
- refusal to hand you any new “one right way to be”,
- insistence on lenses being **drop-able**.

If you’ve never had to blow up a rigid identity structure, you can still use this book.

If you *have*, you might recognise some of the background pressure that shaped it:

- needing a way to see experience that isn’t:
 - “old religion but secretly”,
 - “pure cold materialism”,
 - or “vague everything-is-love that doesn’t survive contact with real pain.”

This lens wants to sit in the middle of all that and say:

“We can be precise *and* tender,
weird *and* sane,
finite *and* not entirely trapped.”

You don’t have to care about any of these overlaps to use the lens.

But if you’ve been quietly trying to locate it on your internal map —
this is roughly where it lives.

Chapter 28

How to Keep Exploring (Without Making It a New Religion)

If this lens feels alive for you, you might want to keep playing with it after the book ends.

This chapter is about how to do that **gently**.

28.1 1. Keep starting from “what appears”

The safest anchor is always:

“What is actually here, in experience, *right now?*”

You can come back to:

- the **field** – sights, sounds, body, thoughts, feelings, all at once,
- **structure** – figure/background, near/far, inside/outside,
- **clumps** – “things”, identities, problems, stories,
- **feelings** – as readouts of fit/mismatch.

Simple questions like:

- “What is figure for me right now?”
- “What am I treating as the whole story?”
- “What’s the bind this feeling is pointing at?”

are enough to stay in contact with reality.

If you notice you’re lost in abstractions, come back to this.

28.2 2. Light-touch practice ideas

None of these are obligations. They’re just possible experiments.

28.3 a) Small daily “field snapshots”

Once or twice a day, for 30 seconds:

- notice the field (room, body, thoughts, mood),
- name 1–2 clumps (“this project”, “this relationship”, “this worry”),
- notice valence and pull around them,
- ask what move is needed: a bit more stabilising or a bit more dissolving?

That’s it. No big session. Just little micro-check-ins.

28.4 b) Journaling as compression debugging

When something feels stuck, you can write out:

- “The story my system is running is:
I am someone who... and this means...”

Then:

- underline the harshest parts,
- ask:
 - “Where did I learn this?”
 - “What doesn’t fit this story?”
- write one alternative working story that is:
 - more honest,
 - less totalising,
 - still admits the pain.

You’re not forcing positive thinking.

You’re giving the field more than one compression to choose from.

28.5 c) Conversations in this language

If you have close people who like this stuff, you can try talking in this lens:

- “Right now my field is organised as X.”
- “This shame feels like it’s trying to install *I am someone who Y* again.”
- “I think I need to stabilise here before I try to dissolve anything.”

This is not to show off; it’s to:

- get out of pure content fights (“what happened, who’s right”),
- and talk about **configurations** and **moves**.

That can be surprisingly de-escalating.

28.6 3. Don’t optimise your whole life around this

Tempting failure mode:

- “If this lens is good, I should apply it to everything, all the time.”

No.

You’re allowed to:

- watch stupid TV,
- flirt,
- write shitty code,
- cook dinner,
- cry,
- dance,
- pray,
- be an animal,
- live.

Some parts of life don't need a lens at all.

Some parts need totally different ones.

If you notice you're:

- delaying decisions until you've analysed them through five layers of field/compression,
- or policing your experience for “proper phenomenology”,

that's a sign to:

- drop the lens for that moment,
 - do something simple and human,
 - come back later if you want.
-

28.7 4. Watch for self-weaponisation

Red flags that you're using this against yourself:

- “If I were doing this right, I wouldn’t feel this anymore.”
- “This is just a story, so I should shut up about it.”
- “If I were truly nondual, I wouldn’t need boundaries.”
- “I’m bad at stabilising/dissolving, so I’m failing at the book.”

Whenever you catch that, you can literally say:

- “Okay, new story:
I am someone who is learning, and my system is doing the best it can right now.”

Then:

- stabilise around that,
- or, if that feels too fake, at least around:
 - “I am someone who is overwhelmed and still here.”

You’re not a test case.

You’re a life.

28.8 5. When to bring other tools and people in

Some situations are bigger than any lens:

- severe depression,
- active addiction,

- acute trauma,
- psychosis,
- suicidality,
- unsafe environments.

In those cases, the most skilled move may be:

- getting help **outside** this frame:
 - therapy,
 - psychiatry,
 - crisis lines,
 - shelters,
 - legal support,
 - community,
 - friends.

It's not a failure to say:

“My architecture diagram is not enough.
I need other humans and other tools.”

If anything, that's a very clean kind of seeing.

28.9 6. Let the lens age

Lenses change as you use them.

Over time you might find that:

- some parts of this book stay central,
- some parts feel naive,
- some parts you've outgrown,
- some parts only make sense years later.

That's normal.

You can treat the whole thing as:

- one snapshot of one mind at a particular moment in its development,
- that you get to be in conversation with.

You don't have to freeze yourself around it.

You can fold it into whatever you become next.

If at some point you look back and think:

- “Wow, I can see how this was incomplete,”

that's not an indictment of the lens.

It's a sign that **you** have more resolution now.

Chapter 29

Closing

If you've reached this page, you've been walking inside my head for a while.

Not just the cleaned-up parts:

- also the bits shaped by strict religion,
- rebellion and atheism,
- queer desire in a frame that didn't allow it,
- shortcuts through LSD and mushrooms,
- too much reading,
- too much abstraction,
- and a stubborn refusal to give up on either clarity or meaning.

This whole lens grew out of:

- trying to make sense of experience when
 - the old God-map had cracked,
 - the flat materialist map felt too thin,
 - and the mystical map was too myth-heavy to inhabit fully.

What I wanted — and maybe what you want too — was something like:

a way of seeing that can hold
both brutal reality and weird grace,
without lying or collapsing.

I don't know if this book succeeded at that.

But I know it was written from that place.

If you remember nothing else, maybe let it be three things:

1. **You are always already in a field.**
 - Whatever else is true, there is this happening, now.
 - You can start from here.
2. **The way it's grouped and storied is not fixed.**
 - Self, world, time, fate — all are compressions.
 - They matter. They're not arbitrary.
 - And they can also be reworked.
3. **Your pain is not proof of your badness.**

- It's information about a configuration.
 - There are moves: stabilising, dissolving, weaving.
 - You don't have to do them alone.
-

Thank you for lending your field to this experiment.

Whatever frames you carry forward from here —
coded, mystical, clinical, artistic, or none at all —

I hope they help you:

- suffer less needlessly,
- love a bit more honestly,
- and recognise yourself, when it matters, as:

not just a problem to be solved,
but a point where the whole field is trying,
in its own messy way,
to wake up to itself.