

Really?!

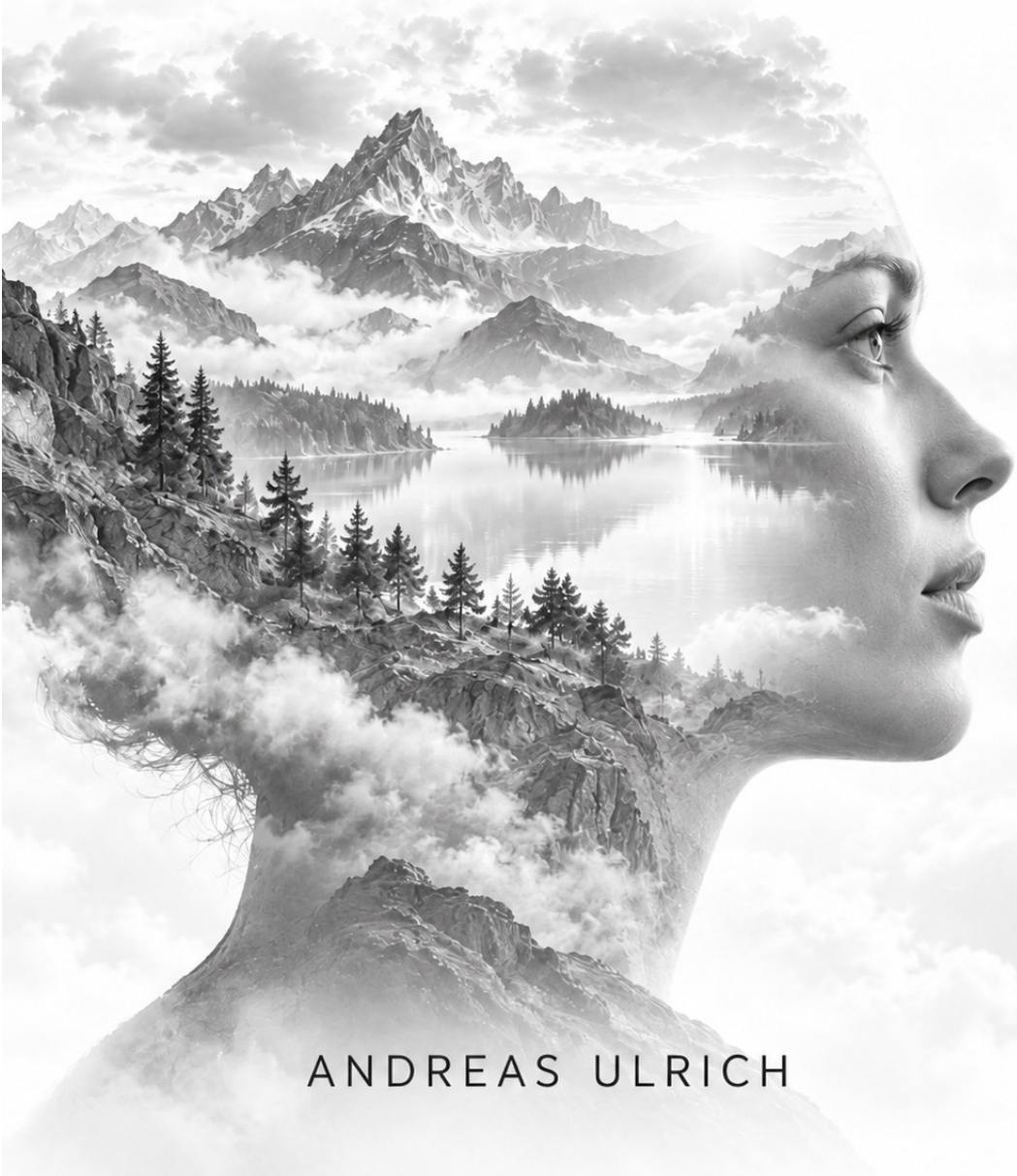
What Your Mind Makes of Reality



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Really?!

You're sitting in a café. Your coffee is still warm. Cups and plates clatter somewhere behind you, and at the next table two people are deep in conversation about something that has absolutely nothing to do with you. Until one of them glances over. Just for a second. He says something, and the person opposite turns to look as well. Suddenly, their conversation becomes a lot more interesting.

You glance down. Something on your shirt? On your face? Maybe one of them looks vaguely familiar. Or perhaps the thought simply arrives: Are they talking about me? A few seconds later they turn back to their coffee, and the moment is gone.

You'll probably never know what that was about. Maybe they recognised someone behind you. Maybe you reminded them of somebody. Maybe they really were talking about you. Or maybe it had nothing to do with you at all. For those few seconds, though, your mind had already put together a version of events - and it felt surprisingly convincing.

That is the interesting part. We rarely stop to question what we see, hear or experience. Why would we? It is happening right in front of us. Two people looked in your direction. That much is fact. What the look meant is another matter entirely.

Perhaps that is why two people can leave the same dinner and later describe two different evenings. One remembers a conversation as warm and open; the other thought it was awkward and cold. You can be certain something happened exactly as you remember it, only to have the person who stood beside you stare back in disbelief. One of you must be wrong. Unless reality is a little less straightforward than that.

How much of what you call reality is actually there - and how much has your mind added?

What You Don't See ...



Imagine someone plays you a short video. Several people are moving around, passing basketballs to one another. Your job sounds simple enough: count the passes made by one particular group. Easy.

The video begins. You start counting and quickly discover that it takes more concentration than expected. Players cross in front of one another, the ball disappears behind a body for a moment, and you are determined not to lose count somewhere around eight or nine. While you are busy doing that, a person in a gorilla suit walks straight through the middle of the scene. Not along the edge. Through the middle. The gorilla even stops, beats its chest and carries on. Subtle it is not.

And still, a remarkable number of people never see it. The experiment became famous through the work of psychologists Daniel Simons and Christopher Chabris in the late 1990s. The participants were not distracted. Quite the opposite: they were concentrating hard on the task, and many counted the passes accurately. They simply missed the gorilla.

Psychologists call this inattentional blindness. The term sounds more complicated than the idea. Attention has limits. When we focus hard on one thing, something else can sit squarely in front of us and barely reach conscious awareness. That is not a design flaw; it is one of the ways the brain keeps life manageable. Imagine processing every sound, movement, patch of light, sensation on your skin and object in your field of vision with equal intensity. You would be exhausted before breakfast.

You know the effect from a crowded restaurant. Conversations overlap, glasses clink, the coffee machine hisses and music hums in the background. After a while it all blends into one wash of sound. Then someone three tables away says your name, and your attention snaps across the room. Or perhaps you are thinking about buying a certain car. A week ago you barely noticed it. Now it seems to be everywhere. The roads did not change overnight. Your attention did.

A useful way to picture attention is as a spotlight. The stage may be huge, but the beam can only illuminate part of it at a time. Whatever falls inside the light feels vivid and important. The rest recedes into the background. That becomes more interesting when we stop talking about basketballs, restaurants and cars and start looking at everyday life.

Think back over an ordinary day. Chances are the things that went wrong come to mind quickly: the email nobody answered, the meeting that ran over, the coffee machine that chose today to give up. Yet the same day may also have contained a good conversation, a compliment, a small win or ten quiet minutes that simply felt good. All of it happened. It just did not all receive equal billing.

That is the idea behind HIGHLIGHTS: paying more attention to the small good moments that are already part of life, yet are remarkably easy to overlook.

You can stare at a problem for weeks and see the same obstacles every time. Then someone asks one question that shifts the spotlight a few degrees, and suddenly a route appears that had been there all along. The world has not changed. What you can see of it has.

The gorilla makes the point almost comically well. Something can walk straight through the centre of the picture and still go unnoticed. Real life is

less obliging; its gorillas rarely wear fur. Sometimes the thing outside the spotlight is an opportunity, a person who has quietly been supportive all along, or a change for the better that seems too small to count because your attention is fixed on what is still missing.

What you don't see can still be there.

Every so often, it is worth asking whether the spotlight is showing you the whole stage. Sometimes a situation changes simply because you move the light.

What You Don't Know ...

You send someone a message. Nothing dramatic - just a few sentences you have actually thought about. Maybe it is personal. Maybe you are trying to settle a decision or arrange something and would rather know where you stand. A little later your phone buzzes. The reply says: "Okay."

That's it. No emoji. No "great", no "sounds good", no second sentence to soften it. Just one word. Oddly enough, "Okay" on a screen can develop a tone of voice all by itself. Friendly and easy? Cool? Irritated? Slightly passive-aggressive? Take your pick.

This is different from the gorilla. There, something was present and you may not have noticed it. Here, something is missing - and the mind hates a vacuum. With no voice to hear and no face to read, we supply the missing tone ourselves. In conversation, a pause, a sigh or a glance can do the same thing. A few fragments are enough for a meaning to take shape.

Most of the time that is useful. We could hardly function if every situation had to be interpreted from scratch. So we lean on context and experience. How does this person usually speak? What happened just before this? What mood are they in? What am I expecting? A handful of facts becomes a story, and the story rarely arrives with a warning label saying: Other explanations are available.

You notice this most when the situation matters. Imagine you are giving a presentation. You prepared well, started strongly and feel reasonably confident. A few minutes in, your manager looks at his phone. Then he does it again. Maybe he is waiting for a message from home. Maybe another meeting is about to start. Maybe he is making a note. Or maybe he really is bored. At that moment, you simply do not know.

Within seconds, however, your mind can produce a very convincing explanation: This isn't landing. Your behaviour begins to follow the story. You speed up, skip a point, lose your rhythm and suddenly notice every hesitation. The glance at the phone was real. Its meaning was supplied by you.

With people we know well, the process can be even faster. A particular look, the way someone says hello, the way a door closes - that can be enough. Before anything has been said, we already think we know what is going on.

A friend does not reply for two days. She may be busy. She may have read your message and forgotten to answer. She may need some space. Or perhaps she really is pulling away. The same facts can support several stories. The one that feels most convincing will shape how you see the situation - and probably how you respond to it.

You have probably had conversations where both people were reacting to assumptions that neither had ever voiced. One goes quiet because they think the other is annoyed; the other reads the silence as distance. Before long, the atmosphere really is tense, even though the whole thing may have started with nothing more than a look. What the mind adds does not stay neatly inside the mind. It can influence what happens next.

What do I actually know - and what have I filled in?

Did It Really Happen That Way?



It usually starts innocently enough. A family dinner, a birthday, Christmas. Someone mentions an old holiday, the house by the lake, or the evening when something went spectacularly wrong.

"That was in summer." - "Summer? We were wearing coats!" - "Dad was furious." - "What? He was laughing so hard he cried." Within seconds, the story itself is almost beside the point. Now the important question is who remembers it properly. One person can still see the red car; another is certain it was blue. Someone remembers the exact words that were spoken, while somebody else knows that sentence did not enter the story until years later. Everyone sounds completely sure. And chances are, nobody is lying.

Memory often feels like playback. Open the right drawer, pull out the scene and run the film again. Some memories are so vivid that you can almost see the room, hear the voice and remember exactly where you were sitting. The trouble is, the brain does not keep a perfect video archive waiting to be replayed.

Each time we remember, the memory is reconstructed. Images, feelings, words and fragments of experience are pieced together, along with things we learned later. What other people told us can gradually become woven into the memory too. You may have childhood photographs that feel almost like memories in their own right. You know the garden, who was standing beside you, even the mood of the afternoon. Then comes the awkward question: Do you remember the moment, or do you remember the photograph?

Years later, the difference can be surprisingly hard to spot. Family stories make it even better. A mishap acquires a punchline the second time it is told. By the fifth telling, the timing improves. Ten years later, the polished version belongs to the family history so completely that nobody could say where memory ends and storytelling begins. The event has not necessarily been invented. The story has simply evolved.

Meaning changes too. The teacher you could not stand at sixteen may look, twenty years later, like one of the few people who genuinely challenged you. A failure that once felt catastrophic can become a turning point. Something that hardly registered at the time may later take up a permanent place in your life story. The event stays where it is. Your relationship to it does not.

So far, none of this is especially alarming. People remember things differently. It gets more interesting when a memory stops being a story about the past and starts becoming a statement about the present. Perhaps at twelve you froze halfway through a school presentation. Everyone was looking at you and your mind went blank. Horrible at the time, certainly. Years later, though, the story may have grown into: "I've never been good at speaking in front of people." One bad moment has quietly become a character reference.

Perhaps you have given five perfectly decent presentations since then, maybe even one you were proud of. Somehow they never acquired the same weight. This is where the past begins to travel with us. It stands beside us before the next presentation, sits in the waiting room before the next interview and whispers what is "typical" of us.

Which version of your past are you carrying with you today?

The past will not change. The story you tell about it can. And sooner or later, stories about what happened become stories about who you are - and perhaps about who you expect to become.

That's Just Who I Am

"That's just who I am." "I've never been a numbers person." "I'm not creative." "I'm hopeless at relationships." "Nobody in our family is sporty." "I overthink everything." These sound like ordinary observations. They can also carry a surprising amount of power. Most have grown out of real experiences, feedback, failures, successes or something somebody once said. That makes them believable. Believable, however, is not the same as fixed.

Imagine a girl who gets two poor marks in maths. The third time, someone says with a shrug, "Maths just isn't your thing." The sentence sticks. She walks into the next test with a slightly different expectation. Every difficult question confirms the story; the easy ones barely register. At some point, "I'm struggling with this topic" becomes "I'm bad at maths." A tiny change in wording. A much bigger change in identity.

Once you believe you are fundamentally bad at something, you practise differently. You ask fewer questions, take fewer risks and often stop sooner. Years later, the story can look remarkably accurate - partly because you have spent years behaving as if it were. The same mechanism can work in the other direction. You probably know someone whose default response is, "We'll figure it out." That sentence guarantees nothing. But it may keep them looking, asking, experimenting or trying once more after the first rejection. Eventually they have a story about themselves too: "I always find a way." By then, it may be largely true.

The curious part is how easily a story turns into a fact in our own mind. Repeat it often enough and it begins to sound like a law: That's just me. That's what people are like. That's how life works. An experience has quietly become a rule.

Someone who has been disappointed repeatedly may learn to expect disappointment. Someone who has succeeded often walks into the next challenge with a different kind of confidence. Someone who was taught that mistakes are embarrassing behaves differently from someone who sees them as part of learning. Same world. Different history. Different expectations.

That is why the stories we carry matter. They do more than explain the past; they make suggestions about the future. And expectations rarely sit quietly in the background. They affect how we show up, what we ask, whom we trust, what we attempt and how long we keep going. An old story can begin shaping new reality in very ordinary, practical ways.

If you are convinced you have no chance, you may never send the application. If you think of yourself as uncreative, an idea may be dismissed before anyone else hears it. If you believe you always end up with the wrong people, certain signs will leap out at you while others barely register. Give a story enough years and it can become very good at producing its own evidence.

Of course, this does not mean every limit is imaginary. You may genuinely have no singing career ahead of you. Even with heroic levels of training, an Olympic medal may remain unlikely. Some limits are real. Others were drawn much earlier, then traced over so many times that they now look like walls.

So one question is worth keeping around: Does this story still fit my life, or am I treating an old conclusion as a permanent fact? You do not need to invent a more flattering version of yourself. Sometimes it is enough to stop assuming the old version is final.

Extra or Main Character?



At this point it would be easy to swing to the other extreme and decide that we create reality entirely by ourselves: picture the perfect job, visualise the ideal partner, repeat the right affirmations, believe hard enough - and the universe will sort out the details. Life does not seem to be quite that cooperative. But the opposite claim can be just as convenient: "There's nothing I can do." "That's life." "I'm just not made for it." Somewhere between total control and total helplessness is a very large amount of influence.

Take two people who receive the same kind of rejection on the same day. Both are disappointed. Both may have invested time, hope and effort. One reads the message as confirmation: "Of course. I'm not good enough." They put it aside. The next time an interesting role appears, they hesitate. At the next interview, they hold back a little more. Eventually they stop trying very often. The other person sleeps on it, looks at the application again, asks for feedback, changes something and applies elsewhere.

Neither person changed the rejection. A few months later, however, their lives may already be moving in different directions. That is probably the least glamorous form of shaping reality - and one of the most important. A thought does not alter the world by magic, but it can decide whether a step gets taken. That step creates an experience. The experience may reveal an opportunity. The opportunity may lead to a conversation. And one day the path looks entirely different from where it began. Looking back, we often say, "It just worked out that way." Perhaps it did. We may simply have had a hand in more moments than we noticed.

Say the word manifestation and you can almost watch the room divide. Some people think of spirituality. Others think of visualisation, intention and goal-setting. Others start rolling their eyes before the sentence is finished. We do not need to settle that argument here. On a much more ordinary level, one thing is easy to observe: inner pictures, expectations and beliefs affect behaviour. Someone who can clearly imagine a goal may notice relevant possibilities sooner. Someone who believes they can learn is more likely to keep going. Someone who has already given up internally behaves differently. Thoughts are not magic spells. They are not irrelevant either.

Faith belongs in this conversation too - and not only in a religious sense. Every one of us believes something about what is possible, what people are like, how the world works and what kind of role we get to play in it. Some of those beliefs open doors. Others make the doors almost invisible.

Perhaps our influence reaches further than that. Perhaps consciousness, prayer, spirituality or manifestation operate on levels that are harder to observe and measure. Those questions are big enough for books of their own, long conversations and probably a few lively evenings as well.

For now, a smaller question will do. If you can influence what you notice, the meaning you give an experience, the version of the past you carry with you and the next step you consider possible - how much of your future is truly fixed?

That does not mean everyone can achieve anything. It does mean your reality may be more flexible than it first appears, and that you have a hand in shaping the story you live. You are already on the set. The ques-

tion is whether you move through it as an extra, step forward as the main character or, every now and then, take the director's chair.

That's Just How It Is – Or Is It?

“That’s just how it is” is a sentence worth questioning every now and then. Sometimes it carries years of experience. Sometimes it may even be exactly right. But before a snapshot hardens into a permanent rule, a second look can be useful. The same goes for “That’s just who I am”, “I can’t do that” and “This always happens to me.” They may describe your current picture of the world perfectly well. The more interesting question is whether they should also decide what tomorrow looks like.

You do not need to cross-examine every thought you have. A little curiosity is enough. Is there another explanation? A part of the picture you have missed? A next move you have not considered yet? Sometimes nothing dramatic changes. Sometimes quite a lot does. But once you recognise that your current version of reality is a version rather than the only possible view, a little space opens up.

If your reality is more flexible than you thought, what will you do with that?

Really? Maybe this is where it starts to get interesting.

What Now?

Some people read a book, take one useful idea from it and get on with things. They try something different, change a habit or look at a familiar situation from a new angle. For now, that is all they need.

At other times, knowing is not the problem. We already know what we want to do; we just keep putting off the first step, or we start well and lose momentum a week later. That is when another person can make a difference - someone to think things through with, turn vague intentions into actual decisions and, crucially, ask later what happened to the thing you said you were going to do.

Maybe you want to understand perception, thought and personal reality in more depth. There are other books for that. Perhaps you prefer a structured path, with ideas and exercises that build on one another; that is where a programme can help. Or perhaps there is a specific issue you want to explore with someone who will ask good questions, challenge your perspective and stay with you over time. That is what coaching is for.

Different people need different things. In the end, the important part is not how much we know about change. It is how much of it makes its way into the way we actually live.

You can find out more at www.lifeinion.ch.

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