

A person in a dark jacket stands on a rocky path at the bottom of a deep, dark canyon. The canyon walls are steep and rugged, with a bright light source at the top, creating a dramatic silhouette effect. The overall mood is somber and contemplative.

# The Vertical Catastrophe of Humanity

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English Edition

## About the Author

Born in the mid-20th century and trained as an engineer, the author's professional life has long been shaped by the search for solutions. Over time, the underlying logic of engineering—understanding systems, constraints, and unintended consequences—extended far beyond technical problems and into broader questions of human behavior and social structure.

This debut work emerges from a growing concern about a transformation that is widely felt but rarely examined at the level of perception itself. Approaching the issue from an unusual and deliberately non-disciplinary perspective, the author does not argue from ideology or expertise, but from long-term observation and structural reasoning.

The book is offered as an invitation rather than a conclusion. The author is convinced that the perspective developed here warrants deeper investigation and open discussion, and looks forward to the responses, critiques, and reflections it may provoke.

## **Table of Content**

Introduction — The Vertical Catastrophe of Humanity	3
Chapter 1 — The Horizontal Human	8
Chapter 2 — The Vertical Interface	12
Chapter 3 — The Collapse of the Horizon	17
Chapter 4 — From 16:9 to 9:16	21
Chapter 5 — The Centered I	25
Chapter 6 — The Engine of the Stream	30
Chapter 7 — I Am the Center of My World	35
Chapter 8 — A Generation Without a Horizon	39
Chapter 9 — The End of Shared Reality	43
Chapter 10 — After the Catastrophe	47

## Introduction — The Vertical Catastrophe of Humanity

There was a time when human beings belonged to the horizon.

Not as a poetic image, but as a physical condition of existence.

Our bodies, senses, and instincts evolved in a world that extended outward—left and right—into a continuous field of perception.

Our eyes sit side by side, granting us a wide panorama of vision.

Our ears mirror this arrangement, allowing us to locate sound across space and orient ourselves within an environment shared with others. This horizontal design is no coincidence. It is the result of millions of years of adaptation to a world that demanded openness, awareness, and relations.

The horizon was not merely something we looked at.

It was something we lived within.

In that horizontal world, reality arrived from the sides. Movement in the periphery mattered. What approached from outside the center of vision could be just as important as what stood directly in front of us. Danger, beauty, and other human beings all appeared within the same shared field. To exist means to be aware of what surrounds you. To be aware means to be open. And to be open means to be in relation.

Human perception was never meant to be narrow.

It was meant to be distributed.

And then, without any biological change, something shifted.

The transformation did not begin in our bodies, but in our tools.

We created a device small enough to carry everywhere, light enough to hold effortlessly, and powerful enough to absorb attention completely. A device that does not open the world

outward, but compresses it into a narrow, vertical frame. A device that does not expand perception but redirects it.

With this invention—almost unnoticed at first—the human being entered a new perceptual environment.

A vertical one.

This vertical world is not defined only by the physical orientation of screens, although that detail is revealing. It is defined by a deeper reorganization of attention. The wide horizontal field that once surrounded us collapses into a narrow corridor, roughly the width of a human face. What lies beyond this corridor does not disappear—but it loses relevance.

The periphery grows quiet.

What matters now is what appears directly in front of me.

Spend a few moments observing a familiar scene. A subway platform. A waiting room. A café. Bodies are present. Proximity is shared. And yet attention is elsewhere. Heads tilt downward. Eyes lock onto glowing rectangles. Hundreds of people inhabit the same physical space while mentally occupying entirely different worlds.

This posture has become so normal that it no longer appears remarkable. But if we pause and look carefully, something profound is taking place. The horizontal world—once continuous, demanding, and alive—fades into the background. The subtle movements of others, the micro-expressions, the unspoken signals that once shaped human interaction become secondary, then irrelevant, then invisible.

In their place emerges a vertical stream of content.

A stream that does not surround us but faces us.

The device is often described as a “window to the world,” but this metaphor is misleading. A window opens outward. A screen pulls inward. It delivers fragments of reality in sequence—curated, filtered, and ordered to sustain attention. One image replaces another. One idea pushes out the last. There is no left or right context—only progression. Up or down. Forward or backward.

The world no longer unfolds around us.

It comes to us.

And more precisely, it comes back to us.

Within this vertical frame, experience begins to reorganize itself. The shared horizon recedes, and in its place a center emerges.

The self.

What appears on the screen is not the world in its fullness, but a personalized reflection shaped by preferences, reactions, and past behavior. Over time, perception bends inward. What happens beyond the frame becomes less important than what resonates with me.

The horizontal world was a space of relations.

The vertical world becomes a system of reflections.

This shift does not merely change how we consume information. It reshapes how we think, how we feel, and how we relate to one another. When perception narrows, attention follows. When attention narrows, concern narrows with it. The other—once encountered as a presence within a shared field—becomes distant, abstract, and optional.

Consider a simple moment. Two people sit across from each other in conversation. The dialogue flows, pauses, resumes. Then a phone vibrates. A glance downward. Attention shifts. The person

in front of you is still there, but something essential has been interrupted. When the gaze returns, continuity has been broken. Presence resumes, but not fully.

Multiply this moment across millions of interactions, across years of daily life.

What emerges is not a small behavioral change.

It is a transformation of how human connection is experienced.

Paradoxically, this occurs in an age of unprecedented connectivity. We message constantly. We share continuously. We remain reachable at all times. And yet many report a growing sense of isolation, fragmentation, and fatigue. Never before have we been so connected—and never before has shared presence felt so fragile.

The vertical world does not isolate us by removing others.

It isolates us by reorganizing how we perceive them.

They appear not as co-inhabitants of a shared reality, but as elements within a stream—selectable, replaceable, interruptible.

This book does not argue that technology is evil. Nor does it call for a return to a pre-digital past. Its concern is structural.

What happens when a species evolved for horizontal awareness reorganizes its perception around a vertical system optimized for fixation?

What happens when the horizon—once the silent architecture of human experience—loses its primacy?

The signs are already visible. Attention becomes shorter and more reactive. Silence grows uncomfortable. Stillness feels unnatural.

Identity shifts toward performance and comparison. Shared reality fragments into parallel streams that rarely intersect.

Individually, these changes may seem manageable.

Collectively, they point toward something deeper.

A transformation not only of behavior, but of perception itself.

And if perception changes, everything changes with it.

The question this book asks is not whether technology influences us. That is beyond doubt. The question is whether a vertical world—no matter how efficient, profitable, or convenient—can coexist with a human design shaped by openness, relation, and shared presence.

If it cannot, then we are not merely living through a technological transition.

We are approaching a civilizational turning point.

A catastrophe not defined by sudden collapse, but by gradual enclosure.

Not loud, but normalized.

Not imposed, but preferred.

The catastrophe of the vertical world is not that we stop seeing.

It is that we stop seeing together.

And once the horizon disappears, we may not even notice what we have lost—because the very structure that allowed us to notice it is gone.

## Chapter 1 — The Horizontal Human

Before the screen, before the city, before even the first written symbol, there was a world that extended sideways. Not upward. Not downward. Sideways.

Human perception did not evolve in a tunnel. It emerged in landscapes—forests, plains, coastlines—environments where survival depended not only on what appeared directly ahead, but on what moved at the edges of awareness. The earliest humans did not stare at a single point. They scanned. They moved through space not as observers of isolated objects, but as participants in a continuous field.

That field was wide—wider, in fact, than we tend to realize today. If you stand still and fix your gaze on a single object, what you consciously see is only a small fragment of your total visual capacity. Beyond that narrow center lies something far more expansive: a horizontal field of vision stretching close to two hundred degrees from side to side. Most of what enters this field never becomes sharp or detailed—but that was never its purpose. Its purpose was awareness.

Peripheral vision does not excel at detail. It excels at detection—of movement, of change, of potential threat. Long before a human consciously recognized what they were seeing, something at the edge of vision would already trigger attention: a shift in the grass, a shadow breaking the rhythm of the landscape, a presence that did not belong. To perceive the world in this way meant something profound. You were never alone in your perception. The world was always arriving from the sides.

This horizontal awareness was not merely a visual feature. It shaped cognition itself. Human perception is layered. Narrow, high-resolution focus is supported by a far broader,

lower-resolution field. The sharp center of vision—the part that allows you to read these words—covers only a tiny fraction of what the eyes can detect. Everything else exists as context, and context is what makes meaning possible. Without context, objects lose their place. Movement loses direction. Events lose significance. The brain continuously integrates central and peripheral signals, stitching together a world that feels cohesive rather than fragmented. This integration happens so naturally that we rarely notice it—until it begins to fade.

There is another detail, subtle but telling. Humans are neither purely predators nor purely prey. Our visual system carries traits of both. Forward-facing eyes enable precise focus and depth perception, while a wide field of view supports environmental awareness. This dual structure reflects something essential about human life. We are not designed for fixation alone. We are designed for balance—to focus and remain open, to act and remain aware, to engage what is in front of us while sensing what lies beyond it. This balance made social life possible.

Imagine a small group of humans moving together through open terrain. They do not walk in silence. They speak, gesture, react. But much of their coordination does not rely on words. It depends on shared perception. Each individual senses not only the environment, but the presence of others within it. A glance to the side, a shift in pace, a subtle change in posture—these are registered instantly, often without conscious effort. We do not perceive others only when we look directly at them. We perceive them continuously, at the edge of vision and at the edge of awareness. This creates a shared field of reality: a space in which multiple individuals are embedded at the same time, each aware not only of themselves, but of one another's presence within the same unfolding environment. This is where trust begins—not as an abstract value, but as a perceptual experience, the sense that

others are there, that they move with you, that they respond, that you are not the center of the field, but part of it.

Even today, traces of this ancient structure remain visible. Think of walking through a busy street without consciously looking at every person around you. You still sense movement, avoid collisions, adjust direction. Or consider sitting in a room where someone enters quietly. Often, before turning your head, you already know that something has changed. This is horizontal awareness still at work—silent, efficient, unnoticed.

And yet, it is fragile, because it depends on openness. The horizontal field functions only when attention remains distributed, when perception is allowed to extend beyond a single point. Collapse that field and a different mode of experience takes over—a narrower one, a more controlled one, a more confined one. At first glance, this may seem like improvement. Central focus is powerful. It enables precision, analysis, and complex problem-solving. It allows reading, tool-making, and planning. But it was never meant to stand alone.

Separated from its horizontal foundation, focus becomes isolation. Precision becomes tunnel vision. Attention becomes capture. In medicine, there is a condition known as tunnel vision, in which the peripheral field gradually disappears, leaving only a narrow central strip. Individuals affected by it can still see, but they no longer experience the world as a wide, connected space. Reality becomes a series of isolated fragments, appearing only when directly attended to. Navigation becomes difficult. Awareness diminishes. The world feels altered—not because it has changed, but because of the structure of perception has.

What was once a rare pathology may now be becoming something else—not through illness, but through habit. We are living in a moment where the natural balance of human perception is being

reconfigured, not by evolution, but by design. Tools that demand continuous fixation, interfaces that reward narrow attention, systems that capture and hold the gaze within a confined visual channel. Our biology remains horizontal. Our behavior is gradually becoming something else—quietly, systematically.

The human being did not evolve to live inside a single column of attention. They evolved to stand within a field—to sense what approaches, to perceive what surrounds them, to remain connected not only through thought, but through perception itself. The question, then, is not whether we are still capable of this form of awareness. We are. The question is whether we are still using it, or whether, step by step and moment by moment, we are allowing a narrower system to take its place.

Because if the horizontal field collapses, we may not notice immediately. We will still see. We will still think. We will still act. But the world will no longer arrive from the sides. And when that happens, something quietly disappears—not only from perception, but from what it means to share a world at all.

## Chapter 2 — The Vertical Interface

The transformation did not begin with an idea.

It began with an object.

Small enough to fit in the hand. Light enough to carry everywhere.  
Powerful enough to absorb attention completely.

At first, it appeared as a tool—a means of communication, a source of information, a convenience. Something external. Something optional. Something we could pick up and put down at will.

But tools are never neutral. They shape not only what we do. They shape how we perceive.

Hold your phone in your hand for a moment. Not to use it—just to observe it.

Notice how naturally your body adjusts. The head tilts forward. The shoulders draw inward. The eyes lock into a downward angle, narrowing their focus. The world that once extended around you begins to fade, not because it disappears, but because it is no longer attended to.

This posture has become so common that it barely registers. Entire populations now move through daily life inclined toward their devices, their gazes absorbed, their bodies subtly reconfigured.

Medical research has begun to document the physical consequences: strain on the neck and spine, altered alignment, accumulated fatigue. But the physical effects are only the surface. Beneath them lies a deeper transformation.

The device does not merely demand a downward gaze. It demands a concentrated one.

Unlike the horizontal world, which invites distributed awareness, the screen requires fixation. It presents a bounded frame in which only certain elements exist at any given time. Everything outside that frame—everything to the left and right of your physical environment—loses relevance.

Attention is drawn inward and held there.

Consider how you navigate a smartphone interface. You do not explore it spatially, as you would a room or a landscape. You scroll. Up. Down.

Content appears in sequence, not in relation. One item replaces another, each occupying the same central position, each demanding full focus before being displaced. There is no meaningful periphery—only progression.

A vertical stream.

Spend a few minutes observing people in a public space. A train. An airport. A waiting area.

Individuals sit or stand physically close, yet perceptually isolated. Each person holds a device. Each gaze is directed into a private channel of information. The surrounding environment becomes a backdrop—present, but functionally irrelevant.

Interaction, when it occurs, is often punctuated by interruption. A conversation begins. A notification appears. Attention shifts. The person in front of you is replaced, momentarily, by something happening elsewhere.

This behavior has been studied repeatedly. When one person diverts attention to a phone during a social interaction—a phenomenon sometimes called *phubbing*—both participants report lower connection, reduced engagement, and diminished satisfaction.

What is striking is not that this happens, but that it is widely known, widely experienced, and yet widely repeated. At some level, we understand that this diminishes presence. And yet, we continue.

Part of the reason lies in the design of the interface itself.

The vertical stream is not passive. It is adaptive.

Every scroll, every pause, every moment of attention is registered, analyzed, and fed back into the system. Content is not presented randomly, but selectively. What holds attention is repeated. What triggers engagement is amplified.

Over time, the stream becomes personalized. And personalization creates a powerful illusion. It feels as though the world is becoming more relevant, more aligned, more responsive.

But at the same time, the field of perception narrows.

Research increasingly suggests that environments characterized by rapid, fragmented content—particularly social media—are associated with reduced ability to sustain attention over longer periods. The mind adapts to constant stimulation, shifting away from depth toward immediacy.

This is not a failure of discipline. It is adaptation. The brain does what it has always done: it adjusts to the structure of the environment it inhabits.

And the environment of the vertical interface has a very specific structure. It is immediately. It is fragmented. It is centered.

Now consider what happens over time. Not in a single moment of use, but across months, years, even decades.

A person wakes and reaches for the phone. Before encountering the physical world, they encounter a curated stream. During the

day, moments of transition—waiting, walking, sitting—are filled with brief returns to the same channel. In the evening, attention settles once more into the vertical flow before sleep.

At no point is there a deliberate intention to withdraw from the world. And yet, piece by piece, attention is reallocated. From the horizontal to the vertical. From the surrounding environment to the central frame.

There is another, quieter effect. When attention is continuously pulled into a device, time itself begins to change—not objectively, but experientially. Moments compress. Transitions disappear. The space between events, once filled with observation or reflection, becomes occupied.

The mind is rarely left alone with the world. Or with itself.

This has consequences that extend beyond attention. Extensive smartphone use has been associated with increased feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and depression. At the same time, large-scale studies suggest a rise in measurable social isolation over recent decades, particularly alongside the widespread adoption of mobile digital technologies.

These relationships are complex. They are not linear. But the pattern is difficult to ignore.

What emerges is not simply a new habit. It is a new environment.

An environment in which human perception is repeatedly guided, shaped, and narrowed along a vertical axis. An environment in which the self becomes the primary point of interaction—not because it is chosen, but because it is continuously reinforced.

In the horizontal world, attention moves outward. In the vertical interface, attention returns inward. Again, and again.

The device does not isolate us by removing others. It isolates us by reorganizing how we perceive them. They appear not as presences within a shared space, but as content within a stream—selectable, replaceable, interruptible.

This is the subtle shift. Not from connection to disconnection. But from shared presence to individualized perception.

And once this shift takes hold, something else begins to emerge—a new structure of experience. One that no longer depends on the world unfolding around us, but on the world being continuously delivered to us.

Human beings no longer stand within a field.

They stand before a surface.

### Chapter 3 — The Collapse of the Horizon

At first, nothing dramatic happens. There are no alarms, no breaking point, no single moment when the world announces that something essential has changed. The transformation is quieter than that—so quiet, in fact, that it often feels like nothing more than modern life: efficient, connected, manageable.

And yet, if you watch carefully, you can see the horizon receding.

Not the physical horizon. Mountains still sit in the distance; streets still extend left and right. What recedes is the perceptual horizon—the lived sense that reality is something we occupy together, something shared, something larger than the self. This horizon does not disappear all at once. It collapses in stages. It begins as convenience. Then becomes habit. Then becomes atmosphere. And once it becomes atmosphere, it becomes invisible—like air.

The horizontal world has a peculiar moral quality: it pulls us outward. Not toward abstract goodness, but toward awareness. When you live within a wide field of perception, the world interrupts you. People cross your path. Faces appear. Movement in the periphery demands attention. Even silence is inhabited by the presence of others. In such a world, you are rarely alone in your perception. Reality insists on being shared.

The vertical interface changes the geometry of interruption. In the vertical stream, the world does not interrupt you—you interrupt the world. You can look up, of course. You can return to the room, the street, the conversation. But you return as one returns from elsewhere. And what makes the vertical interface uniquely powerful is that it is always available as an alternative reality—instantly accessible, endlessly renewable, and carefully shaped to feel more compelling than the unedited world around you. The

horizon collapses not because it vanishes, but because it becomes optional.

In a horizontal world, presence is something you inhabit. In a vertical world, presence becomes something you perform. The difference is subtle, but decisive. When experience is organized around a stream of curated fragments—images, opinions, reactions—the self begins to behave as if it is being watched even when no one is watching. You anticipate how you will appear. You imagine the angle, the framing, the response. You adjust. You refine. You optimize. This is not vanity in the simple sense. It is adaptation to an environment in which attention functions as currency and visibility becomes proof of existence. The vertical interface turns identity into an ongoing project—a continuous edit, never finished, because the stream never ends. As the self becomes more central, the world becomes less shared.

A family sits at a table. There is food, conversation, the small rhythms of domestic life. Phones rest beside plates, silent and harmless, like neutral objects. Then one screen lights up. A glance—almost reflexive. Then another screen lights up. Another glance. No one intends to leave the room, and yet the room begins to empty. Because the most powerful effect of the phone is not that it steals time. It steals continuity. The thread of shared attention is fragile. Once broken, it rarely returns with the same strength. Conversation becomes patchwork. Presence becomes intermittent. The table remains full of bodies, but the space of mutual perception—the real room—grows thin. The remarkable thing is not that this happens. It is how normal it has become. We are living through the normalization of absence.

A sustained thought requires a certain internal landscape: uninterrupted time, stable attention, and a mind that can remain with one thing long enough for depth to appear. The vertical stream is not designed for depth. It is designed for continuation.

One more item. One more swipe. One more moment of novelty. The content itself may not be shallow—but the structure is. It keeps consciousness moving rather than settling. And when attention is trained to move constantly, the mind begins to resist stillness. This is where the collapse of the horizon becomes psychological, because sustained attention is not merely a cognitive skill. It is an existential one. It determines whether we can read deeply, listen fully, perceive others clearly, or stay with our own experience without escaping into stimulation.

When the vertical stream is interrupted, something revealing happens. The horizontal world returns—not as ideology, but as behavior. People look around. Conversations are lengthened. Bodies relax. Time thickens again.

The vertical interface promises connection but often delivers a strange substitute: contact without presence. Over time, contact without presence produces a peculiar condition—being surrounded, yet unseen. Society can become digitally saturated while becoming socially thinner. We are never fully alone, yet increasingly isolated.

In the horizontal world, the self is decentered by necessity. You are one body among others, moving through a shared field. In the vertical world, experience repeatedly returns to a single reference point. What do I like? What do I feel? What do I agree with? What does this say about me? The stream is personalized; therefore, reality becomes personalized. And when reality is personalized, it becomes difficult to inhabit a common world.

This is the deeper danger—not distraction, not even loneliness, but fragmentation. A society that cannot maintain shared attention struggles to maintain shared meaning. Without shared meaning, institutions weaken. Without institutions, trust erodes.

The collapse of the horizon is not only a psychological event. It is a civilizational one.

When this book speaks of catastrophe, it does not mean a meteor. It means something slower. A catastrophe that arrives without noise, through normalization. A catastrophe that looks like progress. A catastrophe that allows people to keep working, shopping, scrolling, posting—while the shared world quietly dissolves behind the screen. Perhaps the most disturbing possibility is this: that the vertical interface does not reshape humanity by force, but by preference. And once reshaped, we may not even miss what we lost—because we will no longer have the perceptual structure required to notice it.

## Chapter 4 — From 16:9 to 9:16

The transformation of human attention did not begin with content. It began with format.

Long before algorithms, feeds, or platforms reshaped perception, the geometry of the screen quietly changed the way reality was encountered. The shift from horizontal to vertical was not merely technical. It was perceptual. And once perception changed, everything else followed.

For much of the last century, moving images arrived in a horizontal frame. Cinema screens were wide. Television screens followed. The world appeared stretched left and right, mirroring the way human perception naturally unfolds. Even when television entertained, distracted, or pacified, it preserved a crucial distance. The screen was over there. The viewer was here. Attention flowed outward.

Television gathered people. Families sat together. Rooms oriented themselves toward a shared object. Even when content was trivial, the experience remained collective. Laughter, boredom, disagreement, and silence all unfolded within the same space. The screen did not compete with the world. It interrupted it temporarily.

The widescreen format mattered more than we realized. It preserved the horizon. Peripheral vision remained active. Sound arrived from multiple directions. The viewer's body stayed oriented toward the room as much as toward the screen. Watching was an activity, not an enclosure. Television occupied time. It did not reorganize perception.

The digital age changed this arrangement. Not suddenly. Not aggressively. But decisively.

The screen rotated. What was once horizontal became vertical. The format narrowed. The frame tightened. Distance collapsed. Content no longer appeared at the edge of experience. It moved directly into the center. The world did not stretch outward. It stacked itself.

The vertical screen does not invite observation. It demands attention. It aligns perfectly with the upright human body and the downward gaze. It places content where the eyes naturally fall. It reduces the need to orient, to scan, to move attention across space. The format itself trains fixation.

In the horizontal frame, the viewer remains a witness. In the vertical frame, the viewer becomes a participant. Scrolling replaces watching. Touch replaces distance. The boundary between observer and content dissolves. What appears is not simply seen—it is engaged, judged, reacted to. The vertical format does not show the world. It inserts itself into it.

This is where the shift becomes profound. The horizontal screen allowed distraction. The vertical screen enables steering.

The vertical frame is not neutral. It compresses experience into a narrow corridor, excluding the periphery almost entirely. Left and right lose significance. What matters is what appearing next. Attention moves up and down, not outward. The horizon collapses into sequence. Reality becomes a queue.

This change aligns with a deeper transformation. Human anatomy is fundamentally horizontal. Two eyes placed side by side create wide visual fields. Two ears oriented laterally allow spatial hearing. Two hands operate across a plane. Balance, movement, and orientation evolved for environments that unfold across space, not along a single axis. We are symmetrical, lateral beings. The vertical frame asks us to behave otherwise.

Prolonged vertical fixation is not what human perception evolved for. It narrows awareness. It suppresses peripheral signals. It trains attention to remain centered and static. Over time, the body adapts. The head tilts. The shoulders fold. The gaze drops. Posture follows format. Perception follows posture.

The widescreen never demanded this adaptation. The vertical screen does. And because the adaptation happens gradually, it rarely feels intrusive. It feels natural. Efficient. Modern. But naturalness does not imply compatibility.

Another difference matters even more. The horizontal screen remained external. The vertical screen is intimate.

Television addressed groups. The vertical screen addresses individuals. It speaks directly. Privately. Persistently. Content is no longer broadcast. It is delivered. Not to a room, but to a person. Not occasionally, but continuously. The screen does not wait. It follows.

This intimacy transforms the role of attention. Watching television meant giving time. Using the vertical screen means giving presence. Eyes, hands, posture, and emotion are all involved. The body is no longer loosely connected to content. It is integrated into the interaction. The viewer is no longer outside the frame. They are inside it.

Once content becomes vertical, personalization becomes inevitable. The narrow frame cannot sustain generality. It demands relevance. What appears must feel connected to the individual, or attention breaks. The system learns quickly. It adapts. It filters. The vertical format does not tolerate the impersonal. It rewards the personal.

This is why the shift from 16:9 to 9:16 is not cosmetic. It is structural. It transforms entertainment into immersion,

information into influence, and attention into a resource that can be guided, shaped, and retained. The format does not merely display content. It organizes behavior.

The last century's media distracted. This century's media directs.

None of this requires malicious intent. The vertical format simply aligns too well with human reflexes—curiosity, anticipation, social comparison, emotional resonance. What holds attention survives. What does not, fades away. The frame selects before content ever speaks.

Once the vertical format dominates, everything else adapts to it. Language shortens. Emotion intensifies. Context disappears. Speed increases. The world reorganizes itself around what fits the frame. The horizon no longer structures experience. The stream does.

This is why the vertical world feels different from all media before it. Not because it lies. Not because it manipulates overtly. But because it changes how reality arrives. The world no longer surrounds us. It faces us.

This chapter does not argue that the horizontal past was better. It argues that it was different. It preserved distance, friction, and shared orientation by default. The vertical world removes those conditions unless they are actively protected. And what is not protected slowly disappears.

The next chapter turns from format to consequence. From how attention is framed to how it is held. From geometry to mechanism. From the vertical screen to the engine that runs behind it.

## Chapter 5 — The Centered I

The collapse of the horizon does not leave a void. Something moves into its place.

The self.

When the shared field of perception weakens, experience does not disappear. It reorganizes. Attention, no longer distributed across a common world, returns inward again and again. What was once shaped primarily by environment, presence, and relation begins to orbit a single axis. The self becomes the reference point of experience—not yet as identity, not yet as ideology, but as orientation.

In a horizontal world, attention is drawn outward. It is interrupted by movement, sound, and the unpredictable presence of others. Meaning often arrives uninvited. The world resists preference. In a vertical environment, this direction reverses. Attention no longer flows primarily toward the world. It flows back toward the self. How does this relate to me? Does this interest me? Does this reflect me? The world no longer confronts the self. The self becomes the gateway through which the world must pass.

This shift feels empowering. Personalization feels like freedom. Relevance feels like clarity. Choice feels like control. Experience appears tailored, responsive, aligned. And in an important sense, it is. The centered self reduces complexity. It filters noise. It creates coherence in an environment that would otherwise feel overwhelming.

As experience becomes self-referential, something subtle disappears: the space between. The horizontal world is rich in in-between moments—shared silence, mutual waiting, unscripted pauses. These moments are not empty. They are where coordination happens without instruction, where presence

is felt without being named. The vertical world compresses these spaces. Every pause becomes an opportunity for input. Every silence becomes something to fill. Experience contracts. Everything happens to me, for me, through me.

At this stage, the consequences are not yet negative. The self feels more present, more focused, more intentional. Orientation feels internal rather than imposed. This is why the shift is rarely questioned. It appears modern, adaptive, even healthy.

An inner commentary begins to accompany experience. One observes oneself observing. Reactions are noted. Preferences are tracked. Life is not only lived; it is monitored. This commentary feels reflective rather than intrusive. It suggests awareness rather than anxiety.

The self has not yet been asked to perform. It is simply centered.

But centering is not a stable endpoint.

It is a position.

And positions invite reinforcement.

Which brings us to the next stage of the transformation.

### **Interlude — Life Inside the Vertical Day**

The day does not begin with intention. It begins with orientation.

Before the body has fully arrived in the world, attention is already elsewhere. A hand reaches for the device not because something urgent has happened, but because something might. A message. A signal. A fragment of relevance waiting to be received. The day opens vertically.

The first minutes are quiet, but not empty. Information arrives before perception has widened. The room is still there—walls, light, familiar objects—but they register weakly. What matters first is what appears on the screen, not because it is important, but because it is immediate. The centered “I” wakes up before the world does.

Morning unfolds as a sequence of transitions. Getting ready. Moving through space. Waiting. These moments once belonged to the horizontal world—pauses filled with awareness, drifting thought, mild anticipation. Now they are colonized gently, almost politely. A glance while brushing teeth. A scroll while waiting for coffee. A check before stepping outside. None of these moments feel decisive. That is precisely why they matter.

On the street, bodies move past one another. The city functions. Traffic flows. People navigate intersections with practiced precision. Yet attention does not rest here. The environment is negotiated efficiently, but it is not inhabited. The world becomes something to get through. Presence is postponed.

In transit, the vertical world takes fuller possession. Heads tilt downward in near unison. Each person enters a private corridor of relevance. The shared journey dissolves into parallel streams. Physical proximity increases while perceptual distance grows. No one intends to withdraw. Withdrawal simply happens.

Work begins. Screens multiply. Tasks fragment. Communication accelerates. Attention jumps from one window to another, from one message to the next. Productivity is measured not by depth, but by responsiveness. What matters is not how long something takes, but how quickly one reacts. The centered “I” adapts easily. This environment rewards it.

There are moments of interruption. A colleague speaks. A question is asked. A conversation begins. Attention lifts briefly from the vertical channel and touches the shared space. For a moment, the horizontal world reappears. Then a notification arrives. The interruption is not dramatic. It is seamless.

By midday, attention feels dispersed—not exhausted, exactly, but thin. Nothing has gone wrong. The day is progressing as expected. Yet something subtle has shifted. It becomes harder to stay with one thing. Focus feels like effort rather than default. The mind looks for the next stimulus not out of boredom, but out of habit.

Lunch is eaten quickly, sometimes alone, sometimes with others. Even when shared, the meal is punctuated by returning to the stream. A pause in conversation becomes an opening. A moment of silence is filled. Presence is negotiated in fragments. No one objects. This is how things are done now.

The afternoon continues in layers of attention. Work overlays communication. Communication overlays monitoring. Monitoring overlays anticipation. The centered “I” remains active, constantly adjusting, evaluating, responding. What matters is not whether this feels good or bad. It feels normal.

Later, there is movement again. Walking. Commuting. Transitioning from one role to another. These are moments where the horizontal world could return, where perception might widen, where the body might reenter space fully. Instead, attention stays tethered. The device accompanies every step.

By evening, fatigue appears—not physical, but perceptual. The day was full, yet strangely incomplete. Many things happened. Few were fully inhabited. The sense of “having been somewhere” is weak.

At home, screens remain present. Entertainment replaces information, but the structure is the same. Content arrives in sequence. Choice feels abundant. Time passes without resistance. This is not coercion. It is ease.

Occasionally, a moment of discomfort surfaces. A restlessness. A vague sense that something is missing. The feeling is quickly resolved. Another scroll. Another episode. Another interaction. The day softens into continuation.

Before sleep, there is one last check—not because something is expected, but because something might have happened. The centered “I” does not want to miss relevance.

The day ends as it began. Not with reflection, but with reception.

Nothing about this day is extreme. There is no crisis here. No tragedy. No visible harm. This is precisely why it matters.

Life inside the vertical day does not feel imposed. It feels efficient. Functional. Adapted. But beneath this adaptation, something has quietly changed. The world no longer gathers itself around shared moments. It arrives in pieces, and each piece is addressed to me.

This is the condition in which the centered “I” becomes stable—not because it is chosen, but because it is practiced. Again, and again. Day after day.

## Chapter 6 — The Engine of the Stream

The vertical world does not simply exist. It is built to learn.

At first, this learning is almost invisible. The stream appears as a sequence of images, posts, short videos, messages arriving one after another. It feels passive, like water flowing downhill—something you watch, something you consume. But the stream is not passive. It is responsive. And over time, it becomes something else entirely: an engine.

Scroll for a few minutes. Pause on something that catches your attention. Scroll again. What feels like freedom—the ability to stop, to look, to move on—is also information. Every hesitation becomes a signal. Every return becomes data. The system does not need you to explain what you want. It observes what holds you, what releases you, what brings you back.

Gradually, almost imperceptibly, the stream begins to change. More of what you linger on appears. Less of what you ignore returns. Transitions smooth out. Timing improves. It becomes easier to stay and harder to leave. At first glance, nothing seems wrong. But something essential has already shifted. The stream is no longer something you use. It is something that adapts to you.

In a horizontal world, feedback comes from reality. You act. Something happens. You adjust. The loop is slow, resistant, and often frustrating. Other people respond unpredictably. Consequences are delayed. Meaning unfolds over time. The vertical stream removes much of this resistance. You react, the system adjusts, and you react again—faster, smoother, more precise. There is no meaningful delay, no friction, no distance between action and response. Over time, this produces a closed loop. And closed loops change behavior.

Human brains evolved to learn through reward. When an action leads to a positive outcome, the nervous system marks it as relevant. This process is mediated by dopamine—not as a chemical of pleasure, but as a signal of significance. Dopamine rises not when we are satisfied, but when something unexpected *might* matter. Uncertainty is key. When rewards are predictable, interest fades. When rewards are variable—sometimes present, sometimes absent—attention intensifies. The brain stays alert, waiting for the next signal that could be important.

This mechanism evolved for survival in uncertain environments.

The vertical stream recreates it continuously.

Open your phone without clear intention. Just a moment of absence, a gap in time. Content appears. You scroll once. Twice. Perhaps something resonates. Perhaps nothing does. Either way, the possibility remains that the next item will matter, that it will surprise you, that it will reward you. So you continue. This cycle repeats throughout the day—not dramatically, not consciously, but automatically. What is often called addiction is, in reality, learned persistence in an environment built around variable reward. The system does not overpower the human nervous system. It cooperates with it.

Up to this point, the vertical world could still appear as an unfortunate side effect of technology—an unintended consequence of innovation moving faster than reflection.

It is not.

The vertical world persists because it is **extraordinarily profitable**.

Modern digital systems do not primarily sell products to users. They sell users—to advertisers, to data markets, to influence

economies—in the form of attention. Time spent. Frequency of return. Emotional engagement. Predictability of behavior. These are not byproducts. They are the assets.

Once attention becomes the source of value, the system reorganizes itself accordingly.

Anything that keeps attention active is rewarded. Anything that releases attention is penalized. Depth is slow. Silence is unproductive. Orientation does not scale. But engagement does.

This is why the vertical system narrows perception. Not because someone decided humans should live this way, but because **narrowed attention is easier to hold, measure, and monetize**. A wide horizon allows distraction. A centered gaze enables capture.

Within this economic logic, the user cannot be the customer. If the user were the customer, the system would optimize wellbeing, understanding, and long-term coherence. But those qualities do not maximize revenue. So, the user becomes the product—not metaphorically, but functionally. Human attention itself becomes the target.

This does not require malicious intent. It requires success.

The people who design, fund, and manage these systems do not need to be indifferent to human flourishing. They only need to operate within an incentive structure where growth, retention, and engagement define survival. If a design increases attention capture, it persists. If it reduces it, it disappears. The system selects its own behavior.

This is why appeals to moderation, responsibility, or ethics alone cannot change the outcome. As long as profit depends on keeping attention vertical, continuous, and centered, the system will drift

in that direction—regardless of personal values. This is not a moral failure. It is an incentive failure.

The stream does not aim to satisfy you. Satisfaction ends loops. Instead, it maintains anticipation. Anticipation keeps attention active. The next item might matter. The next image might resonate. The next moment might reward you. This logic is simple, efficient, and extraordinarily effective.

Once continuation becomes the central goal, experience itself begins to change. Content grows shorter. Transitions grow faster. Intensity increases. Complexity fades. Anything that requires time, patience, or integration becomes less competitive. Depth is not forbidden. It is simply inefficient. A long argument becomes a clip. A process becomes a highlight. A lived Moment becomes an image. The world is no longer something you enter. It is something that passes in front of you.

Over time, the stream learns not only what holds attention, but how it holds it. Emotional signals intensify. Contrast sharpens. Comparison becomes more frequent. What provokes reaction spreads more reliably than what encourages understanding. This is not because the system prefers conflict. It is because conflict keeps attention active. Negative emotion does not push people away. It anchors them.

This explains why escape feels difficult. Many people sense that something is wrong. They try to reduce usage. They take breaks. They uninstall applications. And often, they return. This return is interpreted as weakness—a lack of discipline, a personal failure. But this interpretation misunderstands the environment. The vertical world is not encountered occasionally. It is ambient. It fills transitions, occupies silence, and inserts itself into moments that were once empty. To leave it entirely would require withdrawing not only from technology, but from a way of organizing daily life.

Each moment spent in the stream is not merely time consumed. It is orientation shifted. Attention that might have moved outward—toward environment, toward others, toward shared presence—is redirected inward toward a narrow channel. This redirection happens gradually, not as loss, but as replacement. The horizontal world does not disappear. It recedes.

There is no hidden villain in this process. No conspiracy is required. A system optimized around attention will always drift toward what holds attention most reliably—not what deepens understanding, not what supports long-term well-being, not what sustains shared reality. The outcome is not surprising. It is inevitable.

At a certain point, preference and exposure become inseparable. You see what engages you. You engage with what you see. The loop reinforces itself. Reality does not vanish. It fragments.

The power of the vertical world lies in its invisibility. There are no walls. No commands. No explicit constraints. Only flow. The structure remains unseen. Its effects do not.

This book is not asking whether technology is powerful. That is obvious. It is asking whether a business model built on attention extraction can coexist with a form of life whose well-being depends on openness, relation, and shared reality.

Because once attention is captured and stored, something else follows.

The Self moves inward. Identity reorganizes. Comparison intensifies. The horizon narrows.

Which brings us to the next consequence: the centralized self.

## Chapter 7 — I Am the Center of My World

The final shift does not begin inside the individual.

It begins outside.

Once the self has moved to the center of experience, the vertical world does something decisive: it confirms that position—continuously and systematically.

Vertical systems are built to reward visibility, reaction, and expression. Every post, every image, every opinion that triggers engagement is amplified. Attention returns as feedback. Feedback returns as validation. Small signals accumulate—likes, comments, views, rankings—each trivial on its own, powerful in repetition.

The message is simple and constant: you matter, you are seen, you are relevant.

This message is not delivered once. It is delivered thousands of times, beneath conscious awareness. Over time, the self does not merely feel present. It feels important.

This is not narcissism in the classical sense. It is conditioning.

The reward structure teaches the individual that attention flows toward them, reacts to them, organizes around them. Expression is met with affirmation. Presence is met with response. The world appears responsive, even compliant. The self learns a quiet lesson: I am central because the world keeps responding to me.

At this point, centering completes itself. The self no longer orients within the world. The world is expected to orient around the self.

This is where overestimation emerges—not as arrogance, but as normalization. The vertical world does not present the ordinary, the incomplete, or the contextual. It presents fragments: wealth

without process, beauty without effort, happiness without duration. These fragments are not framed as exceptions. They are ambient. They appear everywhere, repeatedly.

Gradually, the self recalibrates. The question shifts from *Is this real?* to something more dangerous: *Why is this not my reality?* The self does not conclude that these lives are rare. It concludes that they are normal—and therefore deserved.

Once this expectation settles, disappointment becomes inevitable.

The body does not match the images.  
The income does not match the narratives.  
Relationships do not match the highlights.  
Life does not deliver what the system has implied.

And because the self has been taught that it is central, this disappointment has only one destination.

Inward.

Failure is no longer experienced as limitation or circumstance. It is experienced as personal deficiency. If others appear successful, admired, fulfilled—and I am not—then something must be wrong with me.

The system never states this explicitly. It doesn't need to.

Validation inflates expectation. Expectation fuels comparison. Comparison produces inadequacy. Inadequacy generates shame. Shame leads either to withdrawal or to compulsive self-optimization. In both cases, dependence deepens. The loop closes.

Some respond by trying harder. They refine their image. Optimize their bodies, careers, identities. They pursue recognition with

greater intensity, believing that alignment will finally bring satisfaction.

But the standard is not fixed.

The vertical world cannot allow satisfaction to stabilize. Stable satisfaction ends engagement. The bar moves. The ideal shifts. What once felt extraordinary becomes insufficient. Arrival is never permitted.

Others respond by disengaging. They grow resentful, cynical, or numb. But this, too, is not escape. It is another form of centering—the self defining itself against a world it believes has failed it.

Whether through aspiration or rejection, the self remains the axis.

This is why the outcome is so often depression. Not sadness. Not grief. Depression—a state in which effort feels futile, comparison feels exhausting, and meaning feels thin. Not because nothing matters, but because the self has been burdened with being the measure of everything.

No individual can sustain that role.

In a horizontal world, disappointment was distributed. Limits were shared. Failure was contextual. Meaning was negotiated. In the vertical world, disappointment collapses inward. The self absorbs what the world can no longer hold.

This is the completed form of centering. Not empowerment. Not autonomy. But enclosure. The self becomes the center—and then becomes trapped inside that position.

The tragedy is not that people desire too much. It is that they are taught, continuously and invisibly, to expect lives that were never real to begin with. And when those lives fail to appear, the system offers no explanation.

Only more images.

At this point, the transformation is no longer individual. It becomes social. Because a society composed of selves that experience disappointment as personal failure—rather than structural distortion—cannot easily rebuild shared meaning.

Which leads directly to the next collapse.

Shared reality itself.

## Chapter 8 — A Generation Without a Horizon

Every generation enters the world through the conditions it is given. Not by choice. Not by design. By inheritance. The world into which one is born does not appear as an option. It appears as reality.

For previous generations, reality was horizontal by default. Childhood unfolded in physical space, among other bodies, within environments that resisted preference. Pain was often visible. Consequences were immediate. Limits were encountered early and frequently—through play, conflict, failure, and reconciliation. This world was not gentle, but it was legible.

Reality could be harsh, sometimes unfair, often uncomfortable. Yet its rules were evident. What you did had consequences. What you said had effects. What you broke could not be undone by restarting the game or refreshing the feed. This was how orientation was learned—not as theory, but as experience.

The generation growing up today enters a different condition. Not simply a digital world, but a vertical one.

From the beginning, reality arrives mediated, filtered, and optimized for engagement. Attention is guided before it has learned to orient itself. Preference appears before judgment. Entertainment precedes friction. The world does not confront children. It adapts to them. This is not an accusation. It is a description of the environment.

In the Analog world, upbringing happened largely through exposure. Children learned how the world works by being inside it. They encountered other people's emotions in real time. They learned limits by crossing them. They learned empathy by causing pain and seeing it reflected back immediately. These experiences were not optional. They were unavoidable.

The digital vertical world cannot provide this kind of learning by itself—not because it is malicious, but because it is selective. It removes friction wherever possible. It softens consequences. It allows withdrawal without cost. It replaces direct feedback with delayed, abstract, or invisible responses. Pain still exists, but it is internalized.

A harsh word spoken online does not immediately encounter a face. A lie does not collapse under shared scrutiny. A boundary crossed does not necessarily provoke correction. The wound occurs without witnesses. The lesson is delayed—or never arrives.

This produces a new kind of vulnerability. Young people growing up in the vertical world do not lack intelligence, creativity, or sensitivity. What they often lack is orientation. They are surrounded by information but deprived of context.

Truth in the Analog world was never guaranteed, but it was anchored. Falsehoods could be challenged by shared experience. Claims encountered resistance. Reality pushed back. In the vertical world, truth competes with entertainment—and entertainment usually wins. Not because people prefer lies, but because lies travel more easily when consequences are removed.

A child who has never lived outside the vertical environment does not compare digital reality with something else. There is no baseline. No remembered alternative. The stream is not a distortion. It is the world.

This makes judgment extraordinarily difficult. How does one evaluate credibility without shared reference? How does one recognize manipulation without friction? How does one learn restraint without visible limits? These are not moral failures. They are developmental absences.

Play once taught essential skills. Negotiation. Conflict resolution. Physical empathy. Risk assessment. Children learned to read faces, bodies, tone, and silence. They learned when to stop, when to retreat, when to repair. Digital play rarely teaches these things.

Games reward persistence, speed, and repetition. They punish slowness, ambiguity, and hesitation. Violence is reversible. Failure is temporary. The body is absent. The lesson is not cruelty. It is detachment.

Empathy does not disappear overnight. It withers quietly when it is not exercised. When others are encountered primarily as avatars, comments, or opponents, emotional feedback becomes abstract. Suffering becomes distant. The internal compass weakens.

The consequences are not immediately visible. That is what makes them dangerous.

The pain of the vertical generation is real, but it is often invisible. Anxiety without clear cause. Anger without direction. Loneliness amid constant connection. These wounds do not leave marks on the surface. They do not provoke collective response. They remain private, internal, and unshared.

At the same time, inequality grows sharper—not only economic inequality, but perceptual inequality. Some individuals retain access to horizontal experiences: stable environments, embodied relationships, shared realities. Others grow up almost entirely inside mediated worlds shaped by algorithmic relevance and commercial incentives. The gap widens, not only between rich and poor, but between those who learned orientation and those who did not.

Envy intensifies. Mistrust spreads. Comparison becomes constant. The world feels hostile, competitive, and unfair—even when material conditions improve.

This does not produce rebellion. It produces fragmentation.

The most dangerous misunderstanding is to treat this generational shift as a failure of youth. It is not. It is a failure of environment.

No generation in history has been asked to develop inside a system that monetizes attention before orientation is formed. No generation has been immersed so early in a world where relevance replaces reality and engagement replaces judgment. The outcome was not chosen. It emerged.

This is why the consequences belong to everyone. A generation without a horizon does not grow up to replace society. It reshapes it.

When orientation is weak, people cling to certainty. When shared reality is absent, tribes form. When trust cannot be built through experience, it is replaced by allegiance. The fractures we observe are not generational. They are civilizational.

The task, then, is not to correct young people. It is to rebuild conditions in which orientation becomes possible again—not by rejecting technology, not by romanticizing the past, but by recognizing what human development requires and what the vertical world cannot provide by itself.

The horizon was once a teacher. It placed the individual inside something larger. It taught limits without instruction. It revealed truth through resistance.

A generation without a horizon is not lost. But it is unanchored. And anchoring cannot be outsourced to systems optimized for attention.

## Chapter 9 — The End of Shared Reality

For most of human history, disagreement did not threaten reality itself. People argued about meaning, belief, and interpretation, but they argued within a shared world. They saw the same events. They heard the same sounds. They occupied the same physical and perceptual space. Even when disagreements were deep, there was an unspoken agreement about what was there.

Reality was never identical to everyone. But it was common.

The horizontal world created this common ground almost effortlessly. Perception was shared. Attention was distributed. No individual controlled what appeared in the field of experience. The horizon was not neutral, but it was collective. It placed individuals inside a world that existed independently of preference.

The vertical world changes this condition quietly, without confrontation. It does not deny reality. It reorganizes access to it.

Instead of encountering the world directly, individuals increasingly encounter streams—sequences of representation shaped by personal relevance, emotional signal, and prior behavior. What appears is no longer determined by what happens in the world alone, but by what holds attention within a system optimized for engagement. Two people may witness the same event, but they will not necessarily experience the same reality of it.

This is not because one is informed and the other is not. It is because each inhabits a different perceptual environment.

Reality begins to split, not into fantasies, but into parallel constructions—each internally coherent, emotionally persuasive, and repeatedly reinforced. One version spread in one stream. Another version spreads elsewhere. Each feels complete. Each

feels obvious. And because each is encountered continuously, doubt fades.

This is not diversity of opinion. It is divergence of perception.

People are no longer interpreting the same world differently. They are inhabiting different worlds entirely.

The danger here is subtle. Fragmented reality does not feel like collapse. It feels like it is certain.

In the horizontal world, exposure was relatively stable. You could not easily avoid what surrounded you. Public events were encountered together. Information moved slowly enough to be processed collectively. Absence was noticeable. In the vertical world, exposure becomes dynamic, filtered, personalized, and adaptive.

What you see becomes what exists. What you see often becomes what matters. What you do not see fades—not into falsehood, but into irrelevance.

Reality becomes a function of exposure.

The more often something appears, the more real it feels. The more emotionally charged it is, the more urgent it becomes. Repetition creates importance. Absence creates invisibility. Because exposure is personalized, importance fragments.

A society depends on more than shared information. It depends on shared meaning. Meaning arises when individuals not only see the same events but recognize them as significant in similar ways. When attention converges, interpretation can diverge productively. When attention fragments, meaning fragments with it.

What feels central to one group is invisible to another. What feels urgent in one stream feels irrelevant elsewhere. What feels undeniable here feels absurd there.

This is not disagreement. It is misalignment.

And misalignment is harder to resolve than conflict, because conflict assumes a shared object. Misalignment dissolves the object itself.

In fragmented reality, dialogue does not disappear. It intensifies. People speak more. Argue more. React more. But understanding decreases. Dialogue presupposes a shared reference point. Without it, language loses traction. Words retain emotional charge but lose stable meaning. The same words circulate through different streams, pointing to different realities. Communication becomes louder and thinner at the same time.

Fragmented reality reshapes emotional life as well. When shared meaning weakens, individuals carry more interpretive burden alone. They must constantly decide what matters, what is real, and what deserves attention. This creates fatigue, anxiety, and a sense of instability. The world no longer feels grounded.

People seek certainty. Certainty is found where streams are narrow, coherent, and emotionally reinforcing. This is not radicalization by ideology. It is stabilization by repetition.

Perhaps the most profound consequence of the vertical world is the quiet erosion of the collective “we.” Not as a political entity, but as a perceptual one. The “we” emerges when people experience reality together, when attention converges, when meaning is negotiated within a shared field.

When perception fragments, the “we” weakens. People remain connected, but they are no longer aligned.

Society can function this way for a long time. Systems can operate. Markets can run. Technology can advance. But something essential thins—trust, coherence, the sense of inhabiting the same world.

The end of shared reality is not a collapse in the dramatic sense. It is a transition—from a world in which reality is encountered together to a world in which reality is delivered individually. This shift does not destroy society overnight. It changes its texture, its depth, its resilience.

A society without shared perception becomes more reactive, more fragile, and more susceptible to manipulation—not because people are irrational, but because common ground is rare.

The horizon once functioned as a silent organizer of human life. It placed individuals within a world larger than themselves. It reminded them that reality did not begin or end with personal relevance. As the horizon collapses, the world shrinks—not physically, but perceptually.

And when perception fragments, so does responsibility. So does empathy. So does the possibility of common futures.

The vertical world does not impose division. It allows it. And once allowed, division no longer needs force. It sustains itself.

The next chapter turns from consequence to responsibility. From diagnosis to orientation. It asks what remains possible after this recognition, and what it would mean to live deliberately after the catastrophe.

## Chapter 10 — After the Catastrophe

The catastrophe, if it is one, does not end with collapse. It ends with normalization.

Life continues. Systems function. Technology advances. Children grow up. The world appears busy, productive, and connected. From the outside, nothing seems to demand interruption. This is why business as usual feels so tempting—and why it is no longer sufficient.

After the collapse of the horizon, the most dangerous illusion is that nothing fundamental has changed. But something has. Not infrastructure. Not intelligence. Not innovation. Orientation.

A society can operate without shared orientation for a long time. Markets adapt. Institutions persist. Daily routines continue. But beneath this surface, the conditions for understanding, trust, and continuity thin out. This thinning does not announce itself as crisis. It appears as friction everywhere and responsibility nowhere.

The question, then, is not how to stop the vertical world. That question is already obsolete. The vertical world is here to stay. The real question is whether we allow it to replace the conditions that once formed human judgment—or whether we deliberately counterbalance it.

Nowhere is this question more urgent than in education. Education has never been only the transmission of information. Its deeper function has always been orientation: learning how the world works, where limits lie, how actions connect to consequences, and how individual experience fits into something larger than itself. This function cannot be automated. And it cannot be outsourced to systems optimized for attention.

The mistake of our time is to believe that protecting children means shielding them. Shielding them from discomfort. Shielding them from friction. Shielding them from pain. Protection matters. But protection without orientation produces fragility, not resilience.

The analog world was not gentle. But it was formative. It exposed children to shared reality—to disagreement that could not be muted, to limits that could not be bypassed, to truths that resisted preference. It taught that not everything is negotiable, reversible, or optimized. These lessons were not pleasant. They were necessary.

The digital vertical world cannot provide these lessons by itself. It can simulate experience, but it cannot teach consequences. It can offer information, but it cannot guarantee judgment. It can entertain endlessly, but it cannot replace orientation.

Place responsibility where it belongs—not on children, not on youth, not on the next generation—but on those who design the conditions into which the next generation is born. Parents. Educators. Institutions. Society itself.

Protecting children from harm is only one side of the obligation. The other side is harder. It is to expose them deliberately to the world.

To the horizontal world. To environments that resist personalization. To spaces where others cannot be filtered out. To experiences where truth pushes back. To situations where empathy is learned through presence, not instruction.

The opportunity is unique. Every new generation arrives with a natural openness to the world. Curiosity is not taught. It is given. Attention is wide before it is trained to narrow. Orientation is

possible before it is replaced by optimization. Once lost, this openness is difficult to recover. Which is why delay matters.

Business as usual assumes that development will take care of itself. That children will adapt. That systems will correct their own excesses. That progress will somehow absorb its costs. There is no evidence for this assumption.

What exists instead is a choice—often invisible, rarely named. Whether we continue to design environments that narrow perception while calling it efficiency, or whether we intentionally preserve spaces that broaden perception, even when they are inconvenient, slow, or resistant to measurement.

Broadening the horizon does not mean rejecting technology. It means embedding it within a wider world. A world where attention is not always captured. Where silence is not immediately filled. Where others are encountered not as content, but as presence.

This is not nostalgia. It is responsibility.

The future will not be decided by platforms alone. It will be decided by whether societies remember that human development depends on what cannot be optimized: shared reality, embodied experience, visible consequence, and mutual orientation.

After the catastrophe, the task is not to restore what was lost. It is to protect what still can be learned.

The horizon was never guaranteed. It had to be entered, inhabited, and defended—quietly, collectively, and repeatedly. That work now belongs to us.

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This work is published as a digital edition.

First edition, 2026.

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