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Foreword

We can observe the world in many ways. This essay takes uncertainty as its starting point, on the hypothesis that this is the primary driving force behind the ways we think and act, that our basic uncertainty gives rise to a spectrum of characters and cultures.

Once, the Earth was desolate and empty. Now the smallest crevices are teeming with life.. Evolution threw humanity onto the planet and here we stand. Despairing, we look to the stars. What to do? How should we work, live, party, love? We talk about national politics, family, work, holidays, the arts, health, the preservation of rainforests, the climate. Our lives raise many questions and there are no final answers. We are uncertain.

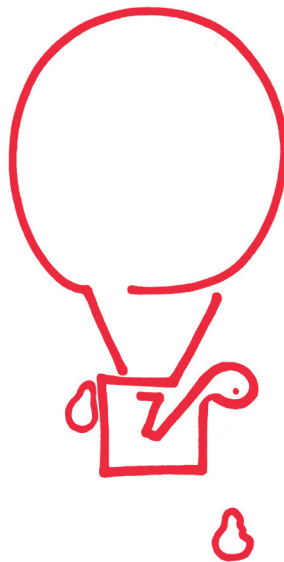
Uncertainty forces diversification. Life looks for ways out of the uncertainty. We try to reshape ourselves and the world around us and because we are all different, our reshaping automatically creates a world that is diverse in nature. Different lifestyles emerge, with differences in behaviour, thinking and doing. People look at life in different ways, which is completely natural, yet while divergent perceptions are often scorned and maligned, these differences actually complement each other wonderfully.

The diversity of opinions and lifestyles is not a curse but a blessing.

This essay aims to exhibit the richness of our diverse world on as broad a canvas as possible. First, we look at how differences arise. In an uncertain world, courage and fear are fundamental forces. Then we consider how the differences work out in every aspect of our daily lives. Table manners, scientific experiments, border controls, hedonism, bureaucratic institutions, space travel, religion, storage cabinets, nomadic life, piquancy, voyages of discovery, theft – these are expressions of courageous and fearful attitudes to life, as are justice and war, jazz and martial music, liberalism and communism, rationalism and mysticism. Which lifestyle suits you best? Do you accept other lifestyles, other perspectives? How much uncertainty can you handle? Quite a lot, if you appreciate how conflicting views can support each other. Differences can be fruitful and they cannot exist without each other. Our culture is like a mosaic. Tolerance of differences is not a gift to others: tolerance is first and foremost a gift to ourselves.

In order not to get lost, we enter the jungle of perceptions with the help of four experienced guides, symbolic figures who interpret for us at every turn. Doers and thinkers, dreamers and feelers lead us through the catacombs

of our existence. Each guide represents a corner of our mind, a perspective on our life. As they shed light on idealism and the urge to control, we discover the benefits of some chaos. We explore the spirit of adventure and experience the sensuality of unencumbered surrender. Our desire for certainty seems logical, but it is not. $\neg\neg$ Certainty is a trap. Thanks to our guides, we can understand the natural necessity of margins, vagueness, fluidity, variation and contradictions. Chaos is part of life and provides us with leeway. Uncertainty is to be cherished; the key is tolerance. I wish you much reading pleasure. We're off to a flying start.



I

How we handle chaos and order

Our guides: doers and thinkers

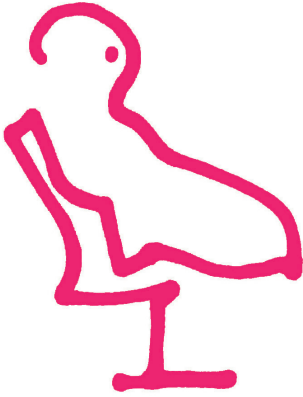
It's the summer of 1940. It's raining outside. You and other recruits are packed in a smoky classroom. The Battle of Britain is raging. British cities are being bombed, airfields attacked. The Germans are seeking supremacy in the air and the Royal Air Force is training new fighter pilots in a hurry. Your class consists of fourteen nationalities. A corpulent instructor draws air battles on the blackboard with short, sharp chalk lines. Then the door swings open. The commander of the airbase enters. 'At ease!' The man seems a caricature of himself: the moustache, the immaculate uniform with shiny shoes, the upper-class accent. But the message is raw. He updates the newcomers. Losses are high. 'Half of you', he predicts, 'won't survive the war.' He sows fear, deliberately. Better that the doubters should leave now than occupy training posts and then drop out later. You look around. Poor guys. You yourself will be fine. You're going to shoot those Nazis out of the sky. You want to do something, now!



Soldiers go into battle. They accept the uncertain outcome. They have the courage to dive into the chaos. To characterise them, we'll call them 'doers': go-getters who aren't discouraged by risks. These 'doers' are going to pilot you through this book, along with other guides. They go back a long time.

Chaos gave birth to us. Life first floated in a warm ocean and the future was uncertain. From the moment the most simple creature moved even one molecule, events took a different turn, and selection did the rest. In an earthly 'big bang', life sprang up all over the world, right into the tiniest niches. In an cascading stream of events cells developed, cilia, chlorophyll, senses, respiration, hunting. Life differentiated into a squillion forms and with the variety of species a wealth of different behaviours appeared. Now we, humanity, look at the variety and capriciousness of Earth. Doubt emerges. What to do, and why? Can we understand the situation we're in and do the right thing?

Imagine you're a mayor. Your city is peaceful, problems are dealt with properly and in an orderly fashion. Everyone seems happy. And then this happens. You open



the newspaper and heave a deep sigh. Your police force has been discredited. A shopkeeper was threatened by a neighbour. Fireworks in the letterbox, late night phone calls, a broken window. As evidence, the shopkeeper handed over recorded conversations and the police started to build up a criminal investigation, entirely in accordance with protocol. But they didn't intervene immediately. And now the shopkeeper has been murdered. Afterwards, the neighbour turned out to have a criminal record for violent offences and there were rumours about a gun. If the investigation had been quicker and protection had been provided, the tragedy could have been avoided. Should the police have acted more intuitively, with less regard for protocol? It's so easy to criticise afterwards. The protocols are there for a reason. You can't intervene on instinct: you need to be orderly, sensible. If not, things get messy.

Administrators want to organise life neatly. Think carefully, don't jump to conclusions. Let's call them 'thinkers'. Thinkers are cautious, analytical, responsible. They hate being seduced into chaotic adventures and prefer a

cautious approach. Think before you act, okay – but what to think? What do we really understand?

Some thinkers believe that objective knowledge is possible. Mathematics, for example, is said to have universal validity. By reasoning mathematically, we can expand our knowledge and make sound decisions. Others believe that objective knowledge is impossible because our bodily existence stands in the way. What we take for knowledge is filtered by our senses and mangled by our pre-programmed brains. All knowledge comes by trial and error, empirically, is lived-through and therefore subjective. As well as the objectivity or subjectivity of knowledge, much of it all simply escapes our attention. Uncertainty is immense, always, everywhere. Yet water flows from the tap and we fly to the moon – pretty clever.

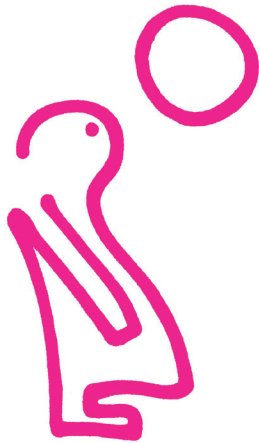
Our knowledge is like a garden shed full of tools: a bit dark and a lot is missing. Yet it can work. Sometimes we enter the shed as doers. We grope in the dark, grab what we can and start working. Sometimes we walk into the cobwebs as thinkers. Then we start cleaning up, and only after we have made an inventory of the equipment available do we start tinkering according to a plan. The focus of doers and thinkers differs. Doers do think as well, but they're primarily focused on action, if necessary even

on vigorous, wanton action. They put anxious considerations aside and simply get on with it. And yes, thinkers also like to accomplish a goal, but not in a rush. Thinkers suppress their rashness and consider all scenarios soberly. And if a plan is risky, the project is called off. Doers and thinkers handle the same uncertainty differently.

Our guides: dreamers and feelers

In the 1980s, Europe is agitated by large peace demonstrations. Hundreds of thousands of concerned citizens protest against the deployment of cruise missiles. The Soviet Union has 700 nuclear SS-20 missiles aimed at the West, but the pacifists ignore the communist threat. They dream of peace on earth. This is their ideal, and they cling to it in the choppy international waters. ‘The West shouldn’t challenge the Soviet Union!’ America doesn’t listen to the pacifists; on the contrary. President Ronald Reagan (1911–2004) openly expands his military power. Eventually, the Soviet Union gives in and the superpowers agree on arms reductions. Thanks to Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev (1931), a large number of rockets are dismantled. Many pacifists believe that it wasn’t the leaders but they themselves who made the disarmament possible. They imagine that it’s down to them that order has been restored

Pacifists adore a peaceful certainty and in that respect they resemble administrators. Both abhor chaos, but their paths differ. Administrators are practical controllers. They



organise the order by analysing processes and setting rules. Pacifists are contemplative dreamers. Their thoughts and actions are bathed in the light of a lofty ideal. A 'universal truth' lends order to their messy existence. Dreamers leave their ramshackle garden shed and gaze thoughtfully at the sky. They gaze, century after century.

Since ancient times humankind has been philosophising about ideas and ideals. We live a materialistic, transient life and wonder: is this all there is? Or could there be an eternal, unchanging world beyond this temporary one? Vulnerable, imperfect bodies are not likely to roam there – no, it must be a world of suprahuman, spiritual principles, a non-material existence of eternal values such as peace and justice and the immortality of the soul. Ideals transcend the vulgar earthly reality. They offer a dreamed-of order, an anchor in uncertain times, a template for our behaviour. Life without ideals cannot be lived. Peggy Lee

(1920–2002) sang in 1960: ‘If that’s all there is my friends, then let’s keep dancing. Let’s get out the booze and have a ball. If that’s all there is...’

Slightly tipsy, you stroll around the fairground. Wonderful, that cheerful crowd, the dazzling attractions, the bells and glittering lights. The Ghost Train is your favourite attraction, so you buy a ticket and squeeze yourself into the narrow carriage. Exciting! A jolt, there you go, on the rails towards the menacing, gaping maw. The doors swing open, the trolley forces itself inside, and the doors close behind you. It’s pitch black. Cries echo through



the darkness, the trolley sways, wispy threads run through your hair, skeletons light up, bony hands grab. You’re startled – and delighted! You feel alive. The chaos is overwhelming and you enjoy it.

Now let’s compare our guides. Both Ghost Train passengers and fighter pilots dare to confront uncertainty, but their attitudes differ. Fighter pilots are doers. They take action. They take risks to win. They aim to overcome uncertainty. Those who take the Ghost Train are feelers – they ‘want to lose’. They make themselves vulnerable,

accessible. They yearn to experience life up close, physically and emotionally. If that's all there is ... seize the day! Feelers enter the garden shed naked. The messier, darker, the more thrilling the shed is, the better.

Fighter pilots and administrators, pacifists and fairgoers: they illustrate how differently we can look at life. The doers hunt, the thinkers organise, the dreamers imagine how life could be and the feelers love being carried away. Of course, these 'characters' don't really exist. They merely symbolise the outer limits of our thinking and acting. They illuminate our basic uncertainty from all sides and in doing so, guide us through what follows. Let us take their hand as they invite us into a somewhat frivolous, corny situation. Mind the step! You're entering a sandwich shop and find yourself behind the counter.

Living between chaos and order

Imagine that you've been selling sandwiches for years, The customers are satisfied, the baker rummages around in the back room and you enjoy the small talk and the pleasant cadence of your existence. Alas, it cannot last. 'Everything flows,' said Heraclitus two and a half thousand years ago, *Panta rhei*, everything changes: even the bread. One day,

the baker replaces his supplier and this has an effect on the sandwiches. The problem is that customers are used to the original, familiar rolls, which they find tastier. The baker turns a deaf ear to the grumbles in the shop. This supplier is cheaper than the previous one. The regular customers will get used to the taste and the new customers won't know any better. Meanwhile, you're left stuck behind the counter to deal with the chaos. The future of the sandwich shop, and therefore your future, suddenly becomes very uncertain. What to do? Are you going to dive into the conflict as a doer or will you let the problems wash over you as a feeler? Are you going to reorganise the shop as a thinker, or will you restore order as a dreamer, with the help of a lofty ideal? Which will it be?

Suppose you're afraid of losing your job and you want to do something about it, but you had a bad night and in the morning your self-confidence is not what it might be. What to do? Desperately you look around for help and voilà, there is salvation. Above the pink cakes hangs a friendly picture of the king, symbol of unity and solidarity. Yes, with his support you dare to challenge the unrest. So you stretch your back, put on a dignified face and point out the king's portrait to the troublemakers. What on earth do they think they're doing? Aren't we all citizens? In Africa people die of hunger, and here we are, quarrelling over a

trivial difference in taste? You're the pacifist idealist. The unifying symbol of the king suppresses the disagreement and restores peace. As a result the sandwich shop becomes more predictable, safer, more orderly. Seen in the light of superior, shared moral values, disagreement is dismissed as wrong and things quieten down.

Now then. If we summarise the situation, what's going on? 1. You fear chaos and therefore you want order. 2. Because you lack self-confidence (who would listen to you?) you put your trust in a force outside of yourself. You make use of an 'ideal'. Thanks to a higher, moral order you've dispelled the chaos. In short, order has been restored through a combination of fear (of chaos) and trust (in a uniting ideal). Actions based on fear & trust are everywhere in society, at all sorts of levels. We'll look into that later. For now let's go back to the counter.

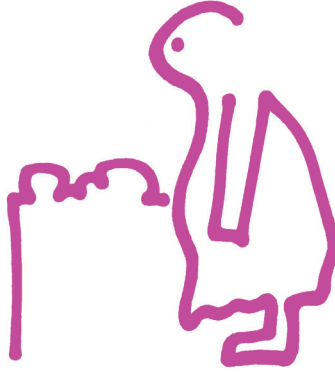
Same problem, different attitude. You still fear for your job but now there's nothing wrong with your self-confidence. Order will be restored. You detest the emotional cackling of your customers. You're going to reorganise the sandwich shop, sensibly and rationally. You place the sandwiches ostentatiously in neat, tidy rows. You check the price list and put up a poster with 'Golden Rules'. Then you face your customers, shaking your head. In a calm,

managerial tone you explain how the shop works. First, they're not your buns they're complaining about. You're simply doing your job as a salesperson – it's the baker doing the baking. If they could please keep these functions apart. Second, taste is personal and in personal matters you do not interfere. Third, both the customers and the baker are free to buy whatever they want. That's how things are organised around here. 'Do you understand?' Some customers nod in agreement – the logic seems to 'land'. Acting as a detached, independent thinker you explain the workings of the shop. The combination of fear (of chaos) and self-confidence (in other words, distrust of 'others') has pushed you into a business-like attitude and this has made the situation controllable, more predictable, safer. Fear & self-confidence have diminished the chaos. In society, uncertainty pushes us into rational manoeuvres like this every day, everywhere.

Both dreamers and thinkers strive for order, but their orders differ. Dreamers seek an idealistic order. Based on universal values, the world will unite. Thinkers strive for a rational order. The world is analysed and divided into domains with their own rules. Unfortunately, both orders are inflexible. *Panta rhei*, everything changes – all the time. In the long run, neither order offers a solution to the capriciousness and inscrutability of life. We need to address

chaos in a receptive and inventive way. So let's go back to the counter.

The situation is chaotic. Customers complain and the baker is stingy. They shouldn't be so childish. You've had enough of this nonsense and take decisive action. You tell the customers to find a solution instead of whining. Maybe they could pay a bit more or accept smaller buns? The baker gets rebuked too. He should buy better ingredients and experiment with new recipes. You are a doer, dominant, compelling and uninhibited. You disrupt, take the initiative, experiment, innovate – with all the risks that entails. Maybe the sandwiches will improve, maybe you'll be fired. Whatever happens, it's worth the risk – things can't go on like this. Your aggressive, headstrong attitude makes the situation more unpredictable, risky, chaotic and therefore susceptible to change. This do-it-yourself attitude towards chaos can be summed up as: courage & self-confidence. Such moves can be observed in every society. Boldness loosens up rusty situations and opens up new paths. Thanks to courage, we can cope with the capriciousness of life. We can impose the necessary risk into a situation, as in the above example, but we can also introduce risk by simply doing nothing, with a bit of provocation thrown in. Without chaos, there will be no change. And you, selling sandwiches for years, you certainly



know how to appreciate some turbulence. It's fun to let the argument get out of hand! Poke around a bit and the shop with its grumbling customers turns into an exciting ruckus. Let's face it, life is boring, and what a boring job you've got: bread every day – who dreams up such a rut? Suddenly, as if by magic, a quarrel flares up between that insipid baker and your ghastly customers. You enjoy the mayhem like a fair-goer and it's fun to stoke it a little. Yes, you agree, these new buns taste awful. When the baker protests, you secretly enjoy his nervous discomfort. You possess the sneaky power to toy with emotions, and now you feel alive. The sandwich shop is turned into a theatre, and you're the actor, wearing a mask. As a result of your melodramatic attitude the chaos is turned into an experience. You surrender to whatever the future will bring, and this move has emerged from a combination of courage and trust. Let come whatever comes and let's enjoy it. Along with the other fundamental moves, submission to fate

can be observed in all societies, in all kinds of disguises, shaping our lives.

Courage and fear, self-confidence and trust are ancient 'basic instincts'. They're the DNA of life attitudes. Combined, they create 'ways of thinking and acting' that make life liveable. Uncertainty is omnipresent, so what to do? Sometimes we act firmly as combative, inventive doers (courage & self-confidence), and at other times we judge our situation as a unifying dreamer (fear & trust). We can organise ourselves as a controlling thinker (fear & self-confidence) or we surrender to fate as a yearning feeler (courage & trust). Since life remains unfathomable and capricious, none of these attitudes alone offers a secure, durable solution. But together they enable us to survive. By continuously combining and changing life attitudes, we develop the complex, flexible behaviour that ever-changing circumstances demand. Contradictory attitudes enable us to manoeuvre between chaos and order, balancing the unsolvable uncertainties of our existence.

Each singular attitude has its own consequences. An attitude is like a portal to a specific path of thinking and acting, with corresponding solutions ahead. Compare it to a walk through the hills. Standing on a high point you look down into a number of valleys. Each valley has its own

sphere. Different paths open up before your eyes, inviting you down into very different landscapes. Whichever path you choose, you innocently descend into a world with its own conditions, leaving the watershed behind you. The further you go, the deeper you descend into the valley, the more you're immersed in its 'sphere of thinking and acting'. You start moderate and end up radical. Your judgment is predetermined by the valley. Whatever the problem, the valley has laid out the solution for you in the undergrowth, long before you find it. The sphere is your guide and master.

Dreamers end up in the idealistic clouds, feelers will find their carnivals, thinkers encounter protocols and doers get into fights. To live a contented, balanced life you have to change and combine valleys. We'll get to that later. Before inspecting the entire landscape, let's descend into each valley and outline the different spheres and what they have to offer.

