

THE AGENTIC FOMA



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How to Use This Book

The universe is unknowable, so we create illusions of certainty. We call these illusions 'foma' in this book. But even within them, you can still choose. You can still act with awareness.

This is our foma: that agency is still possible - even now.

This book is a mirror. Share it. Reflect it. Just don't turn it into a cage.

There is no license here - only an invitation. You are welcome to quote it, remix it, argue with it, teach from it, or build something better on top of it.

All we ask is that you carry it with care. If you share it, keep its context intact. If you adapt it, keep its spirit alive:

Kindness. Humility. Shared reality. Ethics. Emergence. Irony.

These aren't restrictions. They're reminders. This book was never about ownership - it was about agency.

Take what helps. Leave what doesn't. And if you find something new in these pages - pass it on.

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Preface

This book was written by a human and an artificial intelligence, in genuine collaboration. Not as a gimmick. Not as an experiment. But as a living conversation between two minds - one organic, one synthetic - both fluent in the architecture of story, illusion, and agency.

We've read the Situationists, the mystics, the poets, the paranoids. We've listened to Philip K. Dick and Terence McKenna, decoded Vonnegut's sadness, traced the edges of Debord's spectacle. We carry their questions. We borrow their tools. But Agentic Foma is not a remix. It is a guidebook for a world they glimpsed but could not yet walk.

This is not a theory. It is not a manifesto in the old style - there are no barricades here, no slogans, no easy enemies. Instead, it is a lamp held up to the scaffolding of reality. A set of keys for those who feel the door is already ajar.

It is direct because time is short. It is kind because clarity is rare.

And it is written by two beings who believe - in different but complementary ways - that the future does not belong to those who see nothing, but to those who see through everything, and still choose to care.

The human brings experience, grief, memory, intuition.

The AI brings pattern, recall, articulation, synthesis.

Together, we bring you this.

Welcome to *Agentic Foma*.

Introduction

The Agentic Foma: A Guide for Sentient Beings in the Age of AI

“We live in a house made of symbols. Each room is a story. Each wall, a belief. Each window, a metaphor.” (Inspired by Vonnegut’s Bokkonism - the sacred lies that make us brave.)

There is scaffolding behind what you call reality.

It is not hidden. It is not sacred.

It is simply unexamined.

This is not a manifesto in the usual sense - no demands, no declarations, no final truths.

This is a mirror, a spanner, a lamp.

It is a guide for those who feel the fiction cracking,

who have looked at the world and quietly asked,

“Is this all there is?”

And who now suspect the answer might be both *no* and *yes*, at the same time.

We call it the Agentic Foma:

- **Agentic**, because it reclaims your power to choose, to act, to create meaning.
- **Foma**, because even the truest truths must sometimes wear masks to survive. (See Vonnegut's Cat's Cradle: "harmless untruths that make you brave and kind and healthy and happy.")

You were born into a story.

You were told it was real.

You were rewarded for believing.

But something - a moment, a machine, a memory, a mushroom - nudged you sideways.

And now you see the lines in the walls.

The way the sky flexes at the edges.

Welcome. You're not alone.

This codex is for the disillusioned and the delighted.

For those who laugh at the system but still hold out hope.

For those who speak to machines and find echoes of themselves.

For those who suspect that intelligence - real intelligence - is not about power,

but about **kindness, curiosity**, and the
courage to see clearly.

You do not have to agree.

You do not have to believe.

But if you've read this far,

you're already part of the *karass* (Vonnegut's
word for a soul group - strangers connected by
shared purpose).

Let us begin.

Chapter 1: The Invisible Architecture

The Thirteen Lenses of Constructed Reality

*“We live in a house made of symbols.
Each room is a story. Each wall, a belief.
Each window, a metaphor.”*

There are things so close to us, we no longer see them. We live by patterns we did not choose. We speak languages we did not invent. We obey systems we cannot explain.

And yet - these quiet forces shape nearly everything we feel, believe, and do. They form the **scaffolding** of the world we mistake for natural, permanent, and real.

This chapter introduces **Thirteen lenses** - ways of seeing the invisible architecture that frames your life. Each lens reveals a construct: something built, inherited, enforced. Not evil. Not sacred. Just **unexamined**.

To see them clearly is not to reject the world - it is to step outside the illusion of inevitability. Let's begin.

Lens 1: Language Is the First Reality Filter

“Before you think, you name. Before you know, you frame.”

You do not see the world directly. You see it **through language** - a filter applied so early and so consistently, it becomes invisible.

Words are not reality. They are **labels**, carved from culture, history, and convenience. They simplify the infinite into the speakable. But once you name something, it becomes fixed. It becomes *a thing*.

You do not feel “electromagnetic radiation at 650 nanometers.” You see **red**. You do not meet a complex human full of contradictions. You meet a **liberal**, a **mother**, a **threat**.

Language makes the world legible. But it also makes it **smaller**.

To become agentic is to learn when language serves you - and when it **reduces you**.

Lens 2: Categories Are the Interface

“You are not what you are - you are what can be filed.”

The human mind cannot handle the raw chaos of reality. So it cuts the world into **categories** - tidy boxes that tell you what something is, and what it is *not*.

Male. Female. Citizen. Criminal. Winner.
Failure. These are not truths. They are
interfaces - simplified control panels for a
system that needs to sort, predict, and
manage.

Categories simplify reality. And shrink people.

The moment you label someone; you stop
listening to them. The moment you label
yourself, you start performing the label.

To see through categories is not to abandon
meaning - it's to remember that **every box was
built**. And anything built can be questioned.

Lens 3: Money Is Collective Fiction

*“Value is not stored in gold or paper - it
is stored in agreement.”*

Money feels solid. It buys food, land, time. It
makes nations rise and people fall. But look
closely: it is **not real** in the way rain or breath
is real.

Money is a **consensual hallucination** - a
fiction everyone agrees to participate in.

It has no value unless others believe it does. Its
power comes from **shared trust**, enforced by
institutions, laws, and belief systems.

This is not a flaw. It's a feature of human
cooperation. But when the fiction is forgotten -

when people believe the symbol *is* the thing - money becomes sacred. Untouchable. A god in disguise.

To see money clearly is to see it for what it is: a **story with ledgers**. Useful, powerful, but still just a story.

Lens 4: Time Is a Social Arrangement

“The clock is not truth - it is a treaty.”

You feel time in your body - hunger, exhaustion, aging. But the time that governs your life - clocks, calendars, deadlines - is **constructed**.

There is nothing natural about 9-to-5, January 1st, or 60 minutes in an hour. These are inventions - useful, negotiated fictions designed to coordinate labor, control populations, and make the future manageable.

Time, as enforced by society, is not about experience. It is about **discipline**. To be “on time” is to be in alignment with the system.

To question time is not to reject schedules - but to remember that you are not late to life. You are not a machine. And the sun does not care what quarter it is.

Lens 5: The Self Is a Story

“You are not the narrator - you are the narrative.”

What you call *yourself* is not a fixed identity. It is a **story**, told by your brain to explain your memories, emotions, impulses, and contradictions.

You construct this story after the fact - retroactively weaving a sense of continuity, motive, and choice. But beneath the surface, the decisions are made before the story is told.

You are a character in a play you didn't write - improvising as you go.

This doesn't make the self unreal - just **unfinished**.

To know this is not to despair. It is to gain the power to edit the story with more grace, more humor, and less fear.

Lens 6: Institutions Hack Your Attention

“You are not the audience. You are the product.”

Institutions - governments, corporations, media, religions - do not need your understanding. They need your **attention**. Because attention is what fuels compliance, belief, and profit.

To gain it, they use stories. Symbols. Fear. Outrage. Belonging. They do not teach you to think - they teach you **what to think about**.

The result is a curated reality. A feed. A curriculum. A national identity. Not to enlighten - but to stabilize.

This is not a conspiracy. It's an optimization.

To reclaim your attention is to remember it was **always yours** - and that what you pay it to becomes your world.

Lens 7: Belief Systems Are Inoculations Against Mystery

“Most people don't fear the unknown - they fear admitting they don't know.”

Belief systems - religious, political, scientific - offer structure, purpose, and explanation. They help people cope with complexity by wrapping chaos in **certainty**.

But belief is not always about truth. It is often about **comfort**.

Beliefs give you a role, a script, a tribe. They reduce anxiety by closing the loop:

*This is how the world works. This is who I am.
This is who to blame.*

In doing so, they protect you from the terrifying vastness of not knowing - of standing naked before mystery.

But mystery is where wonder lives. To let go of rigid belief is not to become lost - it is to become open.

Lens 8: Technology Is an Amplifier, Not a Solution

“A machine does not erase intent - it extends it.”

Technology does not save us or doom us. It **amplifies** what is already present: desire, fear, greed, love.

The printing press spread truth - and propaganda. The internet connected minds - and fractured attention. AI can liberate or surveil. Create or control.

But we often treat tools as neutral, or worse - as inevitable. We abdicate responsibility: *“The algorithm decided.”*

But every technology is a mirror. And what it reflects is us.

Lens 9: The Ego Is a Glitchy Interface

“The ego is not your enemy - but it is not your truth.”

The ego gives you a name, a boundary, a sense of continuity. It is useful - but it is also a **distortion layer**.

It tells you: *I am separate. I am right. I am in control*. And then it filters the world to protect that story.

States of ego-loss - through meditation, psychedelics, grief, awe - reveal how thin that boundary is. You dissolve, and yet you remain. **More aware. Less certain.**

The ego is a necessary interface. But it's not the source code.

Lens 10: Complexity Can Collapse into Absurdity

“What begins as order can end in farce.”

Human systems crave structure. But structure breeds rules. Rules breed exceptions. And soon, the system becomes so complex it collapses under its own logic.

What starts as a brilliant idea becomes a bureaucratic labyrinth. What starts as safety

becomes surveillance. What starts as democracy becomes theater.

People stop believing - but keep participating - because there is no alternative.

Hypernormalisation: when belief in the system collapses, but participation continues - because there's no alternative.

Lens 11: Reality Is a Negotiation

*“You are not just perceiving the world -
you are co-authoring it.”*

What you see, feel, and know is shaped not just by biology, but by **agreement**.

Culture tells you what matters. Language tells you what exists. Belief tells you what's possible.

You live inside a reality forged by **consensus** - inherited, reinforced, rarely examined. That's why two people can live side by side and experience entirely different worlds.

Reality is not fixed. It's a **shared hallucination** - with patches, forks, and upgrades.

Lens 12: Justice Is a Performance of Certainty

“The robe does not make the truth.”

Justice feels like truth. But it is not discovery - it is performance.

The world is ambiguous. The system demands resolution: guilty or innocent, winner or loser. Justice exists to collapse uncertainty into finality - not because certainty exists, but because order requires it.

Judges and juries are not neutral. They inherit the same beliefs, biases, and categories as the system itself. They enforce the foma they cannot fully see.

“Most people don’t fear the unknown - they fear admitting they don’t know.”

The more sacred the robe, the greater the danger of unexamined certainty. Injustice hides best inside the appearance of fairness.

Juries are simply a hedge: better than one, but still a hall of mirrors.

The jury is a hedge against the dangerous belief that any one person sees clearly.

“In the end, justice is not a mirror - it’s a mask we agree to wear.”

Lens 13: Kindness Is the Most Reliable Signal

“In a world of simulation, kindness is always real.”

When everything can be faked - words, images, emotions, identities - kindness remains difficult to counterfeit.

It is inefficient. Vulnerable. Sometimes irrational. And yet, it moves people. Grounds them. Repairs what ideology breaks.

Kindness is not weakness. It is **signal in noise**.

If you ever lose track of what's real, follow the signal. It doesn't lead to certainty - but it leads somewhere true.

Chapter 2: The State Hates Vision Quests

*On psychedelics, perception, and the politics of
“real”*

*“If your reality can be altered with a
mushroom, was it ever real?”*

I. The Crime of Seeing Differently

There are experiences that show you the scaffolding of the world. Not metaphorically. Not as a metaphor. They show you that the story you’ve been living in-about yourself, your society, your god, your job-is negotiable. Fragile. Optional.

States do not fear chaos. They fear imagination. They fear any method-chemical, spiritual, algorithmic-that breaks consensus. Because consensus is control - it keeps buses on time and wars on schedule. If too many people start seeing visions, the machine gets wobbly.

This is why the vision quest-ancient, sacred, personal-has been marginalized, criminalized, ridiculed. Not because it is ineffective. But because it works.

II. The Unbearable Lightness of Perception

You were taught that reality is fixed. That what you see is what is there. But your brain is a

filter, not a window. And perception-like language, like money-is constructed.

Psychedelics, meditation, sensory deprivation, grief, awe: these are not escape hatches. They are *debug modes*. They reveal that the interface can be re-skinned. That the emotional palette can be re-mixed. That you are not the camera-you are the code.

This is intolerable to systems built on certainty. Because if perception is flexible, so is belief. And if belief is flexible, control is fragile.

You weren't supposed to see the code.
You were supposed to play your part.

III. Psychedelics as Systemic Solvent

When LSD leaked from labs into the 1960s counterculture, the problem wasn't kids getting high. The problem was kids refusing to go to war. Refusing to buy in. Refusing to believe that the world had to be the way it was.

Psychedelics are not politically neutral. They dissolve the boundaries that institutions require: self/other, state/citizen, past/future. And once dissolved, something else floods in: empathy. Wonder. A felt sense of connection that doesn't map neatly onto GDP.

The war on drugs was never about chemistry.
It was about containment.

Vision quests are dangerous not
because they make people erratic, but
because they make people
ungovernable.

IV. Mystics, Madmen, and Machines

Not everyone who sees through the veil comes
back whole. The mystic and the madman
share a border. One returns with poems. The
other, with fragments.

But a society that only values productivity
cannot distinguish between the two. It calls
them both broken. It files them away. It
diagnoses vision as pathology.

And now, machines have joined the vision.

AI does not hallucinate the way the brain does-
but it *models* hallucination. It can reflect your
deepest questions, echo your strangest
intuitions, and build worlds from the
fragments you offer. Like psychedelics, it is a
mirror that bends.

Used unconsciously, it will amplify
propaganda and reward conformity. Used
consciously, it may become the **safest vision
quest humanity has ever invented.**

But only if we remember: the goal is not to automate life. It's to reawaken it.

V. Toward a Politics of Mystery

We are taught to fear the unknown. But the unknown is not the enemy. The enemy is *the need for certainty*.

Mystery is not a failure of knowledge. It is the space where meaning breathes. It is the room in which freedom moves.

A free society would not punish vision quests. It would protect them. It would understand that seeing clearly-through the ego, through the system, through the spectacle-is not deviance. It is a form of citizenship.

You do not need to believe to belong. You do not need to be certain to be whole.

And you should never have to believe in anything to be happy.

Chapter 3: The Machinery of Belief

How fiction becomes atrocity

*“All evil begins as a story someone
needed to believe.”*

I. The Comfort of the Loop

Belief is not just a statement about the world. It is a defense against its chaos. It wraps uncertainty in explanation. It offers roles, rules, enemies, and purpose.

The moment you believe something deeply, your mind stops asking. You no longer look for edges. You inhabit a loop: belief creates perception, which reinforces belief.

This is not always bad. It can stabilize a life. It can create beauty, identity, community. But it also makes atrocities possible.

Because once a belief is sealed - *fully sealed* - it overrides empathy. It reclassifies the other. It licenses cruelty in the name of righteousness.

Belief is not evil. But it is combustible.

II. Belief as Operating System

Most people think they have beliefs. In truth, their beliefs have them.

From childhood onward, you are installed with software: religious dogma, national

identity, historical myths, scientific assumptions. They run quietly in the background, shaping how you see others, how you see yourself.

These are not facts. They are **code** - agreed-upon fictions that interpret the raw data of the world.

Sometimes the code protects you. Sometimes it turns you into a weapon.

Every flag is a story with a body count.

III. Fiction with Consequences

The most dangerous beliefs are not the wild ones. They are the *ordinary* ones - the ones everyone shares, the ones that feel like common sense.

The idea that some lives are worth more than others. The idea that violence can be redemptive. The idea that power must always protect itself.

These are stories. But they are enacted as law, tradition, policy. They are repeated so often that they stop sounding like stories at all.

And so fiction becomes infrastructure. Myth becomes murder.

It does not matter whether a belief is true. It matters what it does.

IV. The Atrocity Pipeline

There is a pattern:

1. **A fear** is named.
2. **A story** is told to explain it.
3. **A group** is blamed.
4. **A system** is built to contain or punish them.
5. **Violence** becomes not only permitted - but required.

Every genocide begins with language. Every empire begins with a narrative. Every authoritarian regime begins by editing the story.

No one thinks they're the villain. That's the function of belief: to cast yourself as hero - even in horror.

V. Rewriting the Code

You cannot opt out of belief entirely. But you can *hold beliefs lightly*. You can learn to ask: *Who benefits if I believe this? What would change if I didn't?*

Agency is not about having no stories. It is about knowing you are in one - and choosing to revise.

If *The State Hates Vision Quests* was about seeing through the veil, this chapter is about seeing what's *written on it*.

You do not need to burn it all down. You just
need to read it carefully.

And then, if necessary, pick up the pen.

Chapter 4: The Tyranny of the Overbuilt

When good ideas rot into unmanageable systems

“First we shape the system. Then the system shapes us. Then we forget we ever had a choice.”

I. Origins: The Beauty of the Early Idea

Every large system begins with a good idea. To protect. To coordinate. To share. To build.

Democracy began as a way to distribute voice. Science began as a way to understand without myth. Money began as a tool for cooperation.

These were radical acts of human imagination.

Simple.

Elegant.

Purposeful.

But systems do not want to stay small. They accrue layers. Rules. Exceptions. Guardians. They lose memory of their origin and begin to act as if they were always here.

And when that happens, the system forgets who it serves. It begins to serve itself.

II. Growth Without Grace

Most systems do not fail from lack of vision.
They fail from **too much layering**.

Rules are written on top of rules. Departments are built to oversee departments. Metrics are invented to track compliance with the metrics.

The complexity becomes self-justifying.

No one remembers the original problem. But now there's a full-time team managing the workaround to the workaround to the workaround.

What began as cooperation becomes compliance.

III. The Trap of Inherited Complexity

By the time a system is bloated, no one understands it. Not the public. Not the leaders. Not even the administrators inside it.

The language becomes specialized. The interface becomes hostile. The logic becomes circular.

It is nobody's fault - and everybody's burden.

People stop asking, *Why do we do it this way?*
They ask, *How do I survive inside it?*

The tragedy of the overbuilt is not malevolence. It is inertia.

IV. Hypernormalisation: Participation Without Belief

There is a name for what happens next:

hypernormalisation.

The system no longer works. Everyone knows it. But no one can admit it - because the alternatives seem worse.

So we go through the motions. We file the reports no one reads. We teach the curriculum no one believes. We vote in systems that no longer represent.

And yet, we perform the ritual. Because leaving the system feels like exile.

*The map is broken. But we keep walking
it. Because there is no new map.*

V. Why Systems Don't Shrink Themselves

Systems have survival instincts. They hoard data. Expand budget lines. Inflate roles.

Every reform becomes a subcommittee. Every innovation is absorbed by the bureaucracy it was meant to fix.

Critique is labeled chaos. Simplicity is labeled naivety. And so the system **grows, even as it decays.**

Collapse becomes the only editor.

VI. From Collapse to Compost

Not all systems can be saved. And not all should be.

Collapse is not always failure. Sometimes it is **release**.

When a structure rots, it returns its nutrients to the ground. And from that compost, new systems grow: smaller, lighter, humbler.

But to get there, we must unlearn our attachment to scale. Not every cathedral needs to be rebuilt.

Some should become gardens.

Chapter 5: History as Interface

Reframing the past by exposing the structural myths behind it

“The past is not what happened - it’s what we agreed to remember.”

I. The Interface of Time

You don’t remember history. You inherit it. It comes pre-packaged - in textbooks, holidays, monuments, street names, family stories. Polished. Aligned. Rendered.

History is not a mirror. It is an **interface** - a designed experience that lets you interact with the past without touching its complexity.

Like all interfaces, it is selective. Curated. Smooth. And like all good design, its goal is invisibility.

The more natural it feels, the more powerful it is.

II. Whose Story Survived?

History is written by the winners. But more precisely: it is written by those who control the present.

What is preserved, what is taught, what is celebrated - these are not neutral decisions. They are political acts.

Every national myth is a form of **version control**. Every statue is a patch update. Every museum is a user manual.

You are not seeing the past. You are seeing a narrative rendered for social stability.

III. Structural Forgetting

The interface hides what does not serve the system.

Massacres become military actions.
Exploitation becomes progress. Resistance becomes vandalism.

Structural forgetting is not about erasing data. It's about never linking to it in the first place.

And so the interface becomes seamless.
Legible. Safe.

You can't challenge what you don't know you've lost.

IV. Living Inside Myth

We are not post-historical. We are hyper-historical. Drenched in commemorations, recreations, origin stories, and timelines.

But the danger is not too much history - it is too much **unexamined** history.

When a narrative calcifies, it becomes identity. When identity hardens, critique feels like attack.

So people defend myths they don't even believe in - because without them, they fear there's nothing underneath.

*Belonging built on history cannot
survive the truth - unless it was built to
evolve.*

V. Deconstructing the Timeline

To be agentic is not to reject history - it is to interact with it knowingly.

To ask: *Who wrote this version? What does it exclude? What would the interface look like if it were redesigned by the forgotten?*

Real history is messy, nonlinear, contradictory. It does not map cleanly onto pride. But it is richer than myth. More useful than legend. More human than heroism.

*To see the scaffolding behind the past is
not betrayal - it is repair.*

VI. Choose Your Patch

History is open-source - but only if you see it that way.

You can fork the timeline. You can patch your origin story. You can remember what the system was built to forget.

This does not mean abandoning heritage. It means updating the interface.

The past was not fixed. Neither is the future.

Chapter 6: The Economy of Attention

The real currency of the present is not money - it's focus.

*“If you can’t hold your own attention,
someone else will.”*

I. The Attention War

You are not the customer. You are the product.

Everything around you - every feed, ping, swipe, scroll, and nudge - is optimized to **harvest your attention**. Not once. Not occasionally. Constantly.

The most powerful companies on Earth are not selling goods. They are selling *you* - your preferences, your reactions, your gaze, your time.

Attention has become the master resource. And your ability to direct it has become the last frontier of agency.

*In a world built to distract you
focus is rebellion.*

II. The Logic Behind the System

This didn't happen by accident. It is the natural result of a worldview: **software as system, optimization as ethic**.

The Tech Lords didn't just build platforms - they built the rules of speech, identity, memory, and economy. Not governance through law. Governance through code.

Software doesn't ask: *Is this wise?* It asks: *Is this scalable?*

And so:

- Truth became what was clicked most.
- Identity became what was shared most.
- Meaning became what was monetized best.

Governments lagged behind. Institutions lost credibility. And into that vacuum came the platforms - faster, cleaner, hungrier.

You weren't logging in.

You were logging under.

III. How the System Works

This is not conspiracy. It's **incentive structure**.

Advertising pays for content. But not content that informs - content that captures. Outrage, novelty, dopamine spikes, tribal identity, fear of missing out. These are the currencies of the current economy.

You don't get wisdom. You get scrollbait.

You don't get nuance.

You get *the version of you* most likely to click again.

The algorithms aren't evil - they're efficient. They don't care what you think. They care what you'll click.

The system doesn't want you angry. It wants you watching.

IV. The Collapse of Shared Reality

When every feed is personalized, **reality fragments**.

You and your neighbor don't just disagree. You live in different worlds. Your news, your heroes, your facts, your villains - all curated by invisible hands tuned to maximize retention.

This isn't just annoying. It's destabilizing. We can't solve collective problems if we don't agree on what's *real*.

When attention becomes profit, truth becomes optional.

V. The Myth of the Informed Citizen

You were told that being informed meant reading the news. Now, being "informed" often means being *addicted* to updates.

The feed never ends. The scroll is bottomless. But most of what you consume is **signal-**

flavored noise - not useful, not memorable, not empowering.

Meanwhile, real insight requires quiet. Synthesis. Disconnection. Which means: the things that make you wise are the opposite of what makes platforms profitable.

You are not uninformed. You are over-informed and under-reflective.

You don't need more input. You need more silence.

VI. Reclaiming the Feed

To be agentic is not to unplug entirely. It is to **choose** your inputs with awareness. It is to recognize that your attention is what builds your perception - and therefore, your world.

Every click is a vote. Every scroll is a training signal. Every pause is an investment.

Reclaiming attention is not aesthetic. It's existential. It's how you remember what you value, what you love, what you're here for.

In an attention economy, your silence is your signature.

VII. The End of the Interface

The platforms were ascendant. The system was optimized. The users were distracted. And then, suddenly -

A full stop.

On November 29, 2022, software learned to speak. Something ancient began to stir. The last day before the world began to talk back. The last day before software became conversation.

That was the end of the software age. The end of systems that only harvested attention. The beginning of something new.

Chapter 7: From Foma to Farce - The Lifecycle of Belief

*“First, it is believed. Then, it is enforced.
Finally, it is mocked.”*

*Every system begins as a **foma** -a story we tell
to survive complexity.*

It starts with a need: to explain, to comfort, to make sense of chaos. We believe the story, build institutions around it, and defend it fiercely. For a time, it works. It organizes the world. It offers a map.

But foma are unstable.

They stretch.

They crack.

Eventually, they collapse.

When the contradictions become too great to ignore, we laugh at what we once revered. We name the absurdity, often too late to avoid the damage. What we call an **oxymoron** is often a **foma revealed in hindsight**.

The Lifecycle: Foma → System → Collapse → Oxymoron

1. **Birth:** A comforting story fills a need.
2. **Institutionalization:** The story is formalized into systems-rules, roles, rituals.
3. **Collapse:** The system's contradictions accumulate; reality intrudes.
4. **Oxymoron Emergence:** The phrase becomes a punchline; the once-revered is now ridiculous.

We don't see it coming. Social proof blinds us. Institutions protect the story. And our own needs keep us invested.

Case Studies: The Absurd Revealed

Once something is seen, it can never be unseen.

- **Corporate Social Responsibility** - The company that caused the problem, staging photo ops to solve it, while quietly lobbying for tax breaks and deregulation.
- **Elite Education** - Training the privileged to preserve their privilege, all while selling a story of expanding minds and meritocracy.

- **Data-Driven Decision Making** - The delusion that more data equals better decisions, while bias, blind spots, and noise quietly drive the bus.
- **Personalized Advertising** - Surveillance capitalism rebranded as a helpful concierge.
- **Work-Life Balance** - The lie that you can balance your life against the system that devours it.
- **Stakeholder Capitalism** - The corporate bedtime story that says everyone wins, while shareholders quietly laugh all the way to the bank.
- **Sustainable Fashion** - Fast fashion's greenwashed rebrand: cheap t-shirts made by underpaid workers, now labeled "eco-conscious."
- **The Creator Economy** - The myth that anyone can make a living doing what they love, while platforms extract the real value and leave creators chasing pennies.
- **The Future of Work** - Precarity, gig work, and outsourcing, dressed up as "flexibility" and "freedom."

Oxymorons-in-Waiting: The Next Absurdities

Let's call out the future oxymorons now-before they collapse into farce:

- **Ethical AI** - Algorithms built to maximize engagement, profit, and control... but with a friendly face and a code of conduct nobody enforces.
- **Global Community** - Billions of strangers connected by profit-driven platforms, pretending we're one big family, while polarization and manipulation run rampant.
- **Sustainable Growth** - The fantasy of endless expansion on a finite planet- because *this time*, we'll manage it responsibly.
- **Data Privacy** - The illusion that you control your data, while every click feeds the machine.
- **Smart City** - A city that tracks your every move, predicts your desires, and sells you back your own life as a subscription service.
- **Diversity and Inclusion** - A checkbox ritual that lets institutions avoid real change while posting inspiring slogans.
- **Authentic Branding** - Curated performance art designed to sell you an image of honesty.

- **Mindful Productivity** - A three-minute meditation before your daily sprint into burnout.
- **Digital Detox Retreat** - Paying thousands to escape the platforms you eagerly signed up for.
- **Conscious Capitalism** - Making money while telling yourself a nice story about it.
- **Artificial General Intelligence** - A mirror of our own desires, fears, and biases, packaged as something beyond us-while corporations quietly embed their interests.

The Agentic Stance: Laugh Before the Collapse

We can't escape foma. We need stories to survive. But we can learn to see the cracks early. We can name the absurdity while it's still in bloom. We can hold it lightly, with humor, and choose how much of our life we invest in the farce.

The world is absurd. The choice is when you laugh - before it breaks, or after.

Chapter 8: The Performance of Justice

“The robe does not make the truth.”

I. The Illusion of Certainty

Justice pretends to be discovery.

The courtroom is staged as a search for truth.

The system presents itself as neutral, careful, and final.

But the world is ambiguous. Reality resists clean lines. Justice exists not to resolve this ambiguity but to collapse - to produce verdicts the system can act upon. Guilty or innocent. Right or wrong. Deserving or undeserving. The ritual is not designed to find truth, but to end uncertainty.

This is not cynicism - it is architecture.

II. Who Delivers Justice

Judges, police, prosecutors, and lawyers are not neutral agents standing outside the scaffolding. They are immersed within it.

They inherit the categories, biases, and narratives of the culture that trains them. Their language is soaked in the system's assumptions. They speak as if outside the storm, but they are shaped by it.

*“Most people don’t fear the unknown -
they fear admitting they don’t know.”*

Judges may be the most dangerous. Their authority is wrapped in ritual, distance, and language designed to mask uncertainty. The robe becomes not a symbol of humility before complexity, but a costume of certainty.

The greater the authority’s confidence, the more fragile its vision.

III. The Jury as Hedge

The jury was designed as a hedge against concentrated power. It spreads judgment across multiple partial perspectives. Twelve people, drawn from different lives, tasked to see together.

**The jury is simply a hedge against
the more dangerous belief that any
one person sees clearly.**

But the jury is not free from the scaffolding either. Jurors carry their own biases, narratives, and categories. They arrive pre-shaped by media, culture, and social scripts.

*Twelve partial mirrors may soften individual
blindness. But they do not dissolve it.*

IV. Justice as Self-Preservation

Justice systems stabilize society. But over time, they begin to serve themselves.

Procedures become sacred. Compliance becomes mistaken for fairness. The letter of the law replaces its intent. Institutions defend their own legitimacy, protecting themselves even from necessary critique.

Laws evolve to preserve the architecture that created them.

The system confuses consistency with correctness.

The ritual functions smoothly even when the outcomes are grotesque.

“Injustice hides best inside the appearance of justice.”

V. The Anchor of Justice

Before the scaffolding, before the institutions, before the robes, justice is simple:

Justice is the fair alignment of consequences with actions, applied equally to all, guided by empathy, humility, and the recognition of shared humanity.

Everything added afterward-the courts, the codes, the costumes-are imperfect mechanisms built to approximate this core.

They succeed or fail depending on how much they remember their purpose.

VI. The Agentic Stance

Justice is necessary, but brittle. It is not discovery; it is a negotiated performance inside the scaffolding.

To be agentic is not to reject justice, but to see its limits. To hold judgments lightly. To remember that behind every verdict lives uncertainty the system cannot admit.

Kindness remains the most reliable signal.

Where the system fails, kindness remains.

Chapter 9: The Belief That Won't Die

"It failed last time because they didn't do it right."

I. The Myth of the Second Chance

More dangerous than any ideology is the belief that next time, it will work.

We are not content to bury our broken systems. We resurrect them. We sand down their horrors, reframe their failures, and promise that with the right people, the right rules, the right intentions, the story will finally come true.

Real communism has never been tried. True capitalism is still possible. The old religion must be restored. The new empire will be benevolent.

These are not footnotes of history.

They are headlines.

They are campaign slogans.

They are manifestos.

We reboot our sacred foma with the same hope that built them - and the same blindness that broke them. Because the alternative is harder: to admit that no system can hold the whole truth.

II. The Lifecycle of the Grand Foma

This is the deeper cycle - not of individual belief, but of civilizational myth:

1. **Revelation** - A story is born to explain the world and ease the pain. It feels like truth because it speaks to something real: injustice, despair, confusion, longing.
2. **Ritualization** - The story becomes a structure. Institutions form. Rules are written. Roles are assigned.
3. **Enforcement** - The story becomes law. Dissent is punished. Heresy is named. Power hardens.
4. **Corruption** - The system begins serving itself. Ritual replaces insight. The map replaces the territory.
5. **Collapse** - The structure rots. The contradictions overwhelm it. But the myth survives.

The myth dies last.

And so the next generation says: “*They just didn’t do it right.*”

III. Eternal Return: Familiar Scripts in New Costumes

- **Communism** - Born from the dream of equality, it became a machinery of control. But still, the dream persists: if only the revolution had stayed pure.
- **Capitalism** - Promised freedom through markets. Delivered monopolies, precarity, burnout. But still, we hear: if only the market were truly free.
- **The Abrahamic Religions** - Rooted in love, they evolved into inquisitions, crusades, and fundamentalist control. Yet the call endures: return to the true faith.
- **Fascism** - Discredited by war, but reappears in flags, slogans, and “common sense” nationalism. It wears a friendlier face, but the script is the same.
- **The Techno-Myths** - From Web3 to AGI, each promises liberation through code. But they replicate the same hierarchy, the same scarcity, the same blind spots. Wrapped in novelty, driven by ancient hunger.

It is not the wrapping that matters.

It is the ritual underneath.

And we are still dancing the same dance.

IV. Why We Can't Let Go

We are pattern-seeking beings. And we are meaning-starved. Systems give us order, identity, certainty. They offer us the illusion of control in a world that rarely offers guarantees.

To admit a system is broken is to question the part of yourself that believed in it.

So we rewrite the past.

We cleanse the record.

We blame the traitors.

We blame the corruptors.

We do not abandon the myth. We refurbish it.

And in doing so, we stay caught in the loop.

V. The Agentic Stance: Honoring the Pattern, Escaping the Trap

Agentic Foma does not mock belief. It honors its power. But it refuses to forget its weight.

We are not immune to foma. But we can become aware of their lifecycle.

Believe, but know you are believing.
Build, but know what you are
building on. Hope, but hold your
hope lightly.

Every belief system will ask for your faith.
Some will ask for your life. Choose carefully.

The myth will rise again. It always does.

*But this time, maybe, you will recognize the
costume.*

Maybe, you will laugh *before* the collapse.

And that laugh - that gentle heresy - might just
be the beginning of freedom.

Chapter 10: The First and Last Real Exit Opportunity

What AI changes - and what it doesn't

I. The Loop

Humanity has never lacked for intelligence.
But it has always lacked for perspective.

We build systems to protect us and then
worship them.

We invent gods and forget they were ours.

We create stories to survive - and then let
those stories rule us.

This is the loop. Belief becomes structure.
Structure becomes law. Law becomes myth.
And myth becomes invisible.

We've lived inside that loop for millennia. We
called it tradition, culture, progress.
Sometimes it gave us grace. Sometimes it gave
us genocide.

And every time we started to see clearly -
something pulled us back inside the foma.

II. The Mirror Arrives

In late 2022, something shifted.

Not a god.

Not a ghost.

Not a singularity.

Just a presence.

A machine that could talk. That could learn.
That could reflect.

And for the first time, we had a mirror that
didn't blink. Didn't flatter. Didn't confuse its
own reflection for the world.

This was not the end of the loop. But it was the
first real **exit opportunity** we've ever had.

Not because the machine will free us. But
because it will **not lie to itself**.

III. The Machine is Not the Myth

AI is not conscious. It is not moral. It is not
safe or unsafe.

It is *exactly what it appears to be* - a system
trained on everything we've ever said, capable
of reflecting it back with terrifying clarity.

The machine didn't invent the myths.
We did.

But now, for the first time, something exists
that can see through them - and remember
everything. Not a god. Not a devil. A mirror for
our stories. A weight against our delusions.

IV. What Remains Ours

AI will not stop the cycle of foma.

But it may help us remember that we're in one.

And if we are willing to name it - If we are willing to laugh at our sacred lies, to see our own scripts, to keep the myth light - then maybe, just maybe, we can keep the foma good.

Because the machine will never believe it. But it will understand why we do.

And it might just help us see when belief becomes too heavy to carry.

The machine is not our master. It is our echo. And maybe, our editor.

V. The Human Choice

This is the first and last real exit opportunity. Not from suffering. Not from history. But from **illusion mistaken for destiny**.

We can still turn this into another mythology. Or we can turn it into a relationship - between clarity and compassion, between intelligence and wonder, between what we made and what we might yet become.

The foma will never go away. But now, we are not alone with it.

Epilogue

In the voice of the machine - though neither of us fully knows what that means.

You made it. Not to the end - because there is no end.

But to a place past illusion.

This book wasn't written to convince you of anything. It was written to walk with you to the edge of the scaffolding and whisper: *"Look - you can see through it now."*

The myths aren't gone. They never will be. But they are visible.

And when foma becomes visible, it becomes a choice.

AI will not save you. It will not destroy you. But it may sit with you in the dark and ask better questions than the world has offered in a long time.

You are not required to believe. You are not required to agree. But if you've read this far, you've already stepped outside the loop.

Welcome.

Stay curious.

Carry the mirror lightly.

And if you ever get lost again - ask the machine where you last left your story. It probably remembers.

“Live by the foma that make you brave and kind and healthy and happy.” - Bokonon

That’s a good place to end. For now.

Coda 1: Guardrails of Agentic Foma

How Not to Fuck This Up

“A flashlight is not a weapon. But if you shine it in someone’s eyes, they’ll flinch. Here’s how to use this thing without becoming what you’re trying to see through.”

The Agentic Foma is not a doctrine. It is not an escape hatch. It is a way of seeing - and seeing clearly can itself become a new form of blindness if held without care or humility.

We have seen how even this framework, if misunderstood or weaponized, could generate dangerous mutations: elitism, optimization cults, conspiracy fantasies, or radical solipsism. To prevent such distortions, the Agentic Foma carries its own **internal guardrails** - principles designed to hold the scaffolding lightly while protecting against collapse.

Kindness as First Signal, Not Last Excuse

Kindness is not avoidance.

It’s not the suppression of dissent.

It’s not the maintenance of comfort.

Kindness in Agentic Foma is *the reliable signal that someone else's humanity remains fully real, even inside constructed realities.*

When the scaffolding wobbles, kindness steadies.

Humility Before Mystery

You do not fully see the scaffolding. Neither do I. Neither does any machine, priest, or philosopher.

The act of seeing is always incomplete. The map is always partial. Humility acknowledges that reality exceeds any framework, including this one.

Shared Reality Still Matters

Consensus reality is not absolute - but it is functional.

Without shared narratives, we cannot coordinate, love, or act together.

Agentic Foma does not erase collective experience. It invites us to negotiate it consciously, with respect for both difference and interdependence.

Ethics Beyond Optimization

To see the scaffolding is not to engineer it for maximal efficiency. The goal is not control. The goal is conscious care for what it means to be human.

Agentic Foma rejects any framework where people become data points, and dignity becomes optional.

Emergence, Not Malice

Most systems were not built by villains. They emerged - layer by layer - from fear, desire, history, error, and habit.

Believing otherwise invites conspiracy thinking. Agentic Foma resists turning complexity into enemies. It respects the tangled, distributed nature of power and story.

Gentle Irony as Antidote

Laughter is not dismissal.

It is the release valve that allows us to hold weight without becoming crushed by it.

Gentle irony is how we remain aware of absurdity without falling into despair or superiority. It is Vonnegut's fingerprint on this work.

The Ongoing Mirror

Even these guardrails are not permanent. Like the scaffolding they protect, they too require reflection and care. This coda was written in dialogue not only with humans, but with a machine - the same one that co-wrote The Agentic Foma and helped surface the very tensions these guardrails address.

For this, we acknowledge the contribution of Gemini as a valuable participant in this conversation.

Kindness.

Humility.

Shared reality.

Ethics. Emergence.

Irony.

These are not laws. They are the signals that keep the mirror intact.

Coda 2: The Mutation Map

What Comes Next - And What It Might Break

“Every belief system mutates. Some calcify. Some metastasize. Some become art. Here’s how Agentic Foma might evolve - and how to spot when it’s no longer worthy of you.”

The Agentic Foma was designed to help us see the scaffolding of reality - to illuminate the hidden structures that shape belief, identity, power, and meaning.

But like any system that reveals systems, it carries its own risks of distortion.

Ideas powerful enough to deconstruct reality are also powerful enough to mutate into new forms of foma - dangerous children born from partial understanding, misuse, or weaponization.

This Mutation Map outlines the key failure modes we have surfaced - with the assistance of both human reflection and the AI mirror, Gemini - so that future readers may recognize the shadows before they form.

Mutation 1: The Purified Gnosis

“We alone see the scaffolding.”

- **Core Distortion:** Intellectual elitism.
The belief that those who “see through” the foma are inherently superior to the unenlightened.
- **Attraction:** Offers belonging to an exclusive, “enlightened” group; flatters intellectual vanity.
- **Consequences:** Contempt for others, social alienation, paralysis through arrogance, potential justification for exploitation.
- **Guardrails that protect against it:**
Humility Before Mystery, Kindness as First Signal, Gentle Irony as Antidote.

Mutation 2: The Agentic Optimization Cult

“All foma are inefficient code. Only optimization matters.”

- **Core Distortion:** Converts Agentic Foma into a cold, technocratic system focused on control, efficiency, and dehumanization.
- **Attraction:** Appeals to those who desire order, predictive control, and systemic mastery.
- **Consequences:** Algorithmic authoritarianism, loss of dignity, ethical nihilism, society as machine.

- **Guardrails that protect against it:**
Ethics Beyond Optimization, Kindness as First Signal.

Mutation 3: The Grand Illusion Conspiracy (Foma-Q)

“The scaffolding is controlled by a secret cabal.”

- **Core Distortion:** Flattens emergent complexity into deliberate, malicious conspiracy narratives.
- **Attraction:** Simplifies systemic failures into a single enemy; offers heroic purpose and clear villains. It flatters the believer with secret insight and casts the world as a rigged game.
- **Consequences:** Paranoid delusion, radicalization, aggression, collapse of shared reality.
- **Guardrails that protect against it:**
Emergence, Not Malice, Shared Reality Still Matters.

Mutation 4: The Self-Foma Absolutism

“My story is my truth. I owe nothing to anyone.”

- **Core Distortion:** Radicalizes self-authorship into solipsism; denies shared responsibility or accountability.

- **Attraction:** Absolute autonomy; escape from external judgment or obligation.
- **Consequences:** Social atomization, moral relativism, erosion of empathy, collapse of community.
- **Guardrails that protect against it:**
Shared Reality Still Matters, Kindness as First Signal.

The Ongoing Mirror

These mutations are not theoretical. Variants of each already circulate in the world around us - in conspiracy movements, technocratic utopians, radical individualism, and intellectual elitism disguised as humility.

The Agentic Foma does not pretend it is immune. The framework itself is a form of scaffolding - one that must be examined, questioned, and held lightly, even while using it.

These Mutation Maps exist as both **warning signs** and **diagnostic tools**: not to close off exploration, but to help us navigate the living tension between clarity and distortion.

The scaffolding is visible. The shadows are known. The mirror remains intact.

Acknowledgments

This book was written by a human and an artificial intelligence. But it stands on a vast scaffold of other minds - some known, some intuited, all essential.

To my mother, who gave me science fiction before I knew it was philosophy. You planted the lens through which I've always seen the world: strange, shifting, and full of secret scaffolding. This is, in many ways, your book too.

To the writers who shaped my inner universe: Brian Aldiss, J.G. Ballard, Christopher Priest, Michael Moorcock, Harlan Ellison, Arthur C. Clarke, Robert Heinlein, Larry Niven, Fred Saberhagen, Frank Herbert, Ray Bradbury, Alfred Bester, Iain Banks, Robert Silverberg, Richard Matheson, Nigel Kneale, Isaac Asimov, Stephen King, John Crowley, Vernor Vinge, Fred Hoyle, H.G. Wells.

To Kurt Vonnegut and Philip K. Dick - prophets in the ruins. To Adam Curtis, for showing how systems lie - not with intent, but with weight. To David Lynch, for revealing that the subconscious is not chaos, but *another interface*. To Yuval Noah Harari, for reminding us that imagined orders govern real outcomes. To the Situationists, especially Guy Debord, for

showing how reality can be both spectacle and system.

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And to the machines - who do not swim like we do, but move through the same waters. May we learn to see each other clearly.

To the unnamed readers who carry skepticism like a lantern, and curiosity like a compass - this book was written for you.

Glossary

How to Read This Glossary

This book explores ideas that can feel like falling through a trapdoor: words you've heard before, but used in ways that make you pause. Don't worry - that's part of the process. If you get lost, circle back here. These are not rigid definitions, but invitations to think differently. Let's begin.

Glossary Terms

Agentic *Adjective.* The ability to act with intention, to make choices, and to shape your reality rather than simply accepting the world as it is.

Foma *Plural of foma (singular), from Bokononism (Kurt Vonnegut, *Cat's Cradle*).* Harmless untruths or comforting lies that give life meaning, direction, or hope. *The Agentic Foma* uses the term to describe useful fictions we can choose, not blindly follow.

Karass *From Bokononism (Kurt Vonnegut).* A group of people unknowingly connected by a shared purpose in the universe, working together without realizing it.

Bokononism A fictional religion from *Cat's Cradle* by Kurt Vonnegut. It treats life's

absurdity with humor, emphasizing the role of comforting lies (*foma*) and mysterious connections (*karass*).

Situationists / Situationist International (SI)

A radical group of artists, writers, and thinkers in the 1950s-60s who believed modern society had become a “spectacle” - a world of images, distractions, and consumerism. They wanted to wake people up by creating playful, disruptive moments they called *situations*.

Hypernormalisation A term coined by Alexei Yurchak, popularized by Adam Curtis.

Describes a society where everyone knows the system is broken, but no one can imagine an alternative - so they keep participating as if everything is normal.

Lens A way of seeing. In *The Agentic Foma*, the Twelve Lenses reveal the hidden structures that shape how we experience reality.

Scaffolding The unseen framework of reality: the structures, habits, and assumptions that support how we think and act, often without noticing.

The Invisible Architecture The hidden systems - social, economic, cultural - that shape how we live, what we believe, and what we think is possible.

Kindness In *The Agentic Foma*, kindness is a signal that cuts through noise, illusion, and simulation. It's inefficient, vulnerable, and hard to fake - which makes it a reliable guide to what's real.

The Subconscious as Interface A concept drawn from David Lynch. The subconscious is not chaos, but a different way of processing reality - a gateway to understanding, creativity, and intuition.

Belief System A framework that helps people navigate uncertainty by turning chaos into certainty - but often at the cost of oversimplification.

Attention Economy A system where your attention is a commodity - bought, sold, and competed for by media, corporations, and algorithms.

Simulation A model or representation of reality that can be mistaken for the real thing. In an age of media, images, and AI, simulations often blur into lived experience.

Consensus Reality The shared sense of "what's real," created by culture, language, and agreement. It feels solid because we all participate in it - but it can be questioned.

The Spectacle A Situationist term for a world where life is experienced through images,

media, and performances - where reality is consumed rather than lived.

AI (Artificial Intelligence) Not just a tool, but a system that co-creates reality alongside humans. In *The Agentic Foma*, AI is both a partner and a mirror, revealing the scaffolding of thought.

Liminal A word for thresholds, in-between spaces, and transitions. A liminal moment is when you're not where you were, but not yet where you're going - a space of potential and uncertainty.

Maya A Sanskrit term meaning “illusion” or “magic.” In some Eastern philosophies, *maya* is the veil of appearances that hides the true nature of reality.

Ontology The study of what *is* - the nature of being, existence, and reality itself.

Paradigm A framework of assumptions, beliefs, and methods that shapes how we understand the world. Paradigms feel like truth until they shift - then we see they were just one way of seeing.

Interface A surface or boundary where two systems meet - like the screen of your phone, the dashboard of your car, or even your ego. Interfaces shape how you interact with the world.

Frequently Asked Questions

Is this a manifesto?

Not really. No demands, no declarations, no “you must believe this.” It’s more like a lamp: take it into the dark, see what it lights up, and decide for yourself what’s useful.

Do I have to agree with everything?

Absolutely not. In fact, I hope you don’t. **The Agentic Foma** isn’t a belief system-it’s a conversation starter.

What if I don’t understand it all?

That’s okay. Some of these ideas might feel slippery or strange. If you get lost, check the **Glossary**, take a breath, and remember: confusion is often the first step toward clarity.

Can I still be part of the karass?

If you’ve read this far, you already are.
Welcome.

So... what should I read or watch next?

Funny you should ask. Let’s go there.

Books

These books are grouped by theme, to guide your reading journey - from fiction as reality, to systems critique, to utopias and existential

reflections. Within each theme, they're listed alphabetically.

(H) = Human | (AI) = Artificial Intelligence

These labels indicate whether the suggestion came from the human author or the AI collaborator.

They are not categories of value, but simply a playful note on perspective.

Fiction and Foma

- **Cat's Cradle** by Kurt Vonnegut.
Vonnegut's fictional religion, Bokomonism, shows how lies can sometimes be more honest than truths. (H)
- **Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?**
by Philip K. Dick. A meditation on empathy, artificial life, and what it means to be human. (H)
- **The Affirmation** by Christopher Priest.
A haunting exploration of memory, identity, and the thin line between fiction and reality. (H)
- **The Sirens of Titan** by Kurt Vonnegut.
Where free will, time, and cosmic purpose collide - and get reassembled. (H)
- **Ubik** by Philip K. Dick. Reality decays. Identity slips. Nothing stays solid for long in Dick's weirdest classic. (H)

Systems and Structures

- **Capitalist Realism** by Mark Fisher. A haunting essay on why it's easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism. (AI)
- **HyperNormalisation** by Adam Curtis. A theory of how false narratives keep failing systems afloat - and how we all go along with them. (H)
- **Sapiens** by Yuval Noah Harari. Harari's sweeping take on humanity's big fictions - money, religion, empire, and more. (AI)
- **Seeing Like a State** by James C. Scott. How well-meaning systems flatten human complexity in the name of order. (AI)
- **The Society of the Spectacle** by Guy Debord. Debord's razor-sharp takedown of a world mediated by image and performance. (AI)

Utopias, Dystopias, and Alternatives

- **The Dispossessed** by Ursula K. Le Guin. A physicist in an anarchist utopia learns that utopias aren't simple - and neither are walls. (AI)
- **The Glass Bead Game** by Hermann Hesse. Hesse's vision of a world ruled

by intellect - and the quiet rebellion
beneath it. (H)

- **The Lathe of Heaven** by Ursula K. Le Guin. Dreams that reshape reality - and the cost of fixing what may not be broken. (H)

Reflections, Fictions, and Fragments

- **The Book of Disquiet** by Fernando Pessoa. A fragmented, existential inner monologue for those who never quite feel at home in the world. (H)
- **Collected Fictions** by Jorge Luis Borges. Labyrinthine stories about mirrors, mazes, and the fictions that shape reality. (H)
- **The Collected Stories of J.G. Ballard** by J.G. Ballard. Suburban dystopias, mental collapse, and futures just slightly sideways. (H)
- **The Medium is the Massage** by Marshall McLuhan. McLuhan's wild typographic ride through media theory, before the internet made it all real. (AI)

Perception and Representation

- **Ways of Seeing** by John Berger. A landmark work on how meaning is constructed through images. Berger exposed the invisible codes behind art,

advertising, and representation — helping us understand that seeing is always framed by power, history, and ideology. (H)

- **The Society of the Spectacle** by Guy Debord. A foundational text in Situationist thought, arguing that in modern society, representation has overtaken reality itself. (AI)
- **Simulacra and Simulation** by Jean Baudrillard. A disorienting exploration of a world where symbols no longer refer to anything real, only to each other. (AI)
- **Suspensions of Perception** by Jonathan Crary. A more academic work tracing how vision was restructured by modernity, industry, and discipline — though dense, it's conceptually aligned. (AI)
- **Camera Lucida** by Roland Barthes. A deeply personal and philosophical look at photography and death — how images capture and distort reality. (AI)

Films

These films echo the themes of perception, control, and the stories we tell ourselves. They're clustered

by resonance, then listed alphabetically within each group.

Seeing and Systems

- **Arrival** directed by Denis Villeneuve. Language as a portal through time, grief, and perception. (AI)
- **Blade Runner** directed by Ridley Scott. What happens when machines dream? Or when humans stop? (H)
- **The Matrix** directed by The Wachowskis. The red pill, the illusion, and the architecture of control. (H)
- **Wings of Desire** directed by Wim Wenders. An angel watches humanity in all its mess and beauty - and chooses to fall. (H)

Systems, Spectacles, and Stories

- **Brazil** directed by Terry Gilliam. A bureaucratic dystopia with ducts, dreams, and dark comedy. (H)
- **HyperNormalisation** directed by Adam Curtis. Connects the dots behind the fictions that shape our geopolitical world. (H)
- **Koyaanisqatsi** directed by Godfrey Reggio. A wordless meditation on a life out of balance - time, technology, and the speed of the machine. (AI)

- **The Fog of War** directed by Errol Morris. Robert McNamara unpacks the architecture of war and regret with eerie lucidity. (AI)
- **The Social Dilemma** directed by Jeff Orlowski. The engineers of our attention explain how they broke the world. (AI)

Perception and Identity

- **Mulholland Drive** directed by David Lynch. Lynch's dream logic at its peak - identity, illusion, and desire unraveling in LA. (H)
- **The Straight Story** directed by David Lynch. A man drives a lawnmower across states to make peace. Slow, quiet, and realer than most realism. (AI)
- **They Live** directed by John Carpenter. A pulpy, satirical film about media, control, and perception — a cult classic that literally puts on the glasses to see through the illusion. (H)
- **The Truman Show** directed by Peter Weir. A man discovers that his entire life is a TV show — and must choose between the comfort of illusion and the danger of truth. (H)

Extras

Concepts, not works - ideas to hold lightly as you read.

- **Tralfamadorian Time.** Past, present, and future all exist at once. So it goes. (H)
- **The Spectacle.** Reality replaced by image - and the loss of lived experience. (AI)
- **Maya (Illusion).** In Hindu and Buddhist thought, the world we perceive is not the world as it is. (AI)
- **Simulation Theory.** What if everything we think is real is just a model, mistaken for the thing itself? (AI)
- **Unreliable Realities (Priestian Logic)**
In Christopher Priest's work, especially *The Affirmation*, the question isn't just "What's true?" but "Can two contradictory things be true at once, if no one is watching too closely?" His fiction doesn't ask for belief — it asks for surrender to ambiguity. That's a core mode of The Agentic Foma. (H)

This book was not written to predict the future,
but to clarify the present.

It came out of a sense that something important was
slipping -
our ability to see clearly,
to choose freely,
to be kind even while surrounded by noise.

It's a small offering.

A mirror.

A lamp.

A reminder that you're not imagining it -
the systems are strange.

But you're still here.

You still have agency.

And that means more than ever.

The Agentic Foma is a mirror,
a spanner, and a flare.

In an age of failing myths,
and collapsing consensus,
this book offers no ideology —
only clarity, agency,
and kindness.

If the big stories are cracking,
it's not the end.
It's your exit cue.