Joy Requires Reduced Action Coupling

Selected M-ZRT Exercises and Environmental Constraints

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This document is organized as follows:

A Regime Theory of Joy is a theoretical framework I developed independently to explain the mechanisms underlying joy. It proposes that joy is not merely a reward state but a distinct access regime. According to this framework, the emergence of joy depends on the temporary suspension of premature cognitive closure. When evaluative closure processes (Z) are sufficiently reduced, the state is able to continue developing until it undergoes a threshold-like transition into autonomous deployment.

The second contribution of this work is the proposal of a task designed to induce joy.

Before Beginning the Task

This task is hypothesized to facilitate a transition toward a distinct brain regime in which comparison, anticipation, and evaluation temporarily become less dominant, allowing a mode of functioning in which optimization is temporarily suspended.

Consequently, approaching the protocol as a problem to solve already shifts cognition away from the regime it is intended to produce. Constructing hierarchies has the same effect, since hierarchies depend on comparison. Similarly, questions such as "Which exercise should I do?" or "How often should I perform it?" engage the very cognitive processes that the protocol is designed to suspend.

The protocol therefore begins by treating all available options as equally acceptable. Only from this position can the task begin.

Not performing an exercise is not considered a failure but simply one of the acceptable outcomes.

Before beginning, it may be helpful to say to yourself once, "There is nothing to optimize here." This sentence is intended as a single local action requiring no verification.

Repeating it in the hope of making the protocol more effective would itself reintroduce optimization into the task.

An attempt to optimize would therefore shift cognitive processing back toward the opposite regime.

Protocol

Do not repeat the exercises excessively. Several attempts spread over a period of days may be required before a meaningful transition occurs. The principal cause of failure is doing too much, therefore perform no more than one attempt per day.

The aim is to induce a regime shift. It is therefore expected that the current regime may resist the attempt rather than cooperate with it. It may even encourage abandoning the exercise altogether.

Simply acknowledge these reactions and continue normally. If the protocol feels confusing, raises questions, or even seems somewhat unpleasant, this is consistent with the hypothesis that the current regime does not readily accommodate the temporary suspension of optimization.

One way the current regime may maintain itself is by subtly reducing interest in the exercise. Thoughts such as "This isn't for me" may arise. If the goal is to facilitate a regime shift, it is preferable to continue despite these reactions, without attempting to suppress or analyze them.

The current regime is generally able to optimize rest, but not to suspend optimization itself. Yet this is precisely what the M-ZRT (Minimal Z-Reduction Task) is designed to do.

The exercises are intentionally minimal. As with falling asleep, additional effort or complexity may interfere with the process rather than facilitate it.

The Core Task

Each exercise can be repeated a few times before moving on to the next. There is no need to count repetitions. Simply let the exercise last for a short while, then continue to the next one. There is no need to memorize the exercises. Simply complete them one at a time.

- Read short text fragments from different places. They do not need to form a coherent whole.
- Perform a small arbitrary movement. The movement does not need to change anything.
- For a brief moment, nothing needs to become the first priority.
- Briefly notice an object before it becomes something to use. "Just an object”.
- For a brief moment, look at a completely ordinary object as if it were highly important.

- Look at the time without immediately judging whether it is early, late, good, bad, useful, or problematic**.**
- Launch a music video. For the first ten seconds, let it begin before deciding anything about it. Media begins → No evaluation. Volume → No adjustment.

These exercises briefly disrupt automatic action recruitment, temporarily reducing the level of Z and thereby increasing the probability of a transition to another regime. By contrast, when an exercise is performed with analysis, anticipation, or verification of its effects, a different set of action policies is automatically recruited, increasing Z instead.

For example, if during the exercise *"For a brief moment, look at a completely ordinary object as if it were highly important,"* you notice yourself evaluating it, for example by searching for reasons why the object might be important, the exercise has become too elaborate. The task is intended to remain brief and immediate. Once it turns into repeated analysis or justification, it no longer functions as intended.

Rationale for the Task

In *A Regime Theory of Joy*, joy refers to a specific positive affective state characterized by a pleasant sensation radiating from the chest together with heightened olfactory sensitivity. This distinctive phenomenology helps, at least in part, to rule out an explanation based solely on a placebo effect or on the novelty of the task.

The increase in olfactory sensitivity may reflect greater engagement of the hippocampal system. If so, the hippocampus, through its role in contextual memory and associative processing, could enrich the variety and diversity of subjective experience, producing a broader range of positive experiential "textures."

In this state, colors may appear exceptionally vivid, almost as though they had a sweet taste. Odors can evoke the feeling of entering another world, and small shimmering objects may spontaneously elicit particularly rich mental imagery.

This may explain why certain moments, particularly during childhood, when access to this state is hypothesized to be easier, are often experienced and remembered as unique.

A common assumption is that the environment itself produces this feeling. The framework proposed here instead suggests that the environment primarily acts as an amplifier of a brain configuration that is already accessible.

In principle, this hypothesis implies that it could be theoretically possible to remain in such a positive state indefinitely.

Joy as a Problem of Causal Rigidity

According to **A Regime Theory of Joy**, the principal obstacle to the emergence of joy is neither a lack of reward nor a dopaminergic deficit, but the progressive rigidification of acquired causal chains. Through learning, the brain accumulates countless

cause-and-effect relationships that organize perception and behavior. This cumulative rigidity is represented by the variable **Z**.

As **Z** increases, it progressively recruits a control regime specialized for prediction, optimization, and the production of reliable actions. This regime is incompatible with the ease regime associated with joy.

Imagine a desk containing a computer and a pencil. Each object recruits a large network of learned causal relationships, action tendencies, and predictions. A pencil is typically assigned less value than a computer and is therefore treated as more easily replaceable. It is grasped in a particular way, used while monitoring spelling, returned to its usual location, and often checked afterward to ensure it has not been misplaced.

These rules are also linked to object categorization. A pencil is perceived as "just a pencil," whereas a computer is regarded as valuable because of its many functions. Each object therefore automatically recruits its customary meaning together with the actions normally associated with it.

As learning accumulates, behavior becomes increasingly organized around local optimization. Each selected action automatically recruits the next preferred action policy.

The **M-ZRT** introduces brief discontinuities into these chains before they become fully stabilized.

Originality of the theoretical framework. To the best of our knowledge, this framework is the first to identify action coupling as a primary determinant of access to joy and to derive from this principle a systematic set of behavioral perturbations intended to reduce action coupling and thereby facilitate access to joy.

Why the M-ZRT Targets Optimization

Some exercises briefly perturb object categories, others interrupt familiar action sequences, while others deliberately leave a sequence incomplete. Together, these micro-perturbations are hypothesized to reduce the rigidity of the underlying action structure, thereby increasing the probability that the ease regime will emerge.

Each M-ZRT exercise is effective only if the brain treats it as a minor, inconsequential perturbation. This is the central challenge of the method. It is also difficult because it runs counter to the principles of flow, a deeply ingrained mode of operation. For this reason, the task is psychologically counterintuitive.

If the exercises are approached too seriously, the brain naturally reinstates comparison, evaluation, prediction, and monitoring. According to the theory, this reactivates the control regime that competes with the ease regime. From that point onward, the task no longer increases the probability of entering a state compatible with joy, it may even reduce it.

Interestingly, many people find it easier to complete a complex task than to introduce a small arbitrary perturbation into an ongoing action. For some, solving a puzzle or meditating requires less effort than walking in a slightly different direction for two seconds.

The theoretical formulation is also important because it provides precise design principles for behavioral exercises. For example, an instruction such as "drink a sip of coffee" primarily recruits action execution, whereas "drink a sip of coffee without checking for any effect afterward" additionally targets evaluative monitoring. Small differences in wording can therefore engage different mechanisms.

Conclusion

Once these exercises are understood and performed naturally, they may already have been sufficient to produce a brief episode of joy, or even to open the ease regime.

They can be applied across a wide variety of contexts, and some target the mechanisms of action more directly and more strongly than others.

The broader objective is to maintain the ease regime even in evaluative environments, see Table 1, a problem that the present theoretical framework naturally seeks to address.

References

Morin, F. (2026). A Regime Theory of Joy: The Ease Regime as a Permissive Control Configuration. SSRN,http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.6711318

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Appendix 1 Evaluative Environments

Table 1: Entry Condition and Stability of the Regime

Element	Prevents entry	Disrupts an already open regime	Hypothesized mechanism

Having a "priority"	Yes	Yes	Action hierarchy, selection of a dominant goal
Preferring one place	Yes	Yes	Value assignment, comparison, selection
Preferring one person	Yes	Yes	Social hierarchy, relational valuation, implicit expectations
Preferring one object	Yes	Yes	Value assignment, selective focus
Working toward a goal considered more important or meaningful than others	Yes	Yes	Hierarchical organization of action around a global objective
Working with a sense of progress	Yes	Yes	Progress monitoring, accumulation, comparison with a previous state
Working while keeping the action local	Often No	Often No	Action remains confined to the present moment, without accumulation or a global objective
Going somewhere for a specific purpose	Yes	Yes	Goal-directed movement, anticipation of an outcome
Having a scheduled appointment	Yes	Yes	Temporal anticipation, maintenance of a future intention

Expecting an effect, for example expecting to enjoy the sun or expecting music to improve one's mood	Yes	Yes	Outcome anticipation, implicit verification of the expected effect
Viewing an object primarily as useful	Yes	Yes	Functional recruitment, action preparation
Decorating as a way of optimizing the environment	Yes	Yes	Environmental correction, search for the best arrangement
Being meticulous or perfectionistic	Yes	Yes	Verification, correction, high standards
Using social media	Yes	Yes	Social comparison, novelty, variable rewards, implicit evaluation
Watching the news	Yes	Yes	Vigilance, continuous evaluation, event salience
Shopping	Yes	Yes	Comparison, choice, optimization, value assignment
Meditating as a goal-directed practice or technique	Yes	Yes	Attentional control, monitoring of internal state

Reading novels	Yes	Yes	Narrative construction, anticipation, mental continuity
Watching films, excluding absurd content	Yes	Yes	Narrative recruitment, engagement with characters' goals
Non-absurd humor	Yes	Variable	Context processing, incongruity resolution, social judgment
Old-fashioned, naive television films	Often No	Often No	Low narrative pressure, low perceptual optimization, familiar and undemanding content
Watching a music video	Variable to No	Often No	Sensory stimulation, limited narrative continuity, perceptual engagement
Listening actively to music, rather than as background	Yes	Variable	Voluntary attentional orientation, expectation of an effect, prioritized emotional processing
Listening to music in the background	Often No	Often No	Low attentional recruitment, passive integration into the environment

Taking medication	Yes	Variable	Expectation of an effect, goal-directed regulation of internal state
Intentionally holding a posture	Yes	Variable	Sustained motor control, maintenance of an instruction
Chronic symptoms	Yes	Variable to Yes	Recurrent bodily monitoring, attention repeatedly drawn to the body
Headache	No	No, may paradoxically increase joy	Empirical exception, possible contrast effect or altered relationship to bodily sensations
High temperature	Yes	Yes	Physiological discomfort, thermoregulation, increased bodily attentional recruitment
Low temperature	Yes	Variable to Yes	Thermoregulation, bodily discomfort, increased physiological vigilance
Searching for the "right" level of difficulty in a game	Yes	Yes	Experience optimization, difficulty calibration, search for an optimal challenge level

Viewing an open landscape, such as the sea, plains, mountains, or the horizon	Often No	Often No	Perceptual openness, low functional recruitment
Viewing a large open structure, such as a cathedral, historic train station, or spacious hall	Variable to No	Often No	Sense of space, perceptual exploration, low immediate action pressure
Viewing a highly optimized large building, such as office buildings, modern shopping centers, or industrial complexes	Yes	Variable to Yes	Functional salience, visible optimization, instrumental purpose embedded in

Appendix 2 Catalog

Cognitive Operators

Although the catalog contains many individual exercises, they are not independent techniques. Most are variants of a smaller number of cognitive operators. Each operator briefly perturbs a specific form of automatic recruitment while minimizing cognitive effort. The same operator can be instantiated in many different contexts.

Cognitive operator	Example exercises
Functional optimization	Before Function, Object Without a Task, Clock as an Object, Pause Before Utility
Selection optimization	Cursor Passing, Either Side

Priority optimization	Nothing First, Nothing Else Becomes Important
Completion optimization	The Action Is Enough, Enough Already, No Second Step
Expectation optimization	What Appears Appears, Nothing Needs to Happen Next
Action anticipation optimization	Before the Next Action
Verification optimization	Continue Without Checking, Check the Time Once
Evaluation optimization	Before Evaluation, Time Without Evaluation
Search optimization	Small Curiosity, Question Without Answer
Interpretive optimization	Meaning Left Open, Unfinished Meaning
Narrative optimization	Paragraph Fragments
Semantic optimization	Unknown Difference, Category Softening, Not Quite What It Is
Representational optimization	MP4 File
Instrumentality optimization	Micro-Movement

Salience optimization	Equal Importance, Functional to Incidental, Treat an Ordinary Object as Highly Important
Relevance optimization	Equal Relevance
Grouping optimization	Several Objects Together
Distinctiveness optimization	One Among Many
Familiarity optimization	Newly Encountered
Time optimization	One Time Among Others

Selection of Exercises for an RPG Game Environment

- Treat a Completely Ordinary Object as Highly Important
- What Appears Appears
- The Action Is Enough (Briefly experience a small action as complete in itself.)
- Look at the Time Without Immediately Evaluating It
- Functional to Incidental (Briefly notice one visual detail that is currently irrelevant to the ongoing action.)

Object Without a Task *(Functional optimization)*

Briefly notice an object without immediately relating it to a use or purpose.

Normally

Object → Purpose → Function → Action recruitment

Briefly

Object → Purpose temporarily less important

Mechanism

Normally, familiar objects are rapidly processed through their practical function. Their role in ongoing behavior becomes available almost immediately. This exercise briefly weakens that recruitment before it fully stabilizes.

Unknown Difference *(Semantic optimization)*

For a brief moment, notice an object as if it were slightly different from usual, without identifying how.

Chair → Slightly different

Normally

Object → Familiar object

Briefly

Object → Unspecified difference

Mechanism

Normally, familiar objects rapidly recruit a stable identity. This exercise briefly weakens that recruitment by allowing a difference to be sensed without selecting or explaining what it is.

Why it is minimal

Because no specific difference is identified, there is little opportunity for interpretation, imagination, or analysis.

Continue Without Checking *(Verification optimization)*

Take a sip of a drink, then continue what you were doing without checking whether anything has changed.

Take a sip, continue. Put the book down, continue. Sit down, continue. Close the door, continue. Turn the page, continue. Check the time once.

Normally

Action → Check for effect → Evaluation → Next action

Briefly

Action → Next action

Mechanism

Normally, actions that could produce an internal effect automatically recruit a brief verification process. This exercise interrupts that recruitment by allowing the action to end without checking for any immediate change.

Meaning Left Open *(Interpretive optimization)*

Briefly let something feel as though there is more to understand. Then continue normally.

Normally

Experience → Interpretation → Meaning

Briefly

Experience → Meaning left open

Mechanism

Normally, perception rapidly recruits an interpretation that makes an experience feel complete and understood. This exercise briefly suspends that recruitment, allowing the impression that further meaning could exist without selecting or searching for it.

Question Without Answer *(Question optimization)*

A question appears internally. It can remain unanswered for a moment.

Normally

Question → Search → Answer

Briefly

Question → Unanswered

Mechanism

Normally, the appearance of a question automatically recruits a search for an answer. This exercise briefly interrupts that recruitment, allowing the question to remain present without initiating a search.

Why it is minimal

Because the question is left untouched rather than actively suppressed, there is little opportunity for analysis or deliberate problem solving.

One Time Among Others *(Time optimization)*

The current time is simply one time among many.

Normally

Current time → Priority → Planning

Briefly

Current time → One time among many

Mechanism

Normally, the present moment is automatically treated as the most relevant point in time, recruiting planning and preparation for what comes next. This exercise briefly weakens that recruitment by allowing the current time to lose its privileged status.

Why it is minimal

Nothing about the current time changes. Only its immediate priority is briefly allowed to become less dominant.

Clock as an Object *(Functional optimization)*

Briefly observe the clock itself, screen, windows bar, watch, or phone display as a visible object rather than as a source of information.

Normally

Clock → Current time → Planning

Briefly

Clock → Visible object

Mechanism

Normally, clocks automatically recruit information about the current time, which in turn supports planning and action. This exercise briefly weakens that recruitment by allowing the clock to remain simply a visible object.

Before the Next Action *(Action anticipation optimization)*

Briefly let the next action remain open. Then continue normally.

Normally

Current action → Next action → Action recruitment

Briefly

Current action → Next action temporarily open → Continue

Mechanism

Normally, completing one action rapidly recruits the next one, creating a continuous chain of behavior. This exercise briefly delays that recruitment, allowing the current action to end before the next one becomes organized.

Why it is minimal

Because the next action is only briefly left open, not prevented or replaced, the normal flow of activity resumes naturally within a moment.

Before the Next Action *(Action anticipation optimization)*

For a brief moment, what comes next remains unspecified. Then continue normally.

Normally

Current action → Next action → Action recruitment

Briefly

Current action → What comes next remains unspecified → Continue

Mechanism

Normally, completing one action rapidly recruits what comes next, organizing behavior into a continuous sequence. This exercise briefly delays that recruitment, allowing the current action to end before the next step becomes specified.

Why it is minimal

Because what comes next is only left briefly unspecified, not prevented or replaced, the normal flow of activity resumes naturally within a moment.

Pause Before Utility *(Functional optimization)*

After picking up an object, let it remain in your hand briefly before using it.

Normally

Object in hand → Use → Action recruitment

Briefly

Object in hand → Brief pause → Use

Mechanism

Normally, picking up an object almost immediately recruits its intended use. This exercise briefly delays that recruitment, allowing the object to remain simply held before its practical function becomes dominant.

What Appears Appears *(Expectation optimization)*

Open something. Whatever is there can simply be what is there. Then continue normally.

Normally

Open → Expectation → Evaluation → Further recruitment

Briefly

Open → What appears appears → Continue

Mechanism

Normally, opening a drawer, page, window, or application rapidly recruits expectations and evaluation of what is found. This exercise briefly delays that recruitment, allowing whatever appears to be encountered before it becomes something to assess or respond to.

Why it is minimal

Because nothing is added, interpreted, or suppressed, perception follows its normal course within a moment. The exercise simply postpones the immediate recruitment of expectation and evaluation.

Cursor Passing *(Selection optimization)*

Let the cursor pass over an object, NPC, skill, menu option, or button without selecting it.

Normally

Cursor over target → Selection → Action recruitment

Briefly

Cursor over target → No selection → Continue

Mechanism

Normally, moving the cursor over an interactive element rapidly prepares selection and the actions that follow. This exercise briefly delays that recruitment, allowing the cursor to pass over the element without immediately committing to it. The only risk is doing it too slowly or in an intentionally theatrical way. The movement should remain natural.

Peripheral Importance *(Salience)*

For a brief moment, let a nearby object seem highly important while seeing it peripherally.

Normally

Object → Direct gaze → Salience → Attention recruitment

Briefly

Peripheral object → High importance

Mechanism

Normally, objects that become important automatically recruit direct visual attention. The eyes tend to orient toward what appears most behaviorally relevant. This exercise briefly weakens that coupling. The object becomes highly important while remaining in peripheral vision, allowing salience and gaze direction to become temporarily dissociated.

Functional to Incidental *(Salience optimization)*

Briefly look at one visual detail that is currently irrelevant to the action you are performing.

Normally

Current action → Relevant visual information → Action recruitment

Briefly

Current action → Incidental visual detail → Continue

Mechanism

Normally, attention is drawn toward visual information that is relevant to the current action, while incidental details remain in the background. This exercise briefly shifts attention to one incidental detail, allowing it to become momentarily noticeable before attention naturally returns to the ongoing task.

Why it is minimal

Because attention shifts only briefly to an incidental detail, without interrupting or replacing the current activity, normal task-directed perception resumes naturally within a moment.

Nothing Else Becomes Important *(Priority optimization)*

A small action ends. For a brief moment, nothing else becomes important. Then continue normally.

Normally

Small action ends → Next priority → Action recruitment

Briefly

Small action ends → Nothing else becomes important → Continue

Mechanism

Normally, as soon as a small action is completed, another object, task, or goal quickly becomes the next priority, organizing subsequent behavior. This exercise briefly delays that recruitment, allowing the completed action to stand on its own before another priority takes its place.

Why it is minimal

Because no new priority is introduced or suppressed, only briefly delayed, the normal organization of behavior resumes naturally within a moment.

The Action Is Enough *(Completion optimization)*

Briefly experience a small action as complete in itself.

Normally

Small action → Continuation → Further action recruitment

Briefly

Small action → Complete in itself → Continue

Mechanism

Normally, a small action is immediately treated as part of a larger sequence, preparing what comes next. This exercise briefly delays that recruitment, allowing the action to stand as a complete event before becoming part of a broader chain of activity.

Why it is minimal

Because the action is only briefly experienced as complete in itself, not isolated or prolonged, the normal flow of behavior resumes naturally within a moment.

Either Side *(Selection optimization)*

For a brief moment, either side of the street seems equally acceptable.

Normally

Situation → Preferred direction → Action recruitment

Briefly

Situation → Either direction acceptable → Continue

Mechanism

Normally, the environment rapidly recruits a preferred direction, preparing movement toward one option rather than another. This exercise briefly delays that recruitment, allowing both directions to remain equally acceptable before one is naturally selected.

Small Curiosity (Search optimization)

Briefly notice a small question or curiosity. It can remain unanswered for a moment. Then continue normally.

Normally

Question or curiosity → Search → Further thought recruitment

Briefly

Question or curiosity → Remains unanswered briefly → Continue

Mechanism

Normally, even a small question or feeling of curiosity rapidly recruits a search for an answer, drawing on memory, reasoning, or further exploration. This exercise briefly delays that recruitment, allowing the question or curiosity to remain present without immediately initiating a search.

Micro-Movement (Instrumentality optimization)

Perform a small arbitrary movement. The movement does not need to change anything. Then continue normally.

Normally

Movement → Purpose → Expected effect → Further action recruitment

Briefly

Movement → Movement itself → Continue

Mechanism

Normally, even small movements are organized around an expected purpose or effect. This exercise briefly delays that recruitment, allowing the movement to occur without needing to accomplish anything before normal goal-directed behavior resumes.

Why it is minimal

Because the movement is not prevented from having a purpose later, but only performed briefly without one, ordinary action resumes naturally within a moment.

MP4 File (Representational optimization)

Briefly remember a familiar video as simply an MP4 file. Then continue normally.

Normally

Video → Meaning → Expectations → Further recruitment

Briefly

Video → MP4 file → Continue

Mechanism

Normally, remembering a familiar video rapidly recruits its content, emotions, and associated expectations. This exercise briefly shifts the representation toward its physical or digital form, allowing it to be experienced simply as a media file before its usual meaning becomes dominant.

Paragraph Fragments (Narrative optimization)

Read short text fragments from different places. They do not need to form a coherent whole.

Normally

Text fragments → Coherent narrative → Further meaning recruitment

Briefly

Text fragments → Separate fragments → Continue

Mechanism

Normally, reading rapidly recruits connections between successive pieces of text, organizing them into a coherent narrative or line of thought. This exercise briefly delays that recruitment, allowing each fragment to remain complete on its own without immediately becoming part of a larger whole.

Equal Importance (Salience optimization)

For a brief moment, let two nearby objects seem equally worthy of attention.

Normally

Multiple objects → One becomes more salient → Attention recruitment

Briefly

Multiple objects → Equal salience → Continue

Mechanism

Normally, attention rapidly assigns greater salience to one object, making it the primary focus while surrounding objects become less prominent. This exercise briefly delays that differentiation, allowing two nearby objects to remain equally worthy of attention before one naturally becomes more salient.

Nothing First (Priority optimization)

For a brief moment, nothing needs to become the first priority.

Normally

Multiple possibilities → One becomes the highest priority → Action recruitment

Briefly

Multiple possibilities → No first priority → Continue

Mechanism

Normally, the brain rapidly organizes available options by assigning one of them the highest priority, guiding subsequent attention and behavior. This exercise briefly delays that recruitment, allowing several possibilities to remain available before one naturally becomes the primary focus.

Why it is minimal

Because no priority is removed or replaced, only briefly left unspecified, the normal organization of behavior resumes naturally within a moment.

Before Function (Functional optimization)

Briefly notice an object before it becomes something to use.

Normally

Object → Use → Action recruitment

Briefly

Object → Briefly noticed → Use

Mechanism

Normally, familiar objects are rapidly perceived in terms of what they are for, automatically preparing the actions they afford. This exercise briefly delays that recruitment, allowing the object to be perceived before it becomes something to use.

Why it is minimal

Because the object's practical use is only briefly delayed, not removed or replaced, normal perception and action resume naturally within a moment.

Before Evaluation (Evaluation optimization)

Launch a music video. For the first ten seconds, let it begin before deciding anything about it.

Normally

Music video begins → Evaluation → Preference → Further recruitment

Briefly

Music video begins → Briefly experienced → Evaluation can occur later

Mechanism

Normally, the first moments of a music video rapidly recruit evaluation, such as whether it is good, familiar, interesting, or worth continuing. This exercise briefly delays that recruitment, allowing the video to unfold before an evaluative judgment becomes dominant.

Why it is minimal

Because evaluation is only briefly delayed, not prevented or replaced, normal appreciation and decision-making resume naturally after a moment.

One Among Many (Distinctiveness optimization)

For a brief moment, this object is simply one object among many.

Normally

Object → Distinct object → Attention recruitment

Briefly

Object → One among many → Continue

Mechanism

Normally, attention rapidly distinguishes one object from its surroundings, allowing it to become a privileged target for perception and action. This exercise briefly reduces that distinctiveness, allowing the object to be experienced as simply one object among many before normal attentional organization resumes.

Why it is minimal

Because the object's distinctiveness is only briefly reduced, not eliminated or replaced, it naturally regains its ordinary significance within a moment.

Newly Encountered (Familiarity optimization)

For a brief moment, let this familiar object feel newly encountered.

Normally

Familiar object → Familiarity → Stable representation

Briefly

Familiar object → Newly encountered → Continue

Mechanism

Normally, familiar objects are rapidly recognized, recruiting stable representations based on repeated experience. This exercise briefly softens that recruitment, allowing the object to feel newly encountered before its usual familiarity becomes dominant.

Why it is minimal

Because familiarity is only briefly softened, not replaced or forgotten, normal recognition resumes naturally within a moment.

Several Objects Together (Grouping optimization)

Briefly notice several objects together before one becomes the focus.

Normally

Scene → One object becomes the focus → Attention recruitment

Briefly

Scene → Several objects noticed together → Continue

Mechanism

Normally, visual attention rapidly selects a single object as the primary focus, while surrounding objects recede into the background. This exercise briefly delays that recruitment, allowing several nearby objects to be perceived together before one naturally becomes dominant.

Nothing Needs to Happen Next (Expectation optimization)

For a brief moment, nothing needs to happen next.

Normally

Current moment → Expectation of what comes next → Further recruitment

Briefly

Current moment → No immediate expectation → Continue

Mechanism

Normally, ongoing experience rapidly recruits expectations about what should happen next, preparing attention and behavior for upcoming events. This exercise briefly delays that recruitment, allowing the present moment to stand on its own before expectations naturally re-emerge.

Equal Relevance (Relevance optimization)

For a brief moment, everything in the scene can be equally relevant.

Normally

Scene → Some elements become more relevant → Attention and action recruitment

Briefly

Scene → Equal relevance across the scene → Continue

Mechanism

Normally, perception rapidly assigns greater relevance to certain elements of a scene, guiding attention and preparing potential actions. This exercise briefly delays that recruitment, allowing the scene to be experienced without any single element becoming more relevant than the others.

Reference:

Morin, F. (2026). A Regime Theory of Joy: The Ease Regime as a Permissive Control Configuration. *SSRN*,http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.6711318 https://florianmorin.com/papers/regime-of-joy/

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