Recreating the Childhood Regime of Joy: A Practical Example of the Morin Z-Reduction Task

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Purpose

Many approaches in psychology assume that positive affect can be increased through structured techniques, regulation strategies, or optimized interventions. The present framework explores the opposite possibility. Certain forms of intense positive affect may be incompatible with instrumental control itself, and may only emerge when evaluative supervision temporarily collapses.

Under this view, the decline of childhood-like joy in adulthood would not primarily reflect reduced emotional capacity, but a shift toward continuous monitoring and optimization of behavior. The Morin Z-Reduction Task therefore does not attempt to produce joy directly. Instead, it attempts to briefly suspend instrumental framing so that the system may transiently operate under a control regime closer to the one often observed in childhood.

In adults, the brain tends to operate under a continuous monitoring regime that evaluates actions, intentions, and internal states. In the model proposed here, this regime differs from the one that typically characterizes childhood. Children appear to spend much more time in a mode where behavior unfolds without constant evaluation or goal supervision. In adults, however, this monitoring layer becomes dominant and can restrict access to strong positive affect.

The aim of the procedure is therefore not to create joy directly, but to briefly approach a regime closer to the one often observed in childhood. In that regime, actions are less supervised and experiences are less continuously evaluated. When the evaluative monitoring system detects that an individual is trying to produce or analyze a positive state, the state itself collapses. In that sense, the situation resembles a hide-and-seek dynamic: if the monitoring process recognizes the goal too clearly, the state disappears.

For this reason, the task cannot function as a conventional technique. Any activity that becomes a clear method, something to optimize, measure, or repeat systematically, tends to reinforce the adult monitoring regime. The procedure works only if it remains partially uncategorized by the system, closer to the loose and exploratory structure often present in childhood behavior.

The guiding idea is therefore indirect. The activity should subtly signal that no explicit method is being applied. If that signal becomes too explicit or rigidly repeated, it turns into a recognizable technique and the monitoring process quickly reasserts itself.

Several elements can help move the system in this direction. A very small sip of coffee may provide a mild increase in arousal that helps the transition across a threshold where positive affect becomes possible. At the same time, a video game or a cartoon introduces frequent small surprises and violations of expectation. These prediction errors disrupt rigid patterns of control and create a more exploratory mode of interaction.

Together, these elements approximate conditions that resemble aspects of the childhood regime: low deliberate control, exploratory engagement, and frequent small surprises. When this configuration appears over several days, it can occasionally allow the adult system to shift toward a state where joy is able to emerge more freely.

The task does not attempt to create joy directly. It attempts to temporarily suspend the adult evaluative regime so that the system can briefly operate under conditions closer to the childhood regime.

Also, many affect induction paradigms assume that positive states can be reliably produced through structured techniques or instructions. The present task explores a different possibility: that certain high-intensity positive states may only emerge when instrumental framing temporarily collapses.

First, let’s look at how children walk

Not in the vague sense of being energetic or playful, but in the precise way their walking seems ungoverned. They are not going somewhere in the way adults are. Their direction is provisional : they drift, stop, turn, speed up, slow down, not because it is better, but because something pulled them. It can be a sound, a line on the ground, a sudden thought. Walking bends around perception instead of perception being filtered to protect the walk.

Children do not walk efficiently, their pace is irregular. Two fast steps, then a pause. A detour for no reason. An abrupt stop that serves nothing. From an adult perspective it looks like wasted motion. From inside the system, nothing is being wasted because nothing is being optimized.

They also do not hold their posture together. Arms swing unevenly. Shoulders tilt. The head leads, then the feet catch up. No internal voice is checking alignment or correcting form. The body is not being graded, so it self organizes locally, moment to moment, without a global supervisor.

Children do not encode walking as instrumental. For an adult, walking is almost always subordinate to something else : arriving, exercising, being efficient, appearing normal, not blocking others. For a child, walking is often the activity itself. There is no hidden objective sitting above it, so no supervisory layer is required.

Self monitoring is not innate, it is trained. Posture correction, speed adjustment, gait normalization, “walk properly,” “don’t drag your feet,” “hurry up,” all of this installs an internal observer. Before that observer exists, there is nothing to optimize against. Movement runs locally, not globally evaluated.

Their error signals are permissive. Children tolerate inefficiency, detours, pauses, asymmetry. Tripping slightly, stopping abruptly, zig zagging, none of this is flagged as a problem unless an adult reacts. Without negative tagging, the system does not tighten. It stays loose because looseness has not yet been punished.

Also, there is no narrative continuity requirement. Adults walk inside a story, “I am going there,” or “I am late,” “I should be faster,” “this walk counts.” Children are not maintaining a timeline. Without narrative pressure, there is no need to regulate pace or direction to stay coherent.

Finally, children have not yet learned that experience should be useful. Adults implicitly expect walking to burn calories, clear the mind, improve mood, save time, look intentional. Children do not extract value from walking. Because nothing is being extracted, nothing needs to be optimized.

If the same logic is applied to a video-game

If the same logic is applied to, let's say, a FPS, a young child would approach the game in a very different way from an adult player. The difference is not skill or energy but the **absence of supervisory optimization**.

A child does not enter the match with a strategic objective. They are not trying to win the round, improve their ratio, practice aim, or learn the map. The match is not subordinate to performance. Movement therefore becomes provisional. The player runs somewhere because something on the screen pulled them: a strange corridor, a weapon lying on the floor, a sound behind a wall. Direction bends around perception rather than perception being filtered to maintain a plan.

Their movement would also be irregular. Instead of maintaining optimal routes or continuous combat rhythm, they might sprint forward, suddenly stop, spin around, jump in place, chase someone briefly, then abandon the chase halfway. The pacing would fluctuate because nothing is stabilizing it. Efficiency is not the reference frame.

Aim and combat would follow the same pattern. Shots would not be carefully controlled attempts to secure a kill. They might fire a rocket simply because the weapon feels funny, or because an explosion looks interesting in a corner of the map. They could shoot at walls, jump while firing, switch weapons randomly, or follow another player for a moment without trying to eliminate them. From an adult perspective this looks like bad play. From inside the system, nothing is wrong because nothing is being graded.

Posture inside the game also remains loose. An adult player keeps their character aligned with the goal: maintain cover, track enemies, control space. A child might strafe oddly, walk backward for a few seconds, spin the camera, or jump repeatedly while moving through a corridor. Control is local and moment-to-moment rather than globally supervised.

Importantly, the game is not encoded as instrumental. Adults play with hidden objectives layered above the activity: winning the match, proving skill, improving mechanics, maintaining reputation, or simply "playing properly." A child can treat the map itself as the activity. Because of this, errors are permissive. Dying repeatedly is not tagged as failure. Falling off a ledge, missing shots, wandering into danger, none of it tightens the system. The loop continues because there is no negative evaluation forcing correction.

There is also little narrative continuity. An adult maintains a story while playing: "I'm pushing this area," "I need that weapon," "I'm losing." A child may abandon a direction instantly when something else captures attention. The sequence of actions does not need to form a coherent plan.

Finally, nothing needs to be extracted from the session. Adults often expect the game to deliver something measurable: improvement, victory, efficiency, progress. A child does not require the activity to produce value. Because nothing is being extracted, nothing has to be optimized.

In that regime, UT99 becomes less like a competitive system and more like a **moving playground of stimuli**. Movement, perception, and action remain loosely coupled, constantly reorganizing around whatever appears next on the screen. That looseness is exactly what disappears when evaluative monitoring enters the loop.

This is the regime the task tries to approximate.

The idea is not to train skill or produce a better player. The task simply tries to recreate, for a few minutes, the same conditions in which action is not supervised by optimization. A short session is used because the adult system very quickly reinstalls goals, evaluation, and performance tracking if the activity lasts too long.

By keeping the task brief, the window remains closer to the childlike regime described above. Movement, perception, and decisions can stay provisional, guided locally by whatever appears on the screen rather than by a plan to win or improve.

Sometimes a small amount of coffee is added before the session. The purpose is not stimulation in the usual sense but vigilance. Slightly elevated alertness allows perception to remain vivid while the task itself remains short and non-instrumental.

In that sense, the task is simply an attempt to momentarily reproduce the loose interaction between perception and action that children display naturally, but within an adult nervous system that normally reinstalls optimization almost immediately.

The-M-ZRT: Practical Example

With a video-game

Download unreal tournament, quake or similar.

Open the game, remove HUD in the option.

No excessive muscle tension, including jaw and shoulders.

Play, without trying to win or to be competitive.

Move your shoulders with no rhythm for a few seconds while playing.

Drink a sip of coffee.

Continue to play a bit if you want, then close the game, and don't evaluate the result, simply forget about it and continue your day.

Do that only every 24h or so, for 1-3 minutes. Not everyday: skip a day randomly.

Nothing is supposed to happen. If you try to make it into a method or to improve the result, the task is already over.

You fail the task if:

You analyze it
You do it more than 3 minutes per day and more than one time per day
You try to improve the task
You follow the task "to get an effect"
You evaluate if you do the task right
You take too much coffee (more than a sip)
You take coffee everytime -> coffee must not be every day
You take coffee with the same timing -> don't think about the timing too much, or vary it
You do micro-mouvement multiple-times -> only once per session, you do one time, you continue to play without thinking about it anymore
You do micro-mouvements for too long (more than a few secondes)

With a cartoon

No excessive muscle tension, including jaw and shoulders.

Launch this cartoon video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hps_NyqEyKk (any absurd cartoon is accepted).

Play the video while occasionally clicking random spots on the timeline without trying to find anything.

Move your shoulders with no rhythm for a few seconds while watching.

Drink a sip of coffee.

Continue to watch a bit if you want, then close the video, and don't evaluate the result, simply forget about it and continue your day.

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One-time exercice

These are one-time exercises. They are meant to be performed only once in a lifetime and not repeated. Repetition would quickly transform them into a routine, which would reintroduce anticipation, monitoring, and evaluation. The value of these exercises lies precisely in their uniqueness: they occur once, without preparation, without optimization, and without expectation of reproducing the effect. After completing the exercise, it should simply be left behind and not revisited or analyzed later. Each exercise lasts only a few seconds. Comparison tends to re-activate the monitoring process, so avoid trying to choose between them for long. Not more than 2 exercises a day.

The exercices:

Look at the time, then proceed as if you had not seen it, without modifying your behavior.

Start a music video. As soon as you notice it becoming enjoyable, close it.

On youtube, deliberately choose a sub-optimal video. Do not optimize the selection.

Ask a question in your head and leave it unanswered.

Form a simple mental image (e.g., a red apple). Do not refresh it. Do not force it to stay. Simply notice when it fades. Do not try to extend it.

Open a book at random. Read one paragraph. Then jump to another random page and read another paragraph.

Look at an object, a thought, or a sound. Internally label it as ‘almost interesting’. Not interesting. Not neutral. Almost.

Look at an object, label it as the most important in the room. Don’t look at it directly.

In a noisy environment, pick one sound as primary (a voice, a bird, a distant car), treat it as central.

Perform a deliberately precise gesture with no utility (e.g., place an object perfectly parallel to an imaginary line). After it is done, make zero corrections, even if it is not perfect.

While walking, stop abruptly for no reason. Walk again without analyzing why you stopped.

Generate a feeling of recognition or approval, as if you were acknowledging someone, but with no recipient.

Generate the internal sense of ‘something important is about to happen’.

Notes

Participants are encouraged to minimize high-load obligations and socially evaluative contexts on test days.

Intrusive imagined social scenarios, such as arguments or anticipated confrontations, should also be reduced where possible. More broadly, avoiding news consumption, scrolling, comment reading, and exposure to social-media metrics may help limit re-engagement of evaluative monitoring.

Similarly, reducing repeated time-checking and unnecessary muscular tension, including jaw tension, may contribute to the same effect.

Repeated exposure to the protocol may decrease, rather than increase, the probability of entry. For this reason, sessions are spaced by approximately 24 hours, not as a training schedule, but to reduce procedural carryover and allow evaluative monitoring to settle between attempts.

Random omission of scheduled sessions is recommended to reduce temporal predictability and prevent schedule-based expectancy formation, which may otherwise reactivate anticipatory monitoring.

The first successful transition may occur only after several null sessions. Within a threshold framework, such delay is not interpreted as gradual training progress, but as evidence of an entry barrier. Repeated failure followed by a sudden discontinuity is therefore treated as expected behavior rather than as an anomaly.

Reference:
“The Morin Z-Reduction Task (M-ZRT): Suspension of Instrumental Framing as a Threshold Mechanism for Ease”:
https://florianmorin.com/papers/Morin-Z-Reduction-Task.html