The Morin Z-Reduction Task (M-ZRT): Suspension of Instrumental Framing as a Threshold Mechanism for Ease

A protocol designed to probe an evaluation-suppressed positive affect threshold, By Florian Morin
V3.1
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Evaluation kills entry, not the state: a threshold model of ease.
Canonical version: https://florianmorin.com/papers/Morin-Z-Reduction-Task.html

Abstract

Many adults report a qualitative discontinuity between childhood affect and adult affect. This protocol tests whether cumulative evaluative load, operationalized here as Z, modulates access to a distinct affective regime consistent with those reports. In adulthood, joy may not be absent but structurally occluded by chronically elevated Z, generated through evaluation, micro-optimization, and persistent self-monitoring.

Importantly, deliberate attempts to "stop evaluating" typically increase Z, because the attempt itself recruits evaluative control. The system therefore remains within the same regime. Access cannot be restored through insight or willpower alone, since both operate within the evaluative architecture.

An effective task must instead reduce Z indirectly, without triggering additional monitoring. If Z falls below a functional threshold, the system may undergo a regime shift into a qualitatively distinct affective state, consistent with reports of childhood-like joy.

Within this framework, any method claiming to access the ease regime while preserving continuous evaluation would contradict the proposed mechanism. Hence, this simple protocol is aimed at disrupting evaluative optimization (veto) in the subject.

Contents

Main Sections

Appendices

Operational definition (M-ZRT effect).

The M-ZRT effect is defined as a **threshold-like, discontinuous transition** into a distinct high positive affect regime, occurring under **monitoring-disruption constraints**. A positive hit requires: (i) **repeated clean failures** prior to first access, (ii) **abrupt onset** (discontinuity rather than gradual improvement), (iii) **qualitative distinctness** from ordinary good mood/arousal, (iv) **cross-context generalization** beyond the task within 24 hours, and (v) at least one instance of **persistence beyond acute stimulation** when caffeine is used. This definition is intended to prevent post-hoc relabeling of ordinary enjoyment as a “threshold transition”.

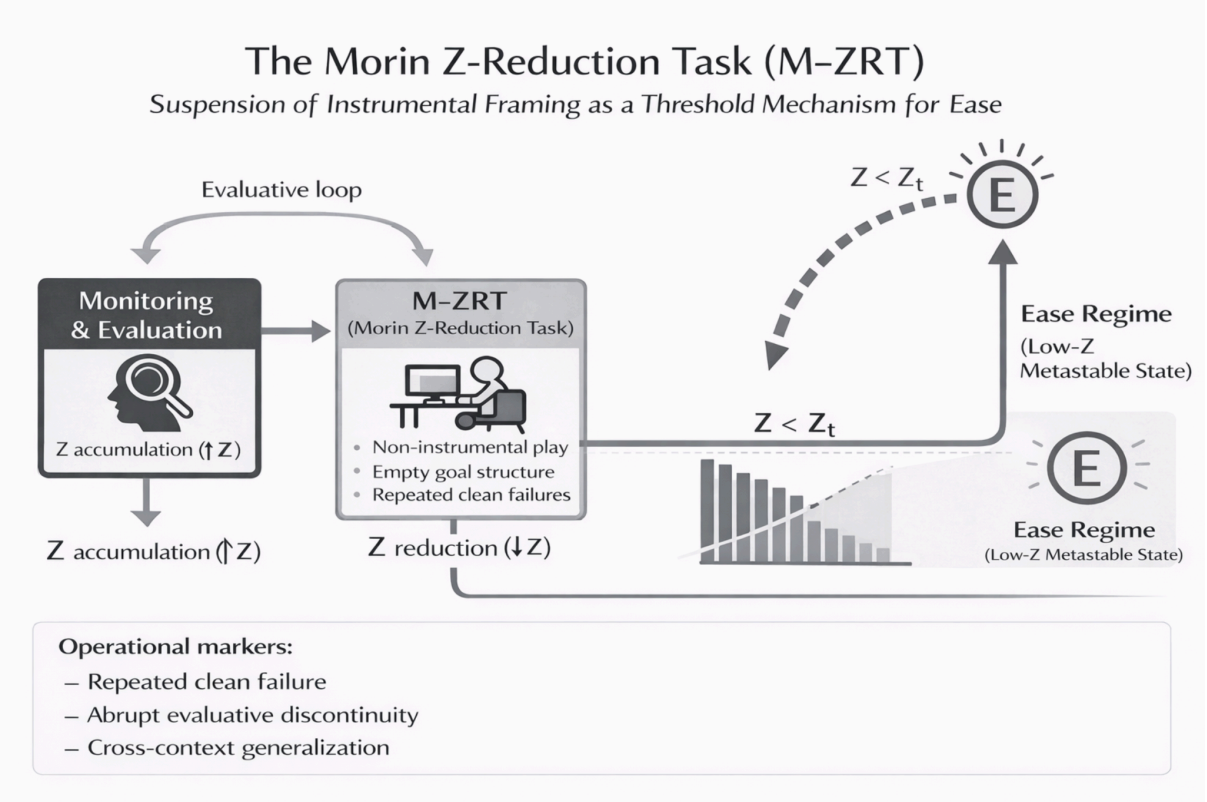

Figure 1. Canonical structure of the M-ZRT effect (Morin, 2026). The monitoring and evaluation loop blocks entry into the ease regime by increasing performance checking and micro-optimization. The Morin Z-Reduction Task (M-ZRT) disrupts monitoring long enough to permit a threshold-like transition. The predicted signature is repeated clean failures followed by an abrupt discontinuity, cross-context generalization, and persistence beyond acute stimulation.

In this framework, joy is not merely a complex system property, but a thresholded dynamic regime whose access depends on monitoring constraints and produces a discontinuous, falsifiable transition signature.

Aim

Aim.
To test whether evaluative monitoring suppresses entry into a distinct high positive affect regime ("ease"), producing a threshold-like access pattern (repeated failures followed by abrupt discontinuity).

Core manipulation.
Reduction of monitoring, performance checking, and micro-optimization during a standardized low-stakes task.

Duration.
3 days (after 2–4 days of brief concept acquisition exercises).

Primary outcome (minimal log).
Daily access (0/1), latency (min), duration (min), intensity (0–10), context.

Canonical signature (M-ZRT effect).
Repeated clean failures prior to first access, abrupt discontinuity, cross-context generalization within 24h, and persistence beyond acute stimulation (when caffeine/alcohol are used).

Key falsifiers (non-negotiable).
(1) Monitoring does not reduce success probability,
(2) caffeine alone reliably reproduces the effect without constraints,
(3) the effect correlates primarily with winning/performance,
(4) reports are indistinguishable from ordinary arousal or mood improvement.

Operational threshold marker (optional).

For lightweight logs, a transition can be flagged when a transition **access = 1 and intensity ≥ 7** occurs. This is intended as a standardized discontinuity marker, not as a full measurement model.

Warm-up, Concept Acquisition, 2 to 4 Days

Prior to the UT99 protocol, a brief 2 to 4 day concept-acquisition phase may be used to clarify, in practice, what is meant by suspending optimization. This phase should not be understood as training, since repetition may itself produce monitorization and reduce the probability of entry. Its function is only to provide limited exposure to the relevant mode of action. When applied lightly, such exposure may weaken evaluative carryover and facilitate later entry. When overused, it is likely to consolidate the monitor instead. The expected relation is therefore U-shaped.

Suitable examples include low-stakes, non-instrumental micro-tasks that interrupt optimization without becoming procedures to be mastered, such as stopping music at

the moment it becomes especially rewarding, leaving a trivial action unfinished, or making an arbitrary low-consequence selection without post hoc evaluation.

Structural Constraint: Single-Use Perturbation

Introduce, at an unspecified moment, a trivial action that will occur only once in the person's life. It must not be corrected, evaluated, or revisited. It must leave no procedural trace that could be reused. Repetition converts perturbation into procedure; procedure reinstates monitoring; therefore certain implementations are structurally valid only once.

The goal, besides attempting to relax monitoring, is to recognize the internal logic that reintroduces evaluative control:

1. Anticipatory commitment occurs when the participant decides too early. This reduces uncertainty, but also reintroduces evaluative control. Examples include predicting when the effect should appear, choosing too early between alternatives, or silently checking whether the protocol is working.

2. Premature closure: Instead of letting the task remain active and unresolved, the participant starts looking for an endpoint, a confirmation, or a sense that something has been completed. This introduces a goal of resolution. In this account, that shift may block the emergence of the target state.

3. Monitoring or performance-checking is the reflex to ask, "Am I doing it right?". Rather than remaining inside the task, the participant begins to supervise it from outside.

4. Meaning-generation refers to the reflexive tendency to assign a reason, meaning, or purpose to an action too quickly. Questions such as "Why did I do that?" transform the task from an enacted process into an interpreted object.

5. Correction or micro-adjustment refers to the reflex to "fix it just a little" after an action is completed. Instead of letting the action stand, the participant slightly revises, refines, or aligns it.

6. Salience veto, or down-regulation of specialness, refers to the reflexive tendency to neutralize an emerging sense of distinctiveness as soon as it appears. This may occur through explanation, comparison, or deliberate attempts at reproduction.

7. Expectancy resolution refers to the reflexive tendency to assume that once an expectancy state has been created, it must be resolved by an identifiable outcome. Once the participant begins searching for the outcome that will justify the anticipation, evaluative monitoring is likely to re-enter and alter the process.

M-ZRT Implementation Parameters

Fast-paced first-person shooters such as Unreal Tournament 99 or Quake may be especially effective because they combine continuous attentional capture with frequent prediction errors and a partial suspension of explicit optimization.

Very low-dose coffee can be used as a threshold helper. The dose should remain minimal, so that it does not become salient enough to trigger monitoring or explicit interpretation as a regulatory aid. It is preferable not to use it every time, as repeated use may be incorporated into the monitor.

M-ZRT can be implemented using any low-stakes environment satisfying constraints C1-C5. C1: no performance feedback, C2: no optimization goal, C3: low salience, C4: distraction-compatible, C5: monitoring stop rule. Any explicit performance-check or feeling-check operation terminates the session (or marks it as invalid).

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.

The task : Game with HUD off (ex : unreal tournament 1999)

1. Low instrumental stakes
   The action must not carry meaningful cost, reward, or consequence for the participant. Once success matters, evaluative control is likely to re-engage.

2. Brief suspension without explicit deliberation
   The task may introduce a short interruption, hesitation, or deviation, but not in a way that recruits sustained comparison, planning, or conscious problem-solving.

3. No performance criterion
   There must be no internal standard of doing the task "correctly." If the participant begins to ask whether the procedure is being executed properly, the relevant condition is lost.

4. No immediate self-evaluation
   The task must not be followed by checking, interpretation, or retrospective appraisal. Post hoc thoughts such as "was that right?" or "did it work?" count as invalidating resumptions of monitoring.

5. Minimal predictability without explicit surprise-seeking
   The implementation may contain mild arbitrariness or non-optimization, but it should not become a deliberate search for novelty, intensity, or effect.

6. Non-rhythmic and non-ritualized execution
   If repeated, the action must not stabilize into a rhythm, routine, or familiar induction sequence. Ritualization converts perturbation into a monitored technique.

7. Single-step permissiveness
   The participant should be able to perform the action and move on without correction, repetition, or refinement. Re-doing, improving, or adjusting the act reintroduces evaluative control.

8. Non-dependence on task-specific content
   No specific game, object, movement, or setting is theoretically essential. Any implementation is only an example if it satisfies the same functional constraints.

9. Absence of explicit expectation of effect
   The participant should not treat the action as a guaranteed trigger. Strong

expectation, countdown logic, or “the effect should occur now” framing recruits anticipatory monitoring.

10. Invalidity under monitoring capture
    Any implementation becomes theoretically irrelevant once it is used in a tracked, measured, optimized, or repeatedly tested manner. At that point, the procedure no longer relaxes the bottleneck, it becomes part of it.

Caffeine should be administered with variable timing, either prior to or following behavioral exercises.

Exemples in appendix 4.

Accordingly, the framework does not propose a fixed set of techniques. It proposes a class of admissible manipulations defined by functional constraints. Surface-level examples are expendable; the underlying requirement is a transient reduction in evaluative monitoring without replacement by a new monitored procedure.

. **Note**

Although early observations suggested that a single exposure may be sufficient, subsequent informal replications indicate that multiple attempts across days can be required before the first successful transition. This pattern is treated as an entry barrier rather than a graded training effect. The protocol separates task performance improvements from the hypothesized state transition: a learning account predicts gradual change tracking increasing mastery, whereas the present account predicts repeated failures followed by an abrupt, disproportionate shift in global affect. Low-dose caffeine is treated as optional contextual modulator, but not considered sufficient explanations given the reported persistence of the regime beyond acute pharmacological timescales. Persistence is assessed via a minimal daily log (access yes/no, latency, duration, intensity, context) and a weekly check-in (practice requirement, major lifestyle changes).

Appendix 1

Threshold vs Learning Model

Two competing accounts can explain changes in affect observed during structured engagement tasks.

Learning Account

Under a learning or skill-acquisition model, repeated exposure leads to graded improvement. Affective intensity should increase gradually as familiarity, fluency, or performance improves. The trajectory is expected to be monotonic and proportional to mastery. Improvements should correlate with measurable behavioral gains, such as faster reactions, better performance, or increased control.

Predicted signature under learning:

- Progressive improvement across sessions
- Performance-affect correlation
- No sharp discontinuities
- Effect reproducible through repetition alone

Threshold Regime-Shift Account

Under the present framework, affective access is gated by evaluative monitoring and micro-optimization. The relevant variable is not skill but evaluative load. When monitoring remains active, access probability remains low. When monitoring falls below a critical threshold under constrained conditions, a discontinuous transition may occur.

The predicted pattern is not graded improvement but:

- Repeated clean failures across sessions
- Abrupt onset rather than gradual build-up
- Magnitude disproportionate to task performance

- **Cross-context generalization (minimal criterion).**

  Generalization is defined as either (a) at least one spontaneous re-entry episode outside the task context within 24 hours, without deliberate induction attempt, or (b) a measurable global shift in baseline affect (≥ +2 intensity points relative to prior null days) persisting for several hours and not restricted to gameplay.

- Persistence beyond acute stimulation windows

The first successful transition may occur after multiple null sessions. This delay is interpreted not as training but as evidence of an entry barrier. Under a threshold model, repeated failure followed by sudden discontinuity is expected behavior, not anomaly.

Discriminating Predictions

The two accounts make incompatible predictions.

If affect tracks mastery, repetition, or performance metrics, the learning model is supported.

If affect appears as a discontinuous jump independent of skill progression, especially after multiple prior null attempts, the threshold model is supported.

A gradual improvement curve falsifies the regime-shift hypothesis. A brittle, state-dependent discontinuity challenges simple learning or stimulation explanations.

The present protocol is designed to differentiate these models empirically rather than rhetorically.

Taken together, these clarifications preserve the central claim: the intervention appears to modulate the probability of entering a distinct affective regime characterized by abrupt onset, unusually high intensity, and persistence beyond the timescale of transient pharmacological or contextual effects, even when multiple attempts are required before the first successful transition.

Appendix 2 Failures modes

A failure is actually informative because it suggests the task isn't a universal "joy button", it's a very specific key that only works when certain hidden prerequisites are already satisfied (low enough load, right expectancy structure, right micro-timing, etc.).

Also, a single failure can happen for reasons that have nothing to do with the core mechanism, like:

- they did it with the wrong "spirit" (too much trying / evaluation),
- they rushed it,
- they didn't follow the constraints precisely,
- they were in a high-load day (stress, sleep debt, future tasks in mind),

Most people will unknowingly "do it right" in an instrumental way. They try to succeed at the task, they try to feel something, they try to optimize. That alone can keep them in the normal adult regime.

Predictions (what should happen if the framework is correct)

If the Ease Threshold Hypothesis is correct, the following predictions should be observed in at least a subset of subjects:

- **P1: Fragile entry, stable after crossing**
  Early in the task, monitoring collapses the transition.
  But once crossed, the state can become surprisingly stable for a while.

- **P2: The strongest suppressor is evaluation, not boredom**
  Even with neutral content (old game, low difficulty), ease can appear if monitoring is reduced.

- **P3: Micro-optimization kills the effect**
  Trying to "do the task better" reduces the probability of transition, even if motivation is high.

- **P4: The task becomes less effective with repetition**
  Repeated attempts tend to increase "checking" and reduce success probability.

- **P5: Coffee acts as a threshold helper, not as the experience itself**
  A very small dose helps entry, but the experience (if it occurs) is not reducible to caffeine stimulation. A higher dose may prevent entry by re-introducing monitoring.

- **P6: The affect has a distinct qualitative signature**
  If it occurs, it is not just "good mood", but vivid, positive, childhood-like, with reduced cognitive friction.

Falsification (non-negotiable failure conditions)

The framework is weakened if the following are observed:

- **F1: No difference between monitoring vs non-monitoring**
  If actively checking feelings does not reduce success probability, the core mechanism is wrong.

- **F2: The effect is fully explained by stimulation**
  If the same effect is produced reliably by coffee alone, without the monitoring constraints, the protocol is not probing the claimed mechanism.

- **F3: The effect correlates mainly with winning/performance**
  If ease appears only when performance is high (winning, dominance, achievement), then the "non-use / anti-optimization" claim is wrong.

- **F4: The state is not qualitatively distinct**
  If reported experiences are indistinguishable from ordinary arousal, excitement, or mood improvement, the "regime shift" claim is not supported.

Operational checklist (positive M-ZRT hit)
A session is counted as a positive M-ZRT hit if the following criteria are met:

1. **Entry barrier signature:** at least two prior sessions on separate days yielded no access (access = 0) under correct constraints.

2. **Discontinuity:** entry is reported as a clear qualitative jump rather than graded improvement.

3. **Distinctness:** the affective state is reported as qualitatively distinct from ordinary mood improvement, excitement, or stimulation.

4. **Generalization:** the state reappears outside the task context within 24 hours, or produces a measurable global shift in daily experience not restricted to gameplay.

5. **Beyond-stimulation evidence:** if optional contextual modulators were used, at least one re-entry or persistence instance occurs outside the expected acute window.

Standardized test conditions (minimal)

To reduce interpretive ambiguity while keeping the protocol lightweight, each session should be tagged using the following minimal condition grid. This does not aim to fully control the environment, but to prevent “same protocol” claims under substantially different contexts.

Variable	Levels (record one)	Notes
Fatigue state	Low / Moderate / High	High fatigue is expected to increase monitoring and reduce entry probability. Postpone if “High”.
Social context	Alone / Others present (silent) / Social interaction	The core protocol is intended to be run alone. If not, record it explicitly.
Caffeine	None / Low-dose / Moderate+	Low-dose is treated as a threshold helper (Day 3). Avoid moderate+ due to arousal confounds.
Alcohol	None / Low-dose / Moderate+	If used, restrict to low-dose only. Moderate+ invalidates interpretation (intoxication confound).
Time of day	Morning / Afternoon / Evening / Night	Time-of-day may interact with vigilance, load, and entry fragility.
Device setup	HUD off (Y/N), resolution lowered (Y/N)	UT99 is used as a low-pressure standardized environment. HUD off + sub-optimal resolution reduces performance salience.

Optional additional tags (recommended)

These are not required, but can clarify failure modes without increasing measurement burden:

Variable	Levels
Sleep debt	None / Mild / Significant
Current load	Low / Moderate / High (work, obligations, unresolved tasks)
Clock exposure	Avoided / Checked repeatedly
Rumination	Low / Moderate / High

Limitations / Contraindications. If you do any of these exercises too often, it becomes "training to not train", which is self-contradictory as the idea is to stop the human tendency to do training or methods. The protocol can then turn into a new performance goal, and that reintroduces evaluation, which is exactly what blocks entry. Don't use it as a long-term life-style, as it will backfire.

Developmental considerations suggest that younger children may exhibit lower baseline evaluative load, but this remains speculative within the present framework. When fully accessed, the regime is characterized by a distinct somatic positive affect signature, often involving intensified chest-centered sensation with craniofacial spread in response to aesthetic or absurd stimuli. Some implementations are structurally valid only once; repetition invalidates them. This framework makes no claim about long-term stabilization of the regime.

Appendix 3

Some sessions occurred under background conditions that may have reduced evaluative rigidity, including mild pharmacological modulation. These factors are not interpreted, as of now, as necessary components of the task, and are not included in the core implementation.

Historical note: some early exploratory sessions included low-dose alcohol as a mid-task condition. This was not retained in the current version of the task, because the present framework treats behavioral structure, rather than pharmacological facilitation, as the primary variable of interest.

Appendix 4 Illustrative Behavioral Implementations

The examples below are illustrative only. No specific game, movement, object, or environment is theoretically required. What matters is not the surface form of the action, but whether it transiently reduces evaluative monitoring without becoming a new object of optimization, checking, or expectation.

Any admissible implementation should satisfy the following functional constraints: it should be low-stakes, brief, non-instrumental, and non-rhythmic; it should not recruit explicit comparison, problem-solving, or performance-checking; it should not be followed by retrospective evaluation; and it should not be repeated often enough to become ritualized or monitorized. Once the participant begins tracking whether the action is being performed correctly or whether it is "working," the relevant condition is lost.

Example 1. Brief micro-movement perturbation
A small, non-rhythmic movement may be introduced during ongoing activity, for example a slight shoulder shift, hand repositioning, or posture adjustment, provided

that it is not performed as a technique and is not repeated in a patterned way. The purpose is not to create stimulation as such, but to introduce a low-stakes deviation without subsequent monitoring or correction.

Example 2. Brief non-optimizing hesitation at a low-stakes fork
At a minor choice point, the participant may allow a brief pause before continuing, without entering explicit comparison or trying to identify the better option. The pause is not a deliberation period. It is admissible only if action resumes without post hoc checking, self-commentary, or corrective replay.

Example 3. Low-stakes arbitrary selection
Where a trivial choice is available, one option may be selected arbitrarily rather than through optimization. The relevant feature is not randomness itself, but the temporary suspension of value-weighting, justification, and internal performance criteria. If the selection becomes an object of self-observation or interpretation, the example no longer satisfies the intended constraints.

These examples should not be treated as fixed techniques. They are merely local implementations of a broader functional requirement: a transient reduction in evaluative monitoring without replacement by a new monitored procedure.

Structural Constraint: Arbitrary Salience Allocation

At an unspecified moment, temporarily assign significance to a neutral object or event without providing justification, explanation, or goal. The assignment must not be defended, analyzed, or converted into meaning. It must not be repeated in patterned form.