

# The Subject as a Process of Stabilizing Experience



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The Subject as a Process of Stabilizing Experience presents the scientific-theoretical route into the project Human as a Multilevel System. The book asks whether experience needs a fixed inner subject behind it, or whether the subject can be described more precisely as a process that maintains coherence for memory, action, self-reference and change. The model draws on philosophy of mind, cognitive science, embodied and enactive cognition, narrative identity, self-model theory, predictive processing, memory studies and extended-mind approaches. It does not merge these theories into a single doctrine, but uses them as constraints and conceptual resources. The book examines attention, memory, language, meaning, continuity, fragmentation, reconfiguration and external supports. It is not psychotherapy, not a clinical protocol and not a spiritual teaching, but a compact scientific-theoretical framework for thinking about the subject as a process of stabilizing experience.

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**The Subject as a Process**  
**of Stabilizing Experience**

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**The Subject as a Process of Stabilizing Experience**  
*A Short Scientific-Theoretical Model*

2026

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## Preface

This book proposes a conceptual model of the subject as a process of maintaining the coherence of experience. Its aim is not to introduce a new entity, replace older concepts with it, and declare the problem of the subject solved. On the contrary, it begins from the assumption that a significant part of the difficulty in describing the subject arises precisely when explanation prematurely takes the form of a hidden object: an inner observer, a stable center, a self-identical I, or some other entity that supposedly stands behind the variability of experience and secures its unity (Metzinger, 2003; Gallagher, 2000).

The working hypothesis of the book is that the subject can be described more productively not as a thing, but as a process. In its minimal formulation, the subject is a process of maintaining the coherence of experience. In a more developed formulation, the human being is understood as a multilevel system for stabilizing experience. This formulation does not remove questions of memory, body, language, attention, personal history, social relations, and external supports. On the contrary, it makes them central, because it is through them that experience preserves connectedness, lived continuity, and the possibility of self-reference without the need to introduce a separate governing entity (Damasio, 1999; McAdams, 2001; Menary, 2007).

The book deliberately limits its own claims. It does not offer a metaphysical theory of the subject. It is not a neurobiological theory of consciousness. It is not a clinical protocol, a therapeutic model, or a guide to psychological practice. It is not a cosmological hypothesis and does not allow an extra-scientific expansion of concepts. Its status must be defined strictly from the outset: it is a scientific-theoretical conceptual model whose task is to refine explanatory language and to describe, in a more disciplined way, what is usually translated too quickly either into ontology or into popular psychology.

This limitation is not a weakness of the model. It is a condition of its scientific usefulness. Whenever a theory of the subject begins to claim more than its own explanatory apparatus allows, it loses the distinction between an analytical level, a working hypothesis, and an established claim. For this reason, the book consistently distinguishes at least four layers: the core of the model, its logical consequences, comparative claims in relation to other theories, and positions that must retain the status of working hypotheses. If a thesis does not withstand this distinction, it does not strengthen the model, but makes it less precise.

The proposed book is situated within an existing field of research and does not claim to be isolated from it. The question of the subject has long been developed in philosophy of mind, cognitive science, personality psychology, theories of embodied and enactive cognition, narrative identity, self-model theory, predictive processing, and the extended mind (Metzinger, 2003; Varela, Thompson, & Rosch, 1991; McAdams, 2001; Friston, 2010; Clark & Chalmers, 1998). However, the presence of these research lines does not mean that it is enough simply to gather them into a general overview. The book proceeds from another task: not to list all possible approaches, but to construct a minimal explanatory framework within which it is possible to distinguish strictly what is meant by the subject, what function is attributed to it, and by what means the coherence of experience is maintained.

For this reason, comparative analysis plays a supporting but necessary role in the book. It is needed neither to declare the proposed model radically new nor to reduce it mechanically to one of the already known approaches. Its task is scientific positioning. If the model is close to anti-substantialist theories of self, this must be stated directly. If it differs from them, the difference must also be stated directly. If some claims rely on research into memory, embodiment, narrative, external cognitive supports, or the active organization of perception, that reliance must be indicated through explicit references and with preservation of the limits of the source's applicability (Gallagher, 2000;

Damasio, 1999; McAdams, 2001; Seth, 2014; Menary, 2007). The literature in this book does not decorate the text; it limits and disciplines it.

The central concept of the book, the coherence of experience, must not be understood as a hidden substance or as a universal criterion of normativity. The issue is not normative completeness, inner harmony, or psychological well-being as such. Coherence denotes a minimal structural connectedness that allows experience not to disintegrate into mutually disconnected fragments, and allows a person to retain the possibility of distinguishing oneself, acting, remembering, revising meanings, and maintaining a certain continuity of one's own history. This connectedness may be stable, fragile, partial, temporary, conflictual, and subject to reconfiguration (Gallagher, 2000; McAdams, 2001). This is why the book gives special attention not only to stabilization, but also to fragmentation, rupture, repetition, and reconfiguration.

Such an approach requires caution in language. The terms of this book must not behave like disguised entities. The subject is not an inner human being inside a human being. Continuity is not a new name for the soul. Attention is not the spotlight of a hidden observer. External structures are not a mystical extension of the subject. If a term begins to explain too much, it must be narrowed. If it begins to sound like a new ontological unit, it must be returned to its function in the model. This rule is not stylistic; it belongs to the logic of the book itself.

From this follows the compositional logic of the text that follows. The book does not begin with a dogmatic proclamation of the central formula. It must arrive at it through a problem. First, the intuitive model of a fixed subject is called into question and its explanatory limits are shown. Then the minimal model of the subject as a process is formulated. After that, the book clarifies what is meant by experience, by what mechanisms its coherence is maintained, how continuity and fragmentation arise, how repetition and reconfiguration work, and what role external structures play. Only after this does it become methodologically justified to compare the model with related theories and to fix its boundaries.

Thus the book offers neither a completed system nor a final solution to the problem of the subject, but a disciplined research framework. Its strength, if it has one, should be found not in the scale of its promises, but in the economy of its assumptions, the clarity of its terms, and its capacity to describe a wide range of phenomena without appealing to unnecessary entities. This also defines the main critical filter of the whole book: if an entity can be removed and the model continues to work, that entity should be removed.

## **The Problem of the Fixed Subject**

### **Initial Intuition**

An ordinary description of the human being often begins with an assumption that seems so obvious that it is almost never formulated explicitly. It is assumed that somewhere within experience there exists a stable subject: the one who perceives, decides, remembers, chooses, observes one's own thoughts, and remains the same through changes of state. This intuition is convenient for everyday language. It allows us to say: "I thought," "I decided," "I changed," "I remember," "I observe myself." Yet the convenience of a grammatical form is not evidence for the existence of a separate inner center.

The scientific problem begins where everyday grammar is taken for ontology. If language contains a subject of action, it does not yet follow that the structure of experience contains a separate entity that performs the role of an inner controller. The grammatical "I" may designate not a thing, but a point of organization of an utterance, a practical form of self-reference, or the result of a temporary stabilization of experience. The initial question, therefore, is not whether a human being has a self in some sense. The question is narrower: does the explanation of experience require a fixed inner subject as a special entity?

This formulation is not the same as denying subjectivity. On the contrary, it begins from the fact that subjectivity is a real phenomenal and functional field: there is experience, attention, bodily state, memory, meaning, action, speech, and self-description. But the presence of these processes does not imply that an unchanging center must stand behind them. In this respect, the present approach is close to anti-substantialist lines of analysis of the self, where the self is considered not as an independent thing, but as a complex structure of modeling, organization, or self-reference (Metzinger, 2003; Gallagher, 2000).

The problem with the fixed subject is that it is often introduced before analysis. Instead of explaining how the connectedness of experience arises, a theory presupposes in advance the one who supposedly secures that connectedness. Instead of describing the mechanisms by which continuity is maintained, it places a stable "I" inside the human being and then uses it as an explanation. But if the phenomenon to be explained is already built into the explanatory principle, the model becomes circular: the connectedness of experience is explained by the subject, and the subject is presupposed because experience appears connected.

## Why the Fixed Subject Seems Necessary

The intuition of a fixed subject has several sources. The first source is first-person continuity. A person does not simply undergo separate states; one undergoes them as "mine." Even when a state changes, the possibility remains of relating that change to oneself: "I was irritated," "I calmed down," "I changed my mind." From this it is easy to conclude that one and the same bearer passes through the changes.

The second source is practical responsibility. Social life requires actions to be attributed to an agent. A person makes promises, bears the consequences of decisions, answers for words, enters into relationships, and preserves biographical identity in legal, moral, and communicative fields. In these contexts, the concept of a stable person is necessary. Yet the practical necessity of attributing responsibility does not prove that an unchanging metaphysical center exists inside experience.

The third source is the sense of observing one's own states. A person can notice a thought, evaluate an emotion, inhibit an impulse, change a decision, and take a critical stance toward oneself. It seems that if thoughts and emotions can be observed, then there must be an observer separate from them. But here again there is a risk of a premature conclusion. The presence of a reflexive organization of experience does not require a separate inner observer. It can be described as a relation among processes of attention, memory, language, bodily regulation, and self-interpretation.

The fourth source is biographical connectedness. A person is able to perceive different periods of life as belonging to a single history. One can say: "At that time I was different, but it is still my life." Such connectedness creates the impression that a constant entity stands behind the history. Yet the connectedness of a life story may be the result of memory, language, and social forms, not the manifestation of an unchanging core. Narrative approaches to identity show that personality is to a large extent supported through the organization of a life story, but it does not follow from this that narrative exhausts the subject or that a separate entity necessarily stands behind the narrative (McAdams, 2001).

These sources cannot simply be discarded. They point to real phenomena: self-reference, responsibility, reflection, and biographical connectedness. The mistake lies not in recognizing these phenomena, but in moving from them to the strong conclusion that there is a fixed inner subject. A more cautious principle is the following: if a phenomenon can be explained through processes of organizing experience, no additional entity should be introduced.

## **The Contradictoriness of Experience**

The first limitation of the fixed-subject model appears in the contradictoriness of experience. A person rarely acts as a single center fully transparent to itself. One may simultaneously want change and resist it, understand the necessity of a decision and avoid it, regard one value as important and act in favor of another. One may sincerely make a promise and later break it, not because of external coercion, but because of an internal divergence among motives, states, and modes of self-description.

If the fixed subject is understood as a single source of decisions, this contradictoriness becomes a problem. It becomes necessary to explain why a single center produces inconsistent actions, why it does not possess its own motives, and why its decisions can be revised under the pressure of states that it did not itself choose. One can say that the subject is weak, mistaken, or insufficiently aware. But such answers often only shift the problem: who exactly is weak, what exactly is mistaken, and why does awareness fail to coincide with action?

A more economical description is that experience is organized from the beginning on multiple levels. Bodily states, affective reactions, habits, attention, memory, language, social expectations, and current tasks interact within it. Coherence is not an initial given; it has to be maintained. When this maintenance is disrupted, internal divergences arise. From this point of view, contradictoriness is not an anomaly that must be explained by the fall of a unified subject. It becomes an expected consequence of the multilevel organization of experience.

This move does not eliminate the concept of the subject. It changes its status. The subject no longer appears as the ready-made owner of all states. It begins to be understood as a process in which states may be partly coordinated, partly separated, and partly not integrated. This makes it possible to describe contradictoriness without appealing to a hidden center that must be unified and yet, for some reason, constantly fails to coincide with itself.

## **Automatism and the Opacity of Action**

The second limitation of the fixed-subject model is connected with automatism. A significant part of human behavior does not pass through explicit decision. A person reacts before having time to formulate an intention. One recognizes an intonation, tenses up, avoids something, chooses a habitual route, answers with a familiar phrase, or returns to a recurring scenario. Later, one may give an explanation of the action, but this explanation is not always the cause of the action. It may be a later stabilization of what has already been done.

Bodily and affective approaches to consciousness show that selfhood and conscious experience cannot be separated from bodily regulation, emotions, and background states of the organism (Damasio, 1999). This is important not as a ready-made neurobiological foundation for the model, but as a constraint against a purely inner and intellectualized picture of the subject. If action and self-experience depend on bodily-affective processes, then a fixed rational center cannot be the primary explanation of the whole organization of subjectivity.

Automatism does not mean the absence of a subject. It means that the subject cannot be identified with an explicit conscious decision. If a person acts automatically and then includes the action in a story about oneself, what we have is not a simple expression of a ready-made I, but a work of coordination: the action has to be noticed, named, justified, rejected, revised, or integrated. In this process, the subject appears not as the source of every impulse, but as a form of maintaining connectedness among impulse, action, memory, and subsequent self-description.

Here again the fixed-subject model encounters a difficulty. If the subject is an inner controller, why does a significant part of control occur without it? If it is an observer, why is observation often delayed? If it is the source of decision, why can the decision be reconstructed after the action? These questions do not prove that there is no subject. They show that the subject should not be placed in the position of a simple inner commander.

## **Variability and the Problem of Identity**

The third limitation is connected with variability. A person changes not only externally and biographically, but also in the ways one experiences, understands, remembers, and evaluates oneself. What seems central in one period of life may later be revised. Old decisions may become incomprehensible. Former values may lose their force. New relationships, traumas, achievements, losses, illnesses, practices, and social roles may reconfigure self-description so deeply that the question arises: in what sense is this the same subject?

The fixed-subject model answers this question by assuming an unchanging bearer. Properties, states, and beliefs change, but the subject supposedly remains the same. Yet this explanation stops the analysis too quickly. It does not show how recognizability of oneself is preserved through change. It merely asserts that there must be someone who is preserved. In this way, an entity is again introduced where a description of processes is required.

An alternative move is to distinguish invariance from continuity. Continuity does not require full identity with a previous state. It requires the connectedness of changes. A person may be different and still preserve the possibility of relating those changes to one's own life. Such connectedness is supported by memory, language, bodily habits, social recognition, documents, relationships, places, practices, and recurring forms of self-interpretation. In this sense, the problem of identity is shifted from the question "what remains unchanged?" to the question "how is the connectedness of changes maintained?"

The distinction between minimal and narrative selfhood helps to show that subjectivity is not single-layered. There are different levels of self-reference: a pre-reflective sense of presence, bodily orientation, agency, autobiographical history, social name, and role (Gallagher, 2000). This distinction is important, but it is not accepted as a ready-made classification of entities. It is used as an indication that the subject must be analyzed in a multilevel way. Different levels may support one another, diverge from one another, or require reconfiguration.

## **The Observer as an Effect of Organization**

One of the most persistent forms of the fixed subject is the idea of an inner observer. It seems convincing because a person is indeed able to relate to one's own states as data: to notice a thought, distinguish an emotion, register a bodily reaction, or comment on one's own behavior. But the observability of states does not imply the existence of an observer as a separate object.

A negative move is useful here: thoughts are discovered, emotions are discovered, bodily sensations are discovered, linguistic formulations are discovered. But when the presumed observer itself has to be found as a separate entity, it does not appear in the same sense. What was called the observer turns out not to be an object, but a function of organization: attention to states, the capacity for distinction, linguistic self-description, memory of one's own changes, and the practice of maintaining distance from an immediate impulse.

Self-model theory radically calls into question the idea of the self as a substantial object and shows that experienced unity may depend on structures of modeling rather than on an inner entity (Metzinger, 2003). The proposed model does not reduce the subject to the self-model, but it accepts an important constraint: the experienced sense of a center must not be turned into evidence for a real inner center. The fact that experience is organized as belonging to someone does not yet prove that this "someone" exists as a separate observer inside experience.

If the observer is understood as an effect of organization, the task of theory itself changes. What must be explained is not where the observer is located, but which processes create the stability of self-reference. Why does experience seem connected? Why do some states become "mine"? Why is a person able to take distance from an impulse? Why does this distance sometimes disappear? These questions are more productive than the search for an inner object that would have to observe everything else.

## **The Fixed Subject as a Redundant Explanation**

The fixed subject performs an important stabilizing function in theories and in everyday thought. It simplifies description: there is the one who experiences, and there is what is experienced. There is the one who acts, and there is the action. There is the one who changes, and there are the changes. But the explanation becomes suspicious when one and the same principle must simultaneously be the source of unity, the agent of decision, the bearer of memory, the observer of states, the guarantor of responsibility, and the basis of personal continuity.

Such expansion makes the concept of the subject too strong. It begins to explain everything, and precisely for this reason it ceases to explain precisely. If contradiction is explained by the subject, automatism is explained by the subject, memory is explained by the subject, rupture is explained by the subject, and continuity is explained by the subject, then the concept loses its power of discrimination. It becomes a name for what has not yet been analyzed into processes.

Scientific economy requires a different move. It is necessary to ask which functions actually require explanation. Here at least five such functions can be distinguished: self-reference, connectedness of experience, temporal continuity, integration of action into a history, and the possibility of reflexive distance. None of these functions requires a fixed subject accepted in advance. Each can be preliminarily described through processes of stabilizing experience.

This does not mean that the term "subject" should be eliminated. On the contrary, it is preserved, but its status changes. It no longer designates the hidden owner of experience. It designates a problem of organization: how experience is maintained as sufficiently coherent for self-reference, action, memory, and continuity to arise. This shift prepares the minimal formula: the subject is a process of maintaining the coherence of experience.

## Chapter Summary

The fixed-subject model is insufficient not because subjectivity is illusory or unimportant. It is insufficient because it turns the complex organization of experience into a simple inner entity too early. It treats as an initial given what requires explanation: connectedness, observation, agency, continuity, and self-reference.

The limitations identified in this chapter show why the fixed-subject model proves insufficient. Contradictoriness shows that experience does not act as a fully unified center. Automatism shows that conscious decision is not the source of the whole organization of behavior. Variability shows that identity cannot be reduced to invariance. The analysis of the observer shows that reflexive distance does not require a separate inner entity. Together, these limitations allow a transition from the question "where is the subject located?" to the question "how is the coherence of experience maintained?"

From this transition follows the minimal model. If the fixed subject proves to be a redundant explanation, then the subject must be described differently: not as a thing, not as a hidden center, and not as a metaphysical bearer, but as a process of maintaining the coherence of experience.

# **The Minimal Model of the Subject**

## **From Entity to Function**

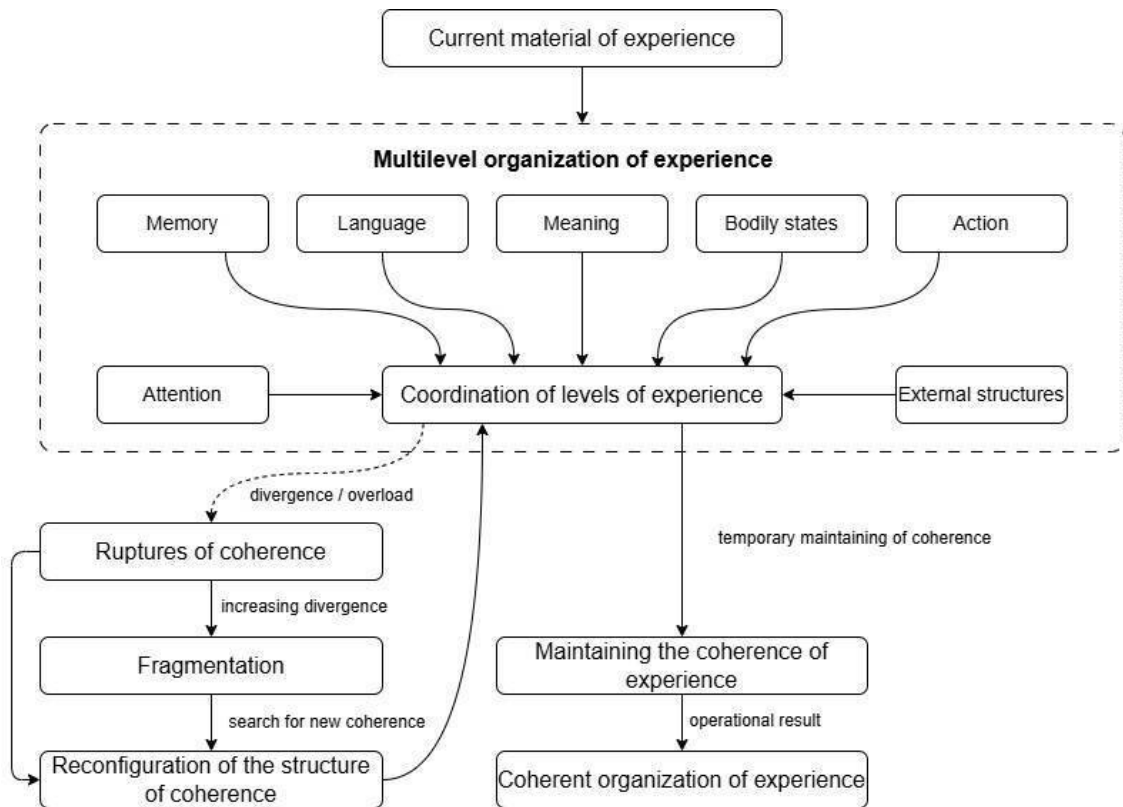
If the fixed subject proves to be a redundant explanation, this does not mean that the concept of the subject should be eliminated. What must be eliminated is not the concept itself, but its substantialist interpretation. The subject does not have to be thought of as an inner object, a hidden observer, or an unchanging bearer of experiences. It can be defined functionally: through the work without which experience would not be maintained as connected, self-related, and capable of continuing through change.

The minimal formula is this: the subject is a process of maintaining the coherence of experience. This formula does not assert a new entity. It does not say that there exists within experience a special object called the subject. It says that a number of processes must somehow maintain experience in a state of sufficient connectedness: so that experiences can be distinguished, actions can be included in a history, memory can be related to the present, and changes do not turn into the complete disintegration of self-reference.

A functional definition changes the direction of analysis. Instead of the question "what is the subject?" the question becomes "what organization of experience performs the subject function?" This shift makes it possible to preserve the reality of subjectivity without introducing an inner center as a separate explanatory principle. Subjectivity remains an object of analysis, but its unity is no longer accepted as an initial given. It becomes what has to be explained.

This position is close to anti-substantialist approaches to the self, but it does not fully coincide with them. Self-model theory shows that self-experience does not require a substantial I and may be connected with structures of modeling (Metzinger, 2003). However, the minimal model of the subject does not reduce the subject only to the self-model. The self-model explains an important aspect of self-organization, but maintaining the coherence of experience also includes attention, memory, bodily states, language, meaning, action, and external supports.

### **Scheme 1. General Model of the Stabilization of Experience**



The scheme fixes the subject as a process of maintaining the coherence of multilevel experience and shows the main lines of stabilization, rupture, and possible reconfiguration.

## What "Maintaining" Means

The word "maintaining" should not be understood as rigid fixation. To maintain experience does not mean to stop change, suppress divergences, or preserve one and the same form of self-description at any cost. Maintaining means supporting minimal connectedness, in which different elements of experience can remain related: sensation to action, action to motive, motive to memory, memory to history, and history to the possibility of further change.

Such maintaining may be stable, partial, conflictual, or temporary. A person may preserve self-reference even in a state of internal divergence. One may fail to understand one's own motives and still try to connect them into an intelligible sequence. One may undergo a crisis of identity and still continue to hold the question "what is happening to me?" as a form of minimal connectedness. The subject function therefore does not require the complete harmony of experience. It requires only that level of coherence at which experience can still be organized, revised, and continued.

Maintaining is also not a purely conscious act. A significant part of this work takes place before explicit reflection or outside it. Bodily orientation, affective background, habits of attention, implicit memory, and social expectations already structure what can later be called "my" experience. Bodily approaches to consciousness show that self-experience is connected not only with thought, but also with organismic regulation, emotion, and the feeling of what happens (Damasio, 1999). For the minimal model, this means that the subject cannot be identified with a conscious commentary on experience.

Maintaining is not the simple preservation of the past either. It includes selection, reconstruction, and the redistribution of significance. Memory does not simply supply material for identity; it participates in how the past becomes part of the present. Language does not simply describe an already finished experience; it helps to distinguish and connect it. Meaning is not simply added to events; it determines which events enter the structure of life as significant. Maintaining coherence is therefore always a dynamic process.

## What "Coherence" Means

The coherence of experience is not the same as inner unity without contradiction. If coherence is understood as complete non-contradiction, the model immediately becomes implausible: human experience almost always contains divergences among desire, action, self-description, bodily reaction, and social role. Coherence means not the absence of divergences, but the possibility of connecting them within some structure.

Minimal coherence exists where elements of experience do not disintegrate into completely unconnectable fragments. A person may say: "I do not understand why I react this way," and this sentence already maintains a connection among the reaction, the question, memory, and the attempt at self-description. One may acknowledge a contradiction: "I want this and at the same time I am afraid of it." Such acknowledgment does not eliminate the divergence, but it makes it part of experience that can be organized.

Coherence has several levels. At the bodily level, it appears in orientation, tension, readiness for action, and the sense of presence. At the affective level, it appears in stable emotional evaluations. At the cognitive level, it appears in expectations, distinctions, and explanations. At the narrative level, it appears in the capacity to include events in a history. At the social level, it appears in recognition, role, name, responsibility, and communication. The distinction between minimal and narrative selfhood shows that subjectivity is not exhausted by a single level of self-description (Gallagher, 2000).

These levels may fail to coincide. A person may assert one thing in language, react differently bodily, return through memory to a third thing, and socially perform a fourth role. Coherence therefore should not be understood as a pre-given order. It is a task of organization. The subject function consists not in eliminating all divergences, but in maintaining them in a form available for further distinction, action, and reconfiguration.

## **Experience as the Object of Stabilization**

The minimal model of the subject is impossible without clarifying what exactly is stabilized. What is stabilized is not "consciousness" in a narrow sense and not only a stream of thoughts. What is stabilized is experience as a multilevel field: bodily sensations, emotions, perceptions, memory, expectations, actions, language, social relations, traces of the past, and external supports. If experience is limited only to conscious content, the subject is once again mistakenly placed in the domain of inner observation.

Experience is not passive material that then receives form from a ready-made subject. Rather, the subject function arises within the organization of experience itself. An experience becomes "mine" not because it has been appropriated by an inner owner, but because it is included in a system of relations: with the body, memory, attention, language, action, and history. These relations are what make it possible to distinguish what is merely happening from what is happening to me.

This understanding brings the minimal model close to lines of embodied and enactive cognition, where cognition is not separated from body, action, and environment (Varela, Thompson, & Rosch, 1991). Yet what matters here is not to transfer another theoretical framework in its entirety, but to fix a basic constraint: the subject should not be described as an isolated inner point. Its function is distributed across processes of organizing experience, some of which are bodily, some linguistic, some social, and some connected with external structures.

It follows from this that the subject cannot be sought in one place. It does not coincide only with the brain, only with narrative, only with the body, only with language, or only with the self-model. Each of these levels may participate in maintaining coherence, but none of them exhausts the subject function. The minimal model remains minimal precisely because it does not turn one mechanism into the complete essence of the subject.

## **The Subject as a Process, Not an Object**

A processual understanding of the subject requires caution: the word "process" too may quietly become a new name for an entity. To prevent this, process must be understood operationally. It does not exist separately from the operations through which experience is maintained as connected. There is no subject over and above attention, memory, bodily orientation, language, action, and self-reference. But there is a certain organization of these processes through which the subject function arises.

A process differs from an object in that it is not preserved as a ready-made thing through change. It is maintained, disrupted, resumed, weakened, strengthened, and reconfigured. A musical performance exists only while it is being performed; a conversation exists only while an exchange is being maintained; equilibrium exists only while a system compensates for deviations. In a similar way, the subject exists not as a thing behind experience, but as a maintained organization of experience.

This example is not a proof, but it helps clarify the type of explanation. If the subject is processual, then the question of its identity is not solved by searching for an unchanging core. It is solved through an analysis of modes of continuation. What allows a person to recognize oneself through change? What connects past and present? What makes an action part of one's own history? What makes it possible to distinguish an impulse, accept it, or reject it? These questions point to processes of stabilization, not to a hidden owner.

A processual understanding also allows for weak, disrupted, and conflictual forms of subjectivity. If the subject were a fixed entity, fragmentation would look like falling out of subjectivity or the breakdown of a center. If the subject is a process of maintaining coherence, then fragmentation becomes a change in the mode of organization. The subject function may weaken, narrow, rely on external structures, require the restoration of connections, or move toward reconfiguration.

## **The Minimality of the Model**

The model is called minimal because it does not add explanatory elements beyond what is necessary. It does not assert a hidden observer, an unchanging I, a special inner substance, or a metaphysical bearer of experience. It preserves only the function that has to be explained: maintaining the coherence of experience. Everything else should be introduced only when a specific mechanism cannot be described without it.

Minimality does not mean poverty of description. On the contrary, it opens space for more precise analysis. Once the fixed center has been removed, it becomes clearer which processes actually work: attention distributes significance, memory connects the present with the past, language shapes distinctions, the body provides the background of presence and action, social relations support recognition, and external structures help maintain traces and obligations. These processes do not have to be reduced to one center in order to perform the subject function together.

Minimality also protects the model from excessive claims. From the claim that the subject is understood as a process of maintaining the coherence of experience, no ready-made neurobiological theory follows. No clinical protocol follows. No theory of physical time follows. No metaphysics of an immortal self follows. The formula sets a framework for analysis, not a completed system of explanations.

This principle is consistent with the critique of a substantial understanding of the self, but it preserves its own focus. Self-model theory emphasizes structures of modeling (Metzinger, 2003). The distinction among levels of selfhood emphasizes the heterogeneity of subjectivity (Gallagher, 2000). Embodied and enactive cognition point to the connection of cognition with body, action, and environment (Varela, Thompson, & Rosch, 1991). The minimal model of the subject uses these lines as constraints and contexts, but formulates its own center of gravity: the coherence of experience.

## **What the Model Explains at the Minimal Level**

At the minimal level, the model explains why the subject should not be thought of as a thing, while nevertheless not disappearing as a problem. If there is experience that is lived as belonging to someone, the form of this belonging has to be explained. If there are actions that are included in one's own history, the connection between action and self-reference has to be explained. If there are changes through which recognizability of oneself is preserved, continuity without an unchanging core has to be explained.

The model also explains why subjectivity can be partial and heterogeneous. Not all elements of experience are integrated to the same degree. Some states are easily included in self-description, others are experienced as alien, still others remain unclear, and a fourth group returns as a recurring task. If the subject is not a ready-made entity but a process of maintaining coherence, such heterogeneity becomes not an exception, but part of the object of analysis.

In addition, the model explains why external and social forms are not secondary. If experience is maintained through a system of relations, then notes, conversations, documents, roles, practices, places, and stable relationships can participate in stabilization. They do not become an independent subject and do not erase the bodily boundaries of the human being. But they can support processes of memory, attention, obligation, and self-description.

## **Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.**

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