

THE WORLD YOU MEET

How Your Inner State Shapes
What You See, Feel, and Do



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What if the world outside has not changed — but your access to it has? A difficult conversation can feel manageable one day and catastrophic the next. The same task can look solvable in one state and impossible in another. The World You Meet asks what changes inside us before thought becomes certainty and reaction becomes action. Psychologist Sergey Zabiyako brings together psychology, systems thinking, neuroscience-informed models, philosophy, and lived experience to explore how body, attention, memory, internal prediction, relationships, culture, grief, love, money, technology, and mortality shape our lived reality. At the center is a practical progression: Autopilot reacts from the first inner version of events; the Observer notices the state and separates fact from interpretation; the Architect changes one accessible part of the system. This is not a promise of total control or positive thinking. It is a book about seeing more clearly where human freedom actually begins.

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Сергей Забияко
**THE WORLD YOU MEET. How Your Inner
State Shapes What You See, Feel, and Do**

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How Your Inner State Shapes What You See, Feel, and Do

Sergey Zabiako

You live not only in a world of events.

You also live in the inner state through which those events become your reality.

Dedicated to Kate, my beloved wife.

She had the wisdom, inner maturity, and courage to step with me into a new life in which the past was not forgotten, but had ceased to be the only place where I existed.

She became part of my present, of the home we share, and of the living reality in which this book was able to come into being.

Her love, trust, acceptance, and the path we have walked together filled this book not only with ideas, but with real events, lived experience, human warmth, and a meaning that could never have been invented at a writing desk.

In many ways, this book was born out of the inner state that came with a new life.

And she is part of that state.

INTRODUCTION

You have probably had moments when you suddenly stopped recognizing your own life.

Yesterday, almost everything was the same: the same people, the same home, the same tasks, money, messages, obligations, and plans that once again refused to fit into a single day. Yet somehow, yesterday you were still holding on. Not perfectly, not easily, and not with a cheerful smile, but what was happening did not feel unbearable. You could open a work file, answer a message, deal with something at home, withstand another person's dissatisfaction, postpone what would not fit into the day, and continue living.

Today, an ordinary request sounds like pressure. A loved one's silence begins to feel like rejection. A small task turns into one more piece of evidence that you are not coping. Your phone brings not messages but demands; the disorder around you irritates you more than usual; and your body seems to be saying: I cannot keep living on the same terms.

You open a document and simply stare at it for several minutes. You check your phone even though you have only just put it down. You try to begin with something simple, but even the simple now seems to require too much inner effort. The person beside you says an ordinary sentence, and you hear reproach in it. Someone does not reply in time, and the silence quickly fills with meanings that may not yet be there.

On days like these, exhaustion rarely admits that it is only exhaustion. It speaks far more convincingly: "Everything is too difficult. You have failed again. Nothing ever changes. It will probably only get worse from here."

And in that moment, it sounds like the truth.

What changed?

Sometimes life really has changed. Illness happens. Betrayal. A financial blow. The loss of a job. Moving to another country. The death of someone close. There are events after which the former reality does not return, and no psychological theory has the right to explain them solely through a person's attitude toward what has happened. The world exists independently of our wishes. The body is real. Money matters. Other people are free. Time moves forward. Love, violence, loss, and chance are not products of our imagination.

But sometimes it is different. Almost everything outside remains where it was, yet you enter the same world differently.

Yesterday, there was enough strength inside you to withstand uncertainty. Today, every uncertainty feels like a threat. Yesterday, you could see several possible paths. Today, you notice only obstacles. Yesterday, another person's silence could have meant that they were busy, tired, or simply wanted a little quiet. Today, it immediately becomes a story about not being heard, not being valued, or being about to be left.

Life has not necessarily become different. What has changed is the inner configuration from which you entered it.

I call that configuration your state.

For now, there is no need to force this word into a final definition. It is enough to notice something simple: your state is connected not only with what you feel. It also affects how you hear other people, how you read messages, how you look toward the future, how you judge yourself, and which actions seem possible at all.

In one state, a difficult conversation remains a difficult conversation. In another, it is experienced in advance as the beginning of the end. In one state, a mistake calls for correction. In another, it becomes an indictment of your entire personality. Sometimes a person truly cannot solve a problem. At other times, they are in an inner configuration from which they cannot see where to begin.

The difference between these situations is enormous, even though from the inside they may feel almost identical.

I did not arrive at the idea of state through any single school of psychology, nor from a desire to invent an elegant theory. It gradually took shape from different parts of my life that, for a long time, seemed unrelated.

I once worked in programming, information technology, and systems design. That work taught me not to stop at the visible error, but to look for the mechanism that keeps producing it. If a program returns the same wrong result again and again, there is no point in blaming the last line on the screen. You have to examine what data entered the system, which condition was triggered, and which algorithm continues to run even though it stopped serving the task long ago.

Photography taught me something different. Even a camera does not show the world without making a selection. An entire shoreline, a person, a city, or a room may stand before the lens, yet only part of what is happening enters the frame. There is light, focus, distance, angle, the moment the shutter is released, and everything left outside the image. The photographer does not invent reality, but the same world can appear calm, anxious, lonely, warm, or almost unfamiliar in different photographs.

Working with people showed me how much more complex the human lens is. I watched loving people become harsh when they were afraid. I saw anxiety call itself care, control call itself responsibility, and exhaustion pass itself off as indifference. I saw people understand everything in the right words, then act under pressure as though no other response had ever been available to them.

Moving to another country forced me to rebuild my sense of where I belonged in the world. Loss showed me that when someone close dies, we may lose not only part of the present but also the version of ourselves that existed beside them. Returning to my body through weight loss, exercise, and movement helped me see that the future sometimes returns first not as a thought, but as a change in your walk, your breathing, your physical strength, and your desire to leave the house again.

I also noticed state in much simpler things: in expecting philosophical clarity from an exhausted body after several hours of work, coffee, and almost no food; in opening my phone for a few minutes and losing not only time but the inner structure of the text I had been writing; in the way a single new

booking could restore my energy before the work had even begun, because people, light, angles, and a sense of movement had already appeared in my imagination.

There were periods when the central problem could not be changed quickly. No single decision can undo a loss, finish a large book, rebuild a relationship, transform a financial reality, or restore strength to a body that needs time. But sometimes I could put one square meter of the space around me in order: clear the desk, close unnecessary tabs, prepare a proper meal, or go for a short walk.

The main problem did not disappear. It simply stopped occupying all available space. And then it became possible to take at least one next step.

Gradually, I began to see the same question behind very different stories: From what state is this person living right now?

From what state do they open a work file, answer someone they love, look at their body, remember the past, think about money, and imagine the future? From what state do they decide that a relationship is over, their work has lost its meaning, life has reached a dead end, and they themselves have finally stopped coping?

This book begins with that question.

It does not promise mastery over life. Other people will not become more convenient, the past will not disappear, the body will not stop growing tired, and chance will not begin asking our permission. Yet between complete helplessness and the fantasy of total control lies a space for human agency.

Sometimes it begins with something very small: not replying in the first second, not mistaking evening exhaustion for a final conclusion, not turning an anxious prediction into established fact, and not demanding that another person immediately relieve the tension inside you.

At first, you do not need to fix yourself. It is more important to see what is actually happening. Perhaps you truly are at a dead end. Or perhaps you are in a state from which the turns in the road are not yet visible.

Perhaps the relationship requires a serious decision. Or perhaps today's conversation is really between two exhausted selves, each convinced it is the one speaking the truth.

Perhaps you have lost interest in your work. Or perhaps you have demanded inspiration, clarity, and high performance from an overloaded system for too long.

These distinctions do not solve the problem automatically. But they restore its true proportions and create a small space between what is happening inside a person and what they do next.

That is where observation begins.

And sometimes an entire life begins to change there.

PART I. HOW THE INNER STATE SHAPES REALITY

CHAPTER 1. YOUR STATE SHAPES REALITY

The introduction has already brought one central observation into view: life on the outside may remain almost unchanged while a person's access to it changes. The same people, tasks, obligations, and circumstances remain on a human scale in one state; in another, they are experienced as pressure, a dead end, or a threat.

People rarely notice their state while it remains familiar. The inner lens does not feel like a lens, a prediction does not seem like a prediction, and a way of interpreting the world is experienced as the world itself. Only when the state changes does it become visible how deeply it had shaped what, only yesterday, seemed like ordinary reality.

What appeared in one inner mode as a difficult but solvable task becomes, in another, proof that there is no way forward. A loved one's pause changes from uncertainty into rejection, a comment from information into humiliation, while exhaustion no longer speaks of the need to recover but of the futility of continuing.

Yet a person rarely feels that the system processing what is happening has changed inside them. It seems instead that they have finally seen the situation, other people, their own capacities, and the future clearly. A state is especially convincing because it does not stand beside perception and announce its presence. It becomes the medium in which perception arises.

The first task, therefore, is not to correct the thought immediately, suppress the emotion, or force yourself to behave differently. It is to understand the inner configuration from which you are now looking at what is happening, and why this particular version of the world feels like the only possible one.

I call this configuration your state.

STATE IS NOT THE SAME AS MOOD

A mood can be described in a few words: calm, anxious, sad, irritable, at ease, joyful. Mood matters, but state runs deeper. It includes not only emotion, but the body, the degree of fatigue, the direction of attention, memory, the internal prediction, the sense of safety, the relationship to oneself, and the capacity to remain with uncertainty.

Put simply, your state is the inner mode from which you are living at this moment.

More precisely, a state is a person's current inner configuration, including the body, emotions, attention, memory, internal prediction, and sense of safety, from which they perceive the world, give it meaning, and act within it.

The body, attention, past experience, expectations of the future, and habitual defenses come together in a particular configuration, and it is from there that a person looks at the situation. State therefore affects not only what you feel, but which part of what is happening you notice, which version of the future seems probable, and which actions you can see as possible.

Your state is not what you think about the world. It is the inner ground on which those thoughts take shape.

The distinction may seem almost linguistic, but it changes how we understand a person. We usually try to work with the content of thought. If we are afraid, we tell ourselves that things are not as dangerous as they seem. If it is difficult to begin, we remind ourselves that every journey starts with a first step. If we feel ashamed, we say that everyone makes mistakes. If conflict arises, we explain that adults need to talk.

All of these thoughts may be correct. But a correct thought does not mean that the system is able to use it.

In acute anxiety, the sentence "Nothing terrible has happened" can sound like a failure to recognize an obvious threat. In exhaustion, the advice to "just begin" can feel almost insulting, because the first movement is precisely what the person cannot make. In shame, the idea that mistakes are part of experience does not reach the place where a verdict has already been passed on the entire self.

One person can remember the right thought in the middle of a difficult conversation. Another remembers it twenty minutes later, after the message has been sent, the voice has been raised, and the consequences must be dealt with separately. They were no less intelligent and knew no less. In that moment, they simply had no access to what they knew.

A state can be understood as an inner configuration in which some paths are open while others are temporarily unavailable. In one state, a person can tolerate a pause, think, clarify, ask for help, or admit a mistake. In another, the same actions feel dangerous, humiliating, or pointless. The person is not necessarily rejecting them consciously. Sometimes they simply cannot see them among the available options.

This is why the words “I can’t” sometimes need to be examined more closely. Real limitations exist, and they cannot be overcome by the right thought or an effort of will. But sometimes it would be more accurate to say: “In this state, I cannot yet see how.”

THE WORLD IS REAL, BUT WE DO NOT MEET IT IN A VACUUM

It is easy here to slip into a convenient extreme and decide that everything that happens is only an internal interpretation. That illness, poverty, violence, betrayal, loss, and other people's freedom exist only because a person is looking at them the wrong way.

That would be not only simplistic, but cruel.

The world does not disappear because we have begun to observe our state. Another person's words can indeed be humiliating. A partner may be pulling away. Money may genuinely be short. A diagnosis may be serious. Rejection remains rejection, loss remains loss, and violence must never be turned into a lesson about the victim's faulty perception.

External reality exists and acts upon us. It supports, limits, wounds, nourishes, disrupts plans, opens possibilities, and sometimes leaves no good choice. Any psychology that fails to take this into account eventually becomes a way of blaming people for not experiencing real pain correctly enough.

But it would be an equally serious mistake to imagine a person as a neutral instrument that simply records the world as it is. An event enters a system that already contains a body, memory, expectations, old wounds, hopes, fears, and a current level of available resources.

Even a camera shows nothing without the conditions under which the image is made. A whole landscape may stand before the lens, but only part of that space enters the photograph. There is light, focus, exposure, distance, the photographer's position, the moment the shutter is released, and the edges of the frame. One detail comes into sharp focus, another recedes into blur; something is illuminated, while something else remains in shadow.

I have worked with photography for many years, and I know how different the same person can appear depending on the light, distance, angle, and moment. They may look strong, vulnerable, tired, closed off, gentle, alive, or almost absent, although the same person has been standing before the lens all along. The camera has not invented them anew. It has made one side visible and nearly concealed another.

Something similar happens in human perception, except our inner lens is incomparably more complex than any camera lens. It is made of the body, experience, expectations, fears, hopes, attachments, cultural norms, and the state in which we entered the event.

We do not create the world from nothing, but we select what will matter most in it, sometimes before we even realize that a selection has already been made.

Not everything lies within us, but everything that becomes part of our lived reality passes through us.

It is this "through us" that concerns this book. Not the external world in itself, and not an inner life detached from events, but the living boundary where a fact becomes a threat, an opportunity, a humiliation, a task, a loss, a hope, or an almost unnoticed episode.

THE EVENT AND ITS INNER VERSION

We are used to thinking that an event causes a response directly. You are criticized, and you become upset. Someone does not reply, and you grow anxious. You are praised, and you feel better. You make a mistake, and shame appears. A task arises, and you tense up.

But between the event and the response, some form of internal processing almost always takes place, so quickly that a person does not have time to notice it. The event has not yet become a conscious thought, but the system has already begun to read it through past experience, the state of the body, the expectation of threat, the need for recognition, the fear of rejection, or accumulated fatigue.

An event does not enter an empty space. It enters a state that is already selecting certain cues, connecting them with past experience, and giving what is happening a preliminary meaning. A person therefore responds not only to the fact itself, but also to the inner version of that fact, formed before a conscious conclusion has been reached.

Someone says to you, “Could you take a look at this text?” In a sufficiently collected state, you hear a straightforward task: open it, read it, make corrections. When you are overloaded, the same sentence sounds like one more burden someone has decided to place on top of everything else. In shame, it may mean: they are about to find a mistake and see that I am not good enough. An old resentment produces another version: once again, they are giving me more work and failing to notice that I am already exhausted.

The sentence has not changed. What changed was where it landed and the meaning that formed around it.

Perception is not a transparent window through which reality enters us unchanged. It is a complex process of selection, comparison, prediction, and completion, in which the present is constantly measured against what has happened before.

You may enter a room and immediately sense tension. Sometimes you are right: something really is wrong there. At other times, you bring the tension with you, and the room becomes a screen onto which the system projects an expectation that was already prepared.

You may hear coldness in your partner’s voice. Perhaps they truly have become distant. Or perhaps they are simply tired, while your anxiety has already turned that fatigue into evidence that you are no longer loved.

You may see a weak response to something you published and decide that no one cares about the subject. But what you are looking at may be only one post, one algorithmic fluctuation, an ineffective headline, or an audience that has not yet encountered the material.

The first act of honesty is not to declare your reaction mistaken, but to ask: What am I actually seeing right now, and what has my state already added?

Sometimes, after checking, it will turn out that the anxiety was justified, the partner really is pulling away, the message contains a threat, or the weak response to the work means that something

needs to change. But now the decision rests not only on the first wave, but also on an attempt to distinguish the fact from its inner version.

Until that distinction appears, the system operates on Autopilot. The first assembled version of reality is experienced as the only possible one, and the response feels natural and inevitable.

I am afraid, so the danger must already be here. I feel ashamed, so something must be wrong with me. I am angry, so the other person must be at fault. It is difficult for me to begin, so I must be lazy. I cannot see a solution, so no solution exists.

Autopilot does not mean primitiveness or the absence of intelligence. In this mode, a person may be intelligent, educated, experienced, and fluent in psychological language. Its defining feature is different: it does not distinguish between the event and its version of the event, between state and reality, or between a feeling and a ready-made instruction for action.

Autopilot is necessary for much of life. A person cannot analyze every movement, every thought, and every breath. But where Autopilot keeps producing pain, conflict, and destruction again and again, its invisibility becomes costly.

WHY UNDERSTANDING ALONE IS NOT ENOUGH

An adult often understands a great deal. They know that it is unwise to respond sharply out of irritation, that using a phone before sleep worsens their state, that the body needs movement, and that resentment does not resolve a conversation. They understand that major conclusions should not be drawn from nighttime exhaustion, that fear of loss can intensify control, and that one failure does not erase the entire path.

But understanding often lives above the level at which the state is operating.

You may know that you need rest and still keep pressuring yourself because an old rule is active inside: rest must be earned. You may understand that your partner is not required to guess your feelings, yet remain silent and wait because making a direct request feels humiliating. You may read dozens of books about boundaries and, when real pressure appears, yield again because the body remembers that conflict is dangerous.

You may know that a book has to be written gradually, yet demand perfect form from the very first attempt. You may understand that one weak response says nothing about the value of the work as a whole, and still feel as though a number on the screen has delivered a final verdict.

Knowledge matters, but it has to enter the state rather than merely take up residence in the mind. As long as it remains a separate thought, it is easily overpowered by the rest of the inner configuration. A person may know the right route, yet in a moment of tension climb into the old car that carries them down the familiar road on its own.

Then they become angry with themselves: Why am I reacting this way again if I understand all of it?

The answer may be unpleasant, but it is precise: because one part of the system understands, while another is the part acting.

A state does not always listen to lectures. It changes not only through explanation, but through the body, the environment, repetition, lived experiences of safety, new ways of responding, and small actions that gradually become evidence from within.

EXHAUSTION THAT SPEAKS IN THE VOICE OF TRUTH

One of the clearest examples of state is exhaustion.

In the evening, after a long day, certain thoughts become especially convincing. It can seem that nothing will work, that work has lost its meaning, that people are too difficult, that the relationship has reached a dead end, that the book is too large, and that there will never again be enough time for a real life. These conclusions may sound serious, coherent, and almost philosophical.

In the morning, after sleep, they do not always disappear, but they often lose their absoluteness. The problem remains, yet it regains its boundaries. Where the night held a final dead end, the morning reveals a difficult, unpleasant, but specific task.

Exhaustion rarely says directly, “I need sleep, proper food, movement, and a lighter load.” It prefers weightier formulations: “Life is meaningless.” “I can’t do anything.” “It will always be this way.” “Now I understand everything.”

At the same time, exhaustion can carry an important truth. It may show that a person has been living against themselves for too long, that the load exceeds their available resources, that a relationship has become destructive, or that the body is no longer willing to keep paying for the same way of life. But exhaustion is poor at judging scale. It turns the temporary into the permanent, one part of life into the whole of life, and a signal into a verdict.

You may not be at a dead end. You may be in a state that cannot currently see a way out. That distinction does not erase the problem, but it keeps you from issuing a final judgment at the very moment when the system is least able to see the whole.

I know this state well from working with texts. Sometimes, after several hours at the computer, coffee instead of a proper meal, and almost no movement, I kept demanding philosophical clarity from myself. The open document began to look like proof that the idea was too large, the material too extensive, and that I would never have enough time or strength to finish the book.

After food, a short walk, or sleep, the book did not write itself. The problem had not disappeared. But it had returned to a human scale.

A bad day rarely arrives fully formed. It becomes bad through a chain of small self-reinforcing moments. A person sleeps poorly, wakes tense, sees an unpleasant message, reads it in the harshest possible way, replies more sharply than intended, damages the connection, loses focus, escapes into the phone, wastes time, blames themselves, and by evening has gathered enough evidence that the day truly was terrible.

This does not mean that the person caused everything that happened. Poor sleep may have come from illness. The message was real. The other person may genuinely have behaved badly. But the state did not merely receive events. It participated in creating the next event, then received new material that confirmed the original conclusion.

A loop forms: state shapes perception, perception shapes behavior, behavior creates a new external stream of events, and that stream reinforces the original state. Later, we will look closely at how such loops become a stable direction in life. For now, it is enough to see that lived reality is built neither by a single thought nor by a single event, but by their continuing interaction.

STATE SELECTS WHAT MATTERS

At any given moment, reality contains more information than a person can consciously take in. Sounds, objects, facial expressions, smells, bodily sensations, and countless small details are all present in the same room, yet only part of them enters the focus of attention.

State participates in that selection. In anxiety, attention finds threat more quickly. In shame, it notices evidence that something is wrong with you. In resentment, it gathers signs of unfairness. In exhaustion, it highlights obstacles and the cost of effort. In a more grounded state, it becomes easier to see structure, alternatives, help, and the fact that a problem has limits.

This does not mean that an anxious person invents every threat, or that a calm person necessarily sees the world correctly. Sometimes anxiety notices a danger that others ignore. Anger can accurately signal that a boundary has been crossed, while shame can remind us of a real action for which responsibility is required. The more important question is which part of reality a state makes central and what it leaves outside attention.

I know this mechanism well from working with texts and public material. You write an article, invest time, experience, and thought in it, publish it, and wait for a response. It is natural for an author to want that response. A psychologist wants to know whether the text helped. A photographer wants to know whether the image was seen. A teacher wants to know whether the material reached another person. It would be dishonest to pretend that a creator does not care whether their work has met the world.

But a weak response can easily become more than publication statistics. It can turn into an assessment of the whole person.

In a more collected state, you can see several possible explanations. The subject may have been difficult, the timing poor, the algorithm may not have shown the material to the right audience, the headline may have been weaker than the text, or people may simply need more time. You can study the data, change the form, and continue.

In another state, the screen produces a completely different conclusion: no one needs this; I am speaking into a void; I have no voice; everything I do is meaningless.

The number of views has not changed. What changed was what that number became inside the system.

I have noticed this in myself as well. Sometimes statistics remained ordinary information I could use in my work. At other times, they almost imperceptibly became an external control panel for my state: one number raised my confidence, while another devalued several days of work.

At moments like these, it becomes especially clear that a person is not seeing only a number on the screen. They are seeing an inner version of that number, already connected with hope, fatigue, the need for recognition, and doubt about their own right to continue.

State frames the world. It brings one signal into sharp focus, blurs another, gives excessive weight to a third, and barely allows a fourth into awareness. Without this selection, a person could not orient themselves at all. The problem begins when they stop noticing their own lens and mistake the current frame for reality as a whole.

State is especially convincing because it rarely feels like one possible way of perceiving. When a person is anxious, it does not seem to them that the system is increasing the probability of threat and assembling evidence around it. They feel that danger is genuinely close. In shame, personal wrongness is experienced as fact. In resentment, a person becomes certain that they have finally seen the other exactly as they are.

You can repeat, “I can handle this,” but if the body is tense, attention sees only obstacles, memory supplies earlier failures, and the future feels closed, the phrase will remain a thin layer laid over the rest of the system. When a person is fully inside a state, it appears not as one version among others, but as truth itself.

The first task, therefore, is not to change the state immediately, but to begin noticing it.

CHARACTER: “THAT’S JUST WHO I AM”

People often explain recurring reactions through character: “I’m hot-tempered.” “I’m anxious.” “I always need to control everything.” “I find it hard to trust.” “I don’t know how to rest.” “I’m just lazy.”

Definitions like these create a sense of clarity, but at the same time they close off the possibility of examining the mechanism. If this is simply who I am, then my only options are to justify myself or try to break myself. But if a familiar reaction arises from a particular inner configuration, it becomes possible to notice where it is activated, what conditions sustain it, and why this response feels like the only available one.

This does not mean that character does not exist. People differ in temperament, sensitivity, speed of response, need for novelty, stability of attention, and many other traits. But part of what a person considers fixed character may be the system’s repeated way of entering a particular state.

A man says he is always irritable, but it turns out that his irritation intensifies sharply when he feels powerless. A woman considers herself distrustful, yet her distrust becomes strongest around people who send contradictory signals. Someone calls themselves lazy, although they act easily where they can see meaning, completion, and a connection between effort and result.

A label describes the whole person. A mechanism reveals the conditions.

The sentence “That’s just who I am” closes the conversation. The sentence “In states like these, I become this version of myself” opens a path to investigation. It does not remove responsibility or promise instant change, but it restores movement.

A FEELING IS NOT AN INSTRUCTION

Everything a person feels matters. Fear, anger, resentment, shame, emptiness, and the urge to control something do not arise from nowhere. They carry information about the body, past experience, expectation, need, threat, or a violated boundary.

But a signal is not yet a ready-made instruction for action.

Fear may warn of a real danger or reproduce an earlier one. Anger can protect dignity, but it may also cover helplessness and shame. Resentment may point to genuine pain, or it may demand the impossible from another person. The urge to check, write, or get an answer immediately may come not from the need to act, but from the inability to tolerate uncertainty.

When a person does not distinguish between feeling and action, every internal movement demands an immediate external response. Fear appears, so control must begin. Pain appears, so someone must be blamed. Anxiety appears, so everything must be checked. Shame appears, so one must hide or attack. Emptiness appears, so it must be filled at once with something.

This is how Autopilot works: a feeling becomes evidence, and the evidence turns into action.

A person does not choose the first bodily wave that rises inside them. They do not always choose the first thought that enters their mind. But sometimes a small space can appear between the inner signal and the response. Later, that space will become one of the central themes of this book.

STATE AND RESPONSIBILITY

If state influences perception and behavior so strongly, it is easy to arrive at a dangerous conclusion: perhaps a person is responsible for nothing.

I was exhausted, so I lost my temper. I was afraid, so I became controlling. I got carried away. There was nothing I could do.

State explains a great deal, but explanation does not erase consequences. If anxiety led you to control someone, the other person still encountered control. If exhaustion made you raise your voice at a child, the child heard the voice, not an internal theory about overload. If shame led you to devalue someone else's work, their pain does not become smaller because the aggression served a protective function.

State is a map, not an absolution. It shows where a reaction begins, what feeds it, and at what point a person stops seeing other options. A map does not remove responsibility for the road already traveled. It exists so that you do not keep returning to the same road blindly.

There is an opposite extreme as well: if a person is responsible for their actions, then state does not matter and they should simply pull themselves together.

That position demands the same clarity, strength, and endurance under completely different inner conditions. It asks the exhausted person to act as though they were restored, the frightened person to love as though they felt safe, and the person in deep shame to speak to themselves as though self-respect were already available.

Responsibility without an understanding of state becomes a whip. Understanding state without responsibility becomes an excuse.

A more mature position requires holding both sides at once: I can see what gave rise to my reaction, and I am still responsible for what I send back into the world through it.

This is one of the hardest positions to hold, because it is usually easier to choose only one side. A person either condemns themselves entirely and demands that they become someone else at once, or explains everything through circumstances and removes themselves from the equation. But maturity rarely lives at the extremes. It appears where a person can say: "Yes, something important and difficult was happening to me. And yes, my response still had consequences."

STATE AS ACCESS TO THE WORLD

When state changes, the external world does not have to change with it. But our access to the world changes.

In a grounded state, you may see a task where you once saw a threat. After recovery, you notice an opportunity that exhaustion had made invisible. In a state of trust, you hear a question where you once heard an attack. When the body regains strength, movement becomes easier to begin. In love, it is easier to withstand another person's imperfection. In grief, even a beautiful road may lose its color for a time, because the world is passing through absence.

We often say, "I can't."

Sometimes that is true. There are real limitations: another person's freedom, illness, lack of money, lack of time, loss, and circumstances that no amount of inner work can erase.

But sometimes it would be more accurate to say, "In this state, I cannot yet see how."

These are not the same statement.

"I can't" closes the door. "In this state, I cannot see the way in" leaves a small possibility: perhaps the task is not to break down the door, but to change the conditions from which you are looking at it. Sleep. Eat. Take a walk. Talk to someone. Simplify the task. Remove unnecessary noise. Divide the work into smaller parts. Ask for help. Bring the body back into the process.

This is not magic or positive thinking. It is respect for the fact that access to the world depends on inner configuration.

There have been periods when I could not change the central problem quickly. No single decision can undo a loss, finish a large book, rebuild a relationship, transform a financial reality, or return strength to a body that needs time.

But sometimes it is possible to put one square meter of the space around you in order. Not your whole life, not the entire house, and not the future, but only a desk, a workspace, or a small part of a room where chaos stops feeling limitless.

The problem does not disappear. But it stops occupying all the inner space, and then at least one next step becomes possible again.

DON'T FIX YOURSELF—SEE THE SYSTEM

Many people come to psychology, philosophy, religion, and self-development practices hoping to find a way to finally fix themselves. To become calmer, more productive, more confident, gentler, more resilient, and more free.

The desire to change is natural. But people often approach themselves as though they were defective objects in urgent need of redesign.

Then every new idea becomes another demand. It is no longer enough to work, earn money, build relationships, care for the body, and cope with life. Now every reaction must also be observed correctly. A new reason for shame appears: once again I was not aware enough, once again I slipped into Autopilot, once again I failed to hold myself back.

But a system is difficult to change while it remains invisible.

This book therefore proposes beginning not with correction, but with observation. To see where the body has been signaling for a long time while you call yourself lazy. Where an anxious prediction presents itself as intuition. Where shame speaks in the voice of conscience. Where control calls itself responsibility. Where exhaustion turns into philosophical disappointment, and old pain places an old meaning onto a new person.

Seeing does not mean stopping the process immediately. Sometimes a person notices their reaction only after it has already happened. At first they recognize it several days later, then that same evening, then twenty minutes after the conversation. Gradually, the moment of recognition moves closer to the reaction itself.

This is not a rapid transition from Autopilot to freedom. First, a person realizes that they have found themselves on the same familiar road again. Then they begin to notice the turn where they left the main path. Only later may the possibility of choosing another direction appear.

The future Architect of the system cannot be created by command. First there must be someone capable of seeing how the system works.

THE FIRST GAP

The central change begins with a barely perceptible gap.

As long as you are fully fused with a state, it speaks on behalf of all reality. When you begin to notice it, the state does not disappear, but it stops being the only voice.

You may still feel pain, fear, shame, or resentment. The familiar action may still pull at you. But a small space appears in which you do not have to do immediately what Autopilot has already prepared.

A person discovers that they can say not “The world is terrible,” but “Right now the world looks especially heavy to me.” Not “I am worthless,” but “Shame has risen in me.” Not “The relationship is over,” but “I became afraid that I would be left.” Not “Everything is meaningless,” but “I am so exhausted that I cannot feel meaning right now.”

This is not wordplay and not an attempt to diminish what is happening. Sometimes the world really is dangerous. A person may have made a serious mistake. Relationships end. Work loses its meaning. But until these possibilities have been distinguished, it is dangerous to give the first inner version absolute authority.

When the system becomes visible, it becomes possible to distinguish the external fact from its inner version, a real danger from a prediction, a bodily signal from a ready-made conclusion, and a feeling from an action.

The person does not gain complete control or step outside the system. They simply stop being fully fused with it.

Freedom does not enter through this gap all at once. Sometimes the gap lasts only a few seconds. Sometimes the person still does what they usually do, but notices it sooner than before. Sometimes, for the first time, they manage not to send the message in the first wave of anger, not to take nighttime anxiety for prophecy, not to issue a final verdict on themselves after one failure, and not to destroy a conversation with a response that, a few minutes later, will no longer seem like the only possible one.

The capacity to see a state without becoming it entirely is what we will later call the Observer mode. For now, there is no need to turn the word into a special spiritual position. The Observer does not stand above life or control the system through attention alone. Its first action is much more modest: it notices that something has already happened between the event and the reaction.

Here is the fact, the bodily wave, the prediction, the meaning the system has already filled in, and the action I now feel pulled toward.

At this moment, the person has not changed anything yet. But they are no longer completely identical with the automatic process. Becoming the Architect of one's own system is still far ahead. To influence individual nodes, a person will need to understand the body, prediction, attention, environment, habitual actions, and protective strategies more clearly.

First, the system must be seen.

CHAPTER 1 FORMULA

The main axis of the book is simple:

State → perception → response.

State does not create the entire world or erase external reality. It is the inner configuration that determines your access to what is happening: what you notice, what meaning you give to what you see, what future you consider probable, and what response you send back.

Within this system, a person can move through three modes. Autopilot takes the first inner version of an event for the only possible reality and acts from it. The Observer notices the state, separates the fact from its inner translation, and creates a gap between impulse and response. The Architect uses that gap to change one accessible node in the system: attention, interpretation, pace, environment, or action.

These are not three different people, nor stages completed once and for all. Autopilot, Observer, and Architect can replace one another over the course of a single day and even within one conversation. The task is not to eliminate automatic functioning forever, but to notice it more often and restore the possibility of participation.

When state changes, the world does not have to change. But what a person can see, understand, tolerate, and do changes.

If one thought remains after this first chapter, let it be this: state is not a mood or a passing emotional background. It is the inner mode in which the world becomes exactly this world for a person.

When someone truly notices, even once, that their lived reality is not simply given to them but is assembled within a particular state, the first crack appears in the automatic picture of the world.

Freedom does not enter through it immediately. But air already begins to come through.

WHERE WE GO NEXT

If state participates so deeply in what the world becomes for us, the next question is unavoidable: where does this inner configuration begin?

A person accustomed to thinking of themselves as a rational being would like to say that everything begins with thought. First I understand, then I feel, then I make a decision and act.

But every morning, before plans, beliefs, conclusions, and elegant words about freedom, you wake first as a body.

It already knows how you slept, how much strength you have, how freely you can breathe, where tension has accumulated, and whether you are ready to move toward the world or want to close yourself off from it. You have not yet formed a single serious thought, and the body is already participating in what the coming day will become.

So next we will turn to the first filter of state.

To the body, which begins reading the world before a person has time to explain it.

CHAPTER 2. THE BODY AS THE FIRST FILTER

However much you think of yourself as a person of thought, meaning, conviction, decision, and free will, each morning begins before any of those things—with the body.

Before you remember your plans, family, work, money, unfinished tasks, or your place in the world, the body has already begun to tell you how you are entering the new day. You slept well or woke several times. Your breathing is free or shallow. Your back moves easily or reminds you of yesterday's strain. Your head feels clear or heavy. Your chest is calm, or tension is already present before the mind has found a reason for it.

You have not yet formed a single serious thought, but the range of what feels possible has already begun to narrow. Today you want to move or lie still. Today the world feels accessible or demands too much effort. Today an ordinary request may remain an ordinary request, or it may sound like another intrusion into a system already operating at its limit.

We are used to thinking that we first evaluate a situation, then experience an emotion, and only afterward does the body respond with a racing heart, weakness, tension, heat, or cold. Sometimes the process does unfold in that order. But very often the body enters the event before the mind has time to build an explanation.

You have not yet decided that the conversation will be unpleasant, but your shoulders have already risen and your breathing has shortened. You have not yet admitted that you feel unsafe beside someone, but your body has already moved you farther away, your voice has become more careful, and your stomach has tightened. You have not yet understood that you are overloaded, yet for several days you have been irritated by ordinary sounds, forgetting simple things, and experiencing every new task as a personal injustice.

The body has already changed your access to the world. Thought will find an explanation later.

THE INTERFACE BETWEEN THE WORLD AND THE PERSON

If the first chapter showed that state determines our access to reality, the next step is to see that this access does not begin in an abstract consciousness. There is no empty space between a person and the world through which events travel directly into the mind. There is a living body.

Light first reaches the eyes. Sound passes through hearing. Another person's voice changes your breathing. Cold makes the body contract. A smell returns a memory before you have time to name it. Touch can soothe or create an urge to pull away. Hunger makes the same conversation harder, pain narrows attention, and a full night's sleep can restore possibilities where the evening had revealed only a dead end.

The body is the first interface between the world and the person. It does not merely carry consciousness through reality the way a car carries a driver. It participates in what that reality becomes.

Thought does not exist separately from posture, breathing, heart rate, muscular tension, sleep, energy, or the sense of safety. A person does not think only with the head. They think through their entire embodied involvement in the situation.

Modern science uses the term interoception to describe how the brain perceives and interprets signals from the body's internal state: heartbeat, breathing, hunger, tension, temperature, pain, and fatigue. But the terminology itself is not what matters most here. The important point is the mechanism: a person is constantly receiving information not only about the external world, but also about the condition of the system meeting that world.

The brain does not wait for the body to send a neatly formatted report. It continually compares signals, estimates available resources, predicts threat, and prepares movement. This is why a person sometimes feels that something is wrong before they understand what exactly is troubling them.

This is neither mysticism nor infallible intuition. The body may accurately detect danger, or it may mistake for danger something that merely resembles an earlier experience. It may signal overload, or resist something new simply because the unfamiliar feels unsafe. In any case, a bodily signal does not appear at the edge of state. It is part of the inner configuration itself.

The body does not illustrate what is happening inside a person. It participates in what is happening.

YOU ARE NOT JUST TIRED—YOU THINK DIFFERENTLY

One of the most underestimated forces in human life is fatigue. We tend to treat it as an ordinary inconvenience. You are tired; it happens. Finish the coffee, pull yourself together, do a little more, make it to the evening, and somehow recover later.

But fatigue does not simply reduce the amount of energy available. It changes the way a person thinks.

When the system is depleted, it becomes harder to hold complexity. Tolerance for uncertainty decreases, irritation rises more quickly, and it becomes harder to see several possibilities at once. A small problem fills the entire horizon. Another person's request feels heavier than usual. A decision that seemed obvious yesterday now demands almost physical effort.

You do not simply grow tired of the world. The world becomes heavier for you.

When sufficiently resourced, a person may hear a critical remark and think: all right, this needs to be corrected. In exhaustion, the same remark is experienced as further proof that they are failing. After sleep, a difficult document remains a difficult document. After several sleepless nights, it can turn into a shapeless wall with no visible first step and no reason to continue.

What makes fatigue especially dangerous is how convincingly it speaks. It rarely says, "I need sleep, food, movement, and a pause." More often it says, "Everything is meaningless. People are too difficult. This work no longer matters. The relationship has reached a dead end. You never have enough time. Things will probably only get worse."

A person believes it not because they are weak or insufficiently self-aware. In that moment, the entire inner configuration supports precisely that version of the world.

A tired person is not necessarily wrong. Sometimes the body understands before the mind does that the old way of living is no longer possible. It may be showing that the load has become excessive, the work has lost meaning, the relationship is draining the system, or that trying to live through discipline alone has long since become a form of internal violence.

But fatigue is poor at judging scale. It can turn the temporary into the permanent, one part of life into the whole of life, and a signal into a final verdict.

You may not be at a dead end. You may be in a state that cannot currently see a way out.

These are not the same thing.

PAIN AS AN EDITOR OF THE WORLD

Pain edits reality too.

When nothing hurts, people rarely think about the body. They make plans, argue about meaning, solve work problems, think about relationships, money, travel, and the future. The body participates silently in life and therefore seems almost transparent.

But once persistent pain appears, the space of the world begins to narrow. The future becomes shorter. Patience decreases. Sound becomes irritating more quickly. Even kindness requires effort, because part of the system's inner capacity is constantly occupied by the bodily signal.

Try talking about lofty goals with someone who has a toothache. They may understand the importance of what you are saying, love you, respect the idea, and even try to listen carefully, but part of their attention remains held by pain.

Chronic discomfort works in an even more complicated way. A person gradually becomes used to it and may no longer realize how much inner energy is spent on continuously managing the body. They simply notice that they have become more irritable, tire of people more quickly, concentrate less well, want to leave the house less often, and increasingly experience ordinary life as too demanding.

They may think their character has deteriorated. But sometimes character has nothing to do with it. Part of the system is permanently occupied by a threat that cannot be switched off.

Pain changes more than sensation. It changes the meaning of what is happening. A long road becomes not a journey but an ordeal. A meeting a person once looked forward to is now measured by a different question: Will I be able to sit through it, get there, endure it? Even love and creativity pass through the bodily cost of participation.

At the same time, pain must not be reduced to a psychological state. It requires medical attention, diagnosis, and real treatment. A book about state must not turn illness into a metaphor and persuade a person that changing their attitude is enough.

But the psychology of pain begins where a bodily signal enters the system of a life. It affects hope, patience, self-esteem, relationships, and the ability to see a future. Pain is therefore not a separate obstacle, but one of the editors of lived reality.

THE HUNGRY PHILOSOPHER

I know well the moment when a bodily cause disguises itself as an intellectual dead end.

Sometimes I sit down to work on the book. The subject is difficult: love, death, culture, or inner freedom. Sources, notes, and several versions of the text are open in front of me. At first the thought moves; then it begins to snag. Paragraphs stop coming together, wording becomes irritating, research starts to seem superficial, and the entire design of the book suddenly feels too large.

I read the same passage several times and begin to think that I have lost the ability to write. I want to open my phone, check messages, look at the response to my posts, switch to something easier. A philosophical conclusion is already almost ready inside me: perhaps the subject simply does not work, the concept is overloaded, and today I am incapable of holding it as a whole.

Only later does a simple detail become visible: for several hours I have been drinking coffee, barely eating, and hardly moving.

When you prepare proper food, go for a walk, return movement to the body, and change your posture at least a little, the text does not write itself. But it stops looking like the end of your life as an author.

This is an important, almost comic moment: a hungry philosopher is sometimes too quick to draw conclusions about the meaning of existence.

We like to think that our thoughts are independent of the body because this supports an elegant image of the rational human being. But some philosophical crises begin not in the depths of the universe, but in a lack of sleep, food, water, and movement.

This does not mean that every difficult thought should be explained by blood sugar or fatigue. It would be just as crude to reduce every experience to biology as it would be to ignore the body completely. Maturity begins with checking the simplest level before passing a final judgment on one's whole life.

Sometimes what you need is not a new philosophy. Sometimes you need to eat.

TRACTION IN THE WORLD

The body shapes more than inner sensation. It participates in how much traction a person has in reality.

When there is energy, movement, and free breathing, the world is more easily experienced as a space in which action is possible. A road invites you to walk it, a staircase looks manageable, a conversation feels possible, and a task becomes approachable. A person senses not only what is happening, but also their own capacity to respond.

In exhaustion, that traction weakens. The situation still exists, but the person has no sense that they can enter it through action. They look at the phone, a document, the room, their workout clothes, or a list of tasks and understand what needs to be done, yet between understanding and movement the transmission seems to be missing.

This is why the phrase “pull yourself together” sometimes fails. The person has already pulled themselves together as tightly as they could. The problem is not the absence of a command. The system does not feel that it has the resources to carry the command out.

Traction in the world becomes especially visible in movement. After a walk, a person often returns not merely with a lighter body, but with a different structure of thought. Attention, breathing, rhythm, and the surrounding space change while walking. A task that looked like an immovable wall at the desk begins to separate into a sequence of steps.

Sometimes a thought arrives not because the person concentrated harder, but because they stopped thinking with a single motionless body.

I know this from photography. When an interesting assignment appears, my body comes alive before the work has even begun. Light, angles, a route, lenses, the movement of people, and a possible frame appear in my imagination. I have not taken a single photograph, yet I am already walking differently, thinking differently, and organizing the space around me.

The reverse also happens. An assignment may be financially worthwhile, yet connected with chaos, constant devaluation, unclear demands, and a person around whom professional boundaries must be defended at every moment. Then the body grows heavy before the shoot has even begun. The thought of the work produces not creative anticipation, but a desire to postpone it, disappear, or finish as quickly as possible.

This does not mean that bodily ease always points to the right path or that heaviness forbids us to continue. But the body reports the cost of gaining traction in a situation before thought does.

WHEN THE BODY BECOMES THE ENEMY

There is a particular tragedy in beginning to experience your own body as an obstacle to a normal life.

The body becomes tired, and the person grows angry with it. It hurts, and they treat the pain as weakness. It asks for rest, and they see sabotage. It changes with age, and the change feels like betrayal. It asks for sleep, food, water, movement, touch, a pause, and recovery, while the person continues living as though the organism were simply required to service their plans.

But the body is not a subordinate department of consciousness. It is part of the system.

When it goes unheard for too long, it begins to speak more loudly. First there is mild fatigue, then irritation, insomnia, pain, reduced concentration, anxiety, and a sense that the world has become heavier. A person may decide that their character has deteriorated, that they have become lazy, old, irritable, or uninteresting.

But sometimes the system has simply lived too long without respect for its first filter.

The body does not always obstruct life. Sometimes it obstructs violence against life.

It does not allow a person to keep dragging themselves forward indefinitely on coffee, willpower, obligations, and the fear of losing everything. It refuses to let sleep be postponed forever, fatigue be canceled by the right motivation, or the old speed be demanded when the inner conditions have already changed.

This is especially difficult to admit for people accustomed to carrying a great deal. They know how to gather themselves, endure, do what is necessary, finish, and show no weakness. Sometimes this is real strength. But when strength becomes the chronic refusal to hear the body, it begins to work against the person.

The body becomes the last honest witness. It says: this cannot continue.

Not always beautifully, not always at the right time, and not always in a convenient way. Yet sometimes it is precisely through fatigue, pain, and breakdown that the body restores a boundary consciousness has refused to recognize for too long.

MAJOR WEIGHT LOSS AND A NEW VERSION OF THE WORLD

I understand well that changing the body changes more than appearance.

There was a period in my life of major weight loss and a return to exercise, movement, and physical effort. As the weight began to come off, far more changed than the number on the scale. It became easier to walk, climb, take photographs, play tennis, go into the mountains, work longer, and recover more quickly.

My sense of my own capacity to participate in life was changing.

Before that, some actions required an internal negotiation in advance. I had to make myself begin, estimate the effort, and imagine how tired I would feel afterward. Later, the body began to answer differently: I can go, I can climb, I can endure, I can be among people, I can move not only because I have to, but because movement itself is pleasurable.

As the body changed, so did the prediction of the future.

This matters enormously. A person does not simply regain a smaller clothing size and a more pleasing reflection in the mirror. They receive new evidence of their own capacity to act. Stairs, roads, exercise, work, intimacy, and even being visible in public begin to feel different.

The world did not become easier in itself. But the body expanded access to it.

A significant result also carries a danger. When a person loses a great deal of weight, receives compliments, and once again feels in control, the body can easily become permanent proof of personal worth. Fear of going backward appears. Every gain feels threatening, a missed workout produces guilt, and food begins to divide not only into healthy and unhealthy, but almost into morally right and morally wrong.

Then movement toward the body quietly becomes a new form of war against it.

A person can lose weight out of love for life, wanting to become stronger, lighter, freer, and more mobile. Or they can lose weight out of hatred for themselves, punishing the body for failing to meet expectations.

From the outside, the actions may look identical. The person exercises, watches what they eat, and moves toward the goal with discipline. But the state from which they do these things is fundamentally different.

Care can be strict too. It does not mean indulging every desire. But within care, the body remains an ally rather than the accused.

A NEW BODY DOES NOT ALWAYS CREATE A NEW STATE

External change does not automatically rewrite the inner body image.

A person may lose weight, become more mobile, receive compliments, and still continue to see the person they used to be. They search for flaws, distrust what others say, fear regaining the weight, and treat the new form as a temporary exception.

The body has changed, but the world is still being read through old shame.

This applies to more than weight loss. A person may recover from illness and continue to regard the body as unreliable. They may gain physical strength and still feel they have no right to take up space. They may begin to look good and still expect to be exposed.

A new reality enters an old inner system and receives the old interpretation.

This is why caring for the body cannot be reduced to changing measurements. It takes time for new movement, breathing, endurance, and freedom to become part of an inner knowledge: this is me too.

People often live in an old body image far longer than they lived in the old body. They have already changed, yet continue to choose clothes as though they should hide, avoid photographs, distrust their attractiveness, and interpret attention as a mistake or a temporary accident.

The body became different. The state has not yet caught up.

This is why a new body must not only be seen, but inhabited. A person needs to walk a road in it, be among people in it, withstand another person's gaze, feel its strength, and allow themselves to be visible. The system needs repeated evidence that the change is real and does not require constant fear.

FOOD, WEIGHT, AND SHAME

Food rarely remains just food.

It can be care, pleasure, a family ritual, a way to recover, and a way to share life with another person. But it can also become anesthesia, reward, punishment, a substitute for intimacy, and a quick way to change one's state.

A person says, "I'm hungry," when sometimes what they want is not food, but a pause, soothing, warmth, or simply a few minutes during which no one asks anything of them. There is no weakness in this. The system is looking for an available form of self-regulation and using something that genuinely helped in the past.

The problem begins when food becomes the only accessible regulator and then turns into a reason for shame. A person first eats in order to calm down, then condemns themselves, increases the anxiety, and once again seeks relief in the same way.

This is how body, feeling, and action become locked in a closed loop.

Shame about weight complicates the picture further. A person experiences not only discomfort or a real burden on health. They enter social space expecting to be judged. A chair, a mirror, a photograph, a beach, clothing, intimacy, and another person's gaze all acquire an additional meaning.

The body becomes not a home, but a constant public examination.

For some, it is a source of strength; for others, an object of endless assessment. And when a person has spent years living in a body they are ashamed of, they enter reality through a chronic inner conflict.

But hatred of the body rarely creates lasting change. It may produce a sudden push, force restriction, and achieve a result, but it often preserves the war itself. The form changes while the inner accuser remains.

The body does not have to become perfect before it can stop being the enemy. Sometimes the first step is not to love every part of it immediately, but to stop treating it as guilty.

THE BODY AND AGE

Age enters a state not only through outward change. It alters the speed of recovery, the cost of old habits, a person's relationship to the future, and the amount of experience the body already carries.

When people are young, they often tolerate lack of sleep, irregular eating, emotional overload, and abrupt changes of rhythm more easily. The body returns to equilibrium faster, the future feels long, and mistakes do not always seem final.

Later, former ways of living begin to cost more. A sleepless night no longer disappears after a cup of coffee. A workout requires recovery. Prolonged strain affects memory, mood, and patience more quickly.

If a person continues to demand their former speed and endless readiness from themselves, they begin to fight not age, but the reality of their own system.

This does not mean that maturity is worse than youth. Maturity may contain more depth, precision, meaning, experience, and inner architecture. But it requires a different way of relating to the body. It is no longer possible to live indefinitely on reserve without consequence. Rhythm, recovery, movement, food, and the conditions in which the body can remain an ally have to be taken into account.

This is why nostalgia for youth is often more than longing for an age. A person misses the capacity of the state from which they once entered life: rapid recovery, the sense that much still lies ahead, a body that moved into action more easily, and mistakes that did not feel irreversible.

The mistake begins when a person tries to restore youth as an external form instead of asking what state was available then, and what version of it can be assembled now, in a different body and a different life.

The former age cannot be recovered. But some of the movement, strength, respect for the body, curiosity, and capacity to begin can return.

THE BODY IN LOVE AND FEAR

The body recognizes another person very quickly. Sometimes faster than the mind is ready to admit.

Beside one person, you exhale. Beside another, you tense. One voice brings you back into contact; another makes you brace and defend yourself. One gaze helps you feel seen; another makes the body feel small, awkward, or guilty.

Love also passes through the body. This does not diminish its spiritual dimension or its dimension of meaning. On the contrary, it makes love real.

A beloved person is not only an idea, a story, a choice, or a value. They are also a bodily experience: beside them, you may relax or remain constantly alert, breathe more freely or wait for criticism, feel warmth or the need to keep explaining yourself.

This is why unsafe relationships change state so deeply. A person may understand intellectually that everything is fine, that their partner is simply tired, and that nothing terrible has happened. But the body has already remembered the tone, the pause, footsteps in the hallway, the expression on a face, and the silence at the table.

Sometimes an incoming message accelerates the pulse before the person has even read it. Sometimes the turn of a key in the door makes the body tense because it does not know in what state the person they love has come home. Sometimes one short sentence restores an old fear faster than the mind can remind itself that this is a different situation.

But the body remembers more than threat. It stores safety as well: a voice beside which you no longer have to prove yourself, a touch that brings you back from anxiety, the presence of someone around whom the shoulders lower on their own and the world no longer feels like a space of constant defense.

Later, we will look more closely at love, attachment, and another person as part of the regulation of state. For now, it is enough to see the first bridge: closeness does not happen only between two stories and two minds. It brings together two bodies, each carrying memories of safety, pain, trust, and the future it expects.

THE BODY AND MOVEMENT

Movement is one of the most direct ways to change a person's participation in the world.

When we speak about exercise, it is easy to reduce everything to health, weight, and outward form. But movement changes more than muscles. It restores a sense of direction: I can stand up, walk, climb, approach, continue.

Sometimes a short walk brings more clarity than another hour spent sitting over a problem. Not because walking contains a ready-made answer, but because the system is no longer motionless. Breathing, rhythm, visual field, and muscular tension change. Thought receives a different body.

Movement can restore a sense of agency, the simple capacity to be the cause of one's own next step. This is especially important after grief, exhaustion, and prolonged passivity, when the future feels abstract and any large action seems impossible.

There is no need to change an entire life at once. Sometimes it is enough to walk one familiar route, make a few movements, climb a flight of stairs, prepare food, or put a small space in order. The body receives evidence: I am not completely stopped.

Autopilot often says that the right state must come first and action can begin afterward. But sometimes state follows action. Not every movement is violence against oneself. Some actions do not spend the last remaining resource; they return it.

What matters is not a cult of movement, but precision. Sometimes the body needs a walk, and sometimes it needs sleep. Sometimes a workout restores life; sometimes it becomes another form of pressure. Observation begins with a question: after this action, will the system have more contact with the world, or a deeper inner split?

THE BODY SHOULD NOT BECOME A DICTATOR

After everything said so far, it is easy to move into the opposite extreme and declare every bodily response an absolute truth.

I do not want to go, therefore the path is wrong. Something tightened inside, therefore the person is dangerous. It became difficult, therefore everything must be canceled. A desire appeared, therefore the body must need it.

But the body has no pure, unmediated access to reality. It carries past experience, habits, fears, and learned responses. It may read something new as dangerous simply because it does not yet know it.

A person may feel anxious before an important step they genuinely need to take. They may tense beside a good person because safe closeness is unfamiliar. They may resist a workout even though they will feel better afterward. They may want food not from hunger, but because food has become a familiar way of lowering anxiety.

The body is a source of data, but not the only judge.

The opposite position is equally dangerous: treating the body as a lazy subordinate. Do not feel. Endure. Push through. We will rest later. Pull yourself together. Stop getting in the way. A person may function like this for a long time, especially if they have learned to take pride in endurance. But the body gradually raises the volume of the signal until it can no longer be ignored.

Maturity begins neither when the body receives full authority nor when the mind finally subdues it. It begins in a dialogue in which the bodily response is noticed, checked, and included in a decision alongside facts, values, consequences, and meaning.

THE BODY AND RESPONSIBILITY

A bodily state explains why a person becomes less patient, finds it harder to sustain attention, and moves more quickly into defense. But explanation does not remove responsibility for what they do.

If you are hungry and therefore irritable, another person is still hurt by your harshness. If you are chronically sleep-deprived and keep losing your temper with those close to you, lack of sleep explains the mechanism but does not cancel the consequences. If pain makes you hard, that calls for compassion and treatment, but it does not automatically give you the right to cause pain in others.

Responsibility here does not mean demanding that you remain equally strong under every condition. It means taking your state into account before it begins to govern behavior completely.

If you know that several sleepless nights make you sharp, important conversations are better postponed, or at least approached with an honest acknowledgment of your condition. If hunger makes you intolerant, eating becomes not a trivial household detail but part of the ethics of a relationship. If pain takes most of your available resources, the answer is not to perform your former availability, but to reconsider the load.

A person is not responsible for the fact that their body has limits. They are responsible for how they participate in the system of those limits.

Sometimes responsibility means not forcing yourself to do more, but recognizing in time that the old mode is already harming you and the people around you.

THE BODY AS A BOUNDARY

The body reveals boundaries before a person is ready to admit them.

You can keep telling yourself that you are coping. You can keep accepting assignments, answering, helping, enduring, remaining silent, holding yourself together, and promising just a little more. But the body gradually shows where the inner agreement with yourself has already been broken.

Sleep begins to fail. Breathing becomes shallow. Irritation rises faster. The shoulders do not relax even at night. Memory starts to falter, the head grows heavy, and more and more often the body wants not to participate in life, but simply to shut down.

And the person wonders: Why have I become like this?

Perhaps they have not become someone else. Perhaps the body is showing the cost of the old mode.

Here, a bodily signal becomes a form of feedback. It says: this is too much, too long, too harsh; there is no recovery here; here you are pretending that you can carry more than the system can actually withstand.

The body's boundary is not a defeat. It is information.

If a person respects it, they may be able to rebuild the mode before the system moves into a more severe failure. If they continue to ignore it, the body will speak more loudly: sometimes through illness, sometimes through collapse, sometimes through complete withdrawal, when it is no longer possible to want, act, or feel joy.

Caring for the body, in this sense, is not an indulgence. It is one way of preventing a state from being driven toward destruction.

THE BODY AS THE BEGINNING OF OBSERVATION

In the first chapter, we approached the distinction between Autopilot and the Observer. The body provides the first practical entry into that distinction.

Autopilot usually notices a bodily signal only after it has already become an action. A person shouts and only afterward realizes that they had been walking around for hours with a clenched jaw. They refuse an important conversation, then later notice that before the meeting they had almost stopped breathing. They declare themselves lazy even though they have been living without proper sleep for weeks.

Observation begins before words.

What is happening with my breathing right now? Where is the tension? Is the body moving toward the situation or trying to withdraw from it? Is this hunger, fear, pain, fatigue, excitement, or a mixture of several signals? After this action, will the system become more alive, or close down even further?

These questions do not grant immediate control over the body. They simply make visible what previously happened without the person's participation.

At first, the bodily signal is noticed after the reaction. Then during it. Sometimes it is noticed before Autopilot has had time to unfold completely.

Here the shoulders rise. Here the breath grows short. Here the hand reaches for the phone again. Here the body is already preparing to attack, although the conversation has not yet begun.

At this point, the person has not changed anything yet. But the first gap appears between signal and action.

The Observer does not begin as an elegant spiritual position. It begins with a simple bodily recognition: something is happening to me right now.

The Architect will appear much later, when the person learns to influence individual conditions of the system: sleep, workload, environment, movement, food, rhythm, boundaries, and ways of recovering. But first, the body must stop being the invisible executor of automatic reactions.

It has to be brought back into the field of attention.

CHAPTER 2 FORMULA

If this chapter is gathered into one thought, it is this:

the body does not merely report a state; it participates in the construction of reality.

Through sleep, pain, hunger, breathing, movement, tension, age, weight, closeness, and the sense of safety, the body shapes what a person is able to notice, withstand, and do.

But a bodily signal is not an absolute truth and must not become a command. The body is the first source of data, one that must be heard, checked, and included in a broader understanding of what is happening.

Autopilot acts from a bodily reaction without noticing it.

Observation begins when a person manages to feel: my body entered the event before I explained it.

WHERE WE GO NEXT

The body is the first to signal how a person is entering the world. But by itself, it does not yet explain what a particular event will become.

Two people may feel the same acceleration of the pulse, yet one will call it fear, another excitement, a third a premonition of danger, and a fourth readiness for action. The same bodily signal receives a different meaning depending on past experience, expectations, and the future the system considers probable.

The body sends a signal, but then the inner translation begins.

An event does not enter the system as ready-made meaning. It becomes data that must be recognized, compared with the past, and integrated into a prediction. It is there that an ordinary pause becomes rejection, a comment becomes a verdict, and a new possibility becomes either a threat or a path.

The next chapter will therefore turn to internal prediction and the code of an event.

To the way the system transforms what is happening into meaning before a person has time to tell themselves what they understood.

CHAPTER 3. INTERNAL PREDICTION AND THE CODE OF AN EVENT

You have probably noticed that sometimes you react faster than you can understand what, exactly, you reacted to.

The phone makes a brief sound, and your body has already tensed. Someone pauses before answering, and a sense arises that something unpleasant is about to be said. Your manager writes, “Come see me,” and the conversation is still some time away, yet the mind has already opened an entire archive of possible reasons: Where did I make a mistake? What did I do wrong? Why am I being called in now? How will this end?

Your partner reads a message but does not reply. Only a few minutes have passed and there are almost no facts, yet a story is already beginning to assemble inside you. Perhaps they are offended. Perhaps their feelings have cooled. Perhaps something has happened. Perhaps everything will be different now.

We rarely simply wait for an event. We meet it in advance.

While a doctor studies test results, the patient tries to read the answer in the doctor’s face. While an email is opening, a person is already preparing for a complaint or a rejection. While a client is still formulating a question, the professional has already decided that criticism is coming. While someone close takes a breath before speaking, the system is already selecting a defense.

We may call this experience, intuition, anxiety, caution, professional instinct, or simple common sense, depending on the situation and on how we regard our own reaction. Sometimes internal prediction is remarkably accurate. Sometimes it helps us prepare, notice danger, avoid repeating an old mistake, and orient ourselves more quickly in uncertainty. But sometimes a person responds not to what is happening, but to what the system expects to see.

Then the future begins to influence the present before it has even arrived.

THE ANTICIPATION OF AN EVENT IS ALREADY AN EVENT

Imagine that tomorrow you have an important conversation.

The conversation has not happened yet. The other person has said nothing. No decision has been made. Yet you are already living inside a possible future. You return several times to the beginning of the conversation in your mind, imagine the tone, choose your arguments, and build replies to sentences you have not heard.

When the prediction is relatively calm, preparation helps. You recall the facts, clarify your position, understand what you want to say and where you are willing to look for compromise. The future becomes a space for preliminary organization.

But if a fear of humiliation, rejection, or defeat is already active inside you, preparation gradually turns into defense. You begin arguing with someone who has not said anything. You become angry at possible accusations. You prove yourself right to an imaginary opponent. By the time the real meeting begins, you enter the room not ready to talk, but internally certain that you are about to be attacked.

The other person asks an ordinary question, and you answer the question you expected. They are surprised by your harshness and begin to defend themselves. The conversation really does become difficult, and your system receives confirmation: I knew it. The world has once again proved to be exactly like this.

There is no mysticism here. We did not attract the event with the power of thought. We entered it through behavior that had already been prepared by prediction.

Expectation does not remain somewhere inside the head. It changes the body, attention, voice, choice of words, distance, speed of response, and readiness to notice some signals while ignoring others. Prediction becomes part of the event before the event has had time to unfold fully.

AN EVENT ENTERS AS DATA

For many years, I worked in programming, information technology, and systems design. That work taught me something simple: a result on a screen does not appear by itself. Before it, there are always input data, processing rules, conditions, connections, and the code by which the system assembles the outcome.

When a program produces an error, there is no point in blaming the last line of output each time. You have to look deeper. What data entered the system? In what format? Which condition was triggered? Where did an old value remain in memory? Why did the system choose this particular branch of execution?

Later, I began to notice a similar logic in human behavior.

An event enters a person as data. Someone falls silent. Someone says a sentence. An email arrives. A client refuses. A partner does not reply. A photograph shows an unfamiliar angle. The number on the scale changes. You are praised or, on the contrary, corrected.

But an event is not yet ready-made meaning.

Silence is not, by itself, rejection. A comment is not humiliation. A delayed reply is not proof that a relationship has cooled. One client's refusal is not professional failure. A compliment does not necessarily mean sincere admiration, but neither is it necessarily a polite lie.

The event provides data, and the inner system begins to process them.

It compares the new with the past, identifies familiar signs, looks for possible threat, estimates the probability of loss or reward, and assigns a meaning. As a result, the person is no longer dealing with the original event, but with its inner version.

You can imagine this process as the work of a translator. A message arrives from outside in the language of events, and inside it is translated into the language of personal experience. The same set of data receives different meanings in different systems.

For one person, the phrase "This needs a little more work" means a professional correction. For another, it sounds like, "You have done badly again." A third hears a challenge and engages with the task. A fourth feels humiliated and begins to attack. A fifth agrees outwardly, but internally closes the file and never returns to it.

The input data are the same. The interpreters are different.

THE EVENT AS CODE

The metaphor of code reveals another layer. An event is not merely translated into meaning. It can activate an already existing sequence of actions.

In programming, a macro is a prewritten set of commands. The user presses a button or performs a particular action, and the system automatically launches an entire chain of operations. There is no need to repeat each step manually every time.

Human systems contain similar automatic sequences.

Someone speaks sharply, and an old macro begins to run: tense, justify yourself, then attack. A partner falls silent, and the system starts checking the phone, recalling past conflicts, searching for evidence that the relationship is cooling, and preparing an accusation in advance. A person receives critical feedback, and a familiar route unfolds inside: shame, self-devaluation, the urge to disappear, refusal to continue.

These macros launch without a separate request. They were once assembled as ways to orient quickly, defend oneself, and reduce uncertainty. If a sharp voice once truly preceded humiliation, the system remembered the connection. If silence was used as punishment, a pause ceased to be neutral. If mistakes were accompanied by shame, any correction became a signal of possible exposure.

The system does not ask, “Do you want to reproduce the old sequence now?” It recognizes familiar code and begins to execute it.

This is how Autopilot works.

Autopilot is not necessarily foolish. It can be fast, experienced, and highly accurate. Before fully realizing it, a professional photographer sees that the light has changed and the frame must be rebuilt. A driver automatically slows down after noticing movement at the roadside. A psychologist hears tension in a client’s calm sentence that someone else might miss.

Experience is compressed into rapid models, and that is what makes us capable of acting.

The problem begins not with automatic functioning itself, but where old code is executed in a new reality without being checked.

THE BRAIN DOES NOT WAIT FOR THE WORLD TO EXPLAIN ITSELF

It would be naive to imagine the brain as a passive receiver that first obtains a complete picture of the world, then analyzes it, and only afterward makes a decision.

There is almost never a complete picture.

The world moves too quickly, there is too much data, and there is often too little time for detailed analysis. The system therefore keeps forming assumptions about what will happen next. It uses past experience, current bodily signals, context, and probability to prepare a response in advance.

We do not first see everything and then predict. To a significant degree, we see through prediction.

When you are looking for someone you know in a crowd, attention picks out similar silhouettes more quickly. When you fear danger, an ordinary sound at night receives more weight. When you are convinced that the person opposite you is hostile, an ambiguous tone is more readily read as an attack.

The brain does not wait for the world to explain itself. It offers a preliminary version, then compares that version with what arrives from outside.

This saves time and resources. But it also creates a risk: the preliminary version may become so powerful that new data are forced to fit it.

A person does not merely receive a signal. The system already knows what that signal is likely to mean.

PREDICTION BEGINS BEFORE THOUGHT

We often imagine prediction as a conscious sentence: “I think this is what will happen now.” But most prediction begins before thought has taken verbal form.

First, breathing changes. Then attention narrows. The body prepares to move away or draw closer. Tension appears inside, already carrying a direction: danger, reward, loss, possibility.

Only afterward does the mind find words.

Sometimes a person says, “I have a bad feeling.” This may be a subtle assessment of many cues they have not had time to name. It may be bodily memory of a similar situation. It may be fatigue amplifying threat. Or it may be an old fear that recognized one familiar detail and decided the entire story was repeating.

In every case, prediction has begun to operate before it became a thought.

You have not yet told yourself, “They are about to criticize me,” but your voice has already hardened. You have not decided that your partner has become distant, but you have begun replying more coldly. You have not yet formulated a fear of failure, but you have opened your phone instead of the work file.

Thought arrives later and explains an inner preparation that has already begun.

This is why it can be so difficult simply to order yourself to think differently. You are trying to change the text after the program has already started running.

PREDICTION BECOMES PART OF THE OUTCOME

Prediction does not merely describe a possible future. It prepares behavior, and behavior begins to influence the outcome.

When a person expects rejection, they may speak more quietly in advance, explain the idea without confidence, lower the price, apologize for making the offer, or never approach the person who might have agreed. The rejection they receive becomes evidence: I knew nothing would work.

When a person expects humiliation, they enter a conversation already tense, hear attack more quickly, and begin defending themselves where the other person had not intended to attack. The other person encounters harshness, responds with harshness, and the prediction receives confirmation.

When a person is certain that no one will support them, they ask for nothing. Support does not appear because the people around them do not know it is needed. The inner conclusion remains unchanged: I can rely only on myself.

This is how a self-fulfilling prediction arises without any magic.

A person does not create reality with a single thought. They create part of the conditions through behavior prepared by expectation.

This is especially visible in relationships. Fear of loss intensifies control. Control makes closeness heavier. The partner begins to move away because they are tired of constantly proving their presence and loyalty. That distance confirms the original prediction: I knew it, I will inevitably be left.

The person increases control, and the system closes into a loop.

The prediction was not an empty fantasy. It became one of the participants in the outcome.

PREDICTION ERROR

A predictive system does more than expect. It constantly compares expectation with what actually happened.

When the outcome matches the prediction, the model grows stronger. When the outcome is better or worse, a discrepancy appears that science calls a prediction error. This is not an error in the everyday sense, but the difference between what was expected and what was received.

You expected rejection, but someone agreed to help. You anticipated a cold conversation, but met understanding. You expected an ordinary assignment and received a major project. Or, on the contrary, you were confident of success and heard no.

Such discrepancies can change not only thought, but the system's overall energy. An unexpectedly good result can literally put more movement into the body: a person walks faster, speaks more actively, and takes the next step more readily. A negative prediction error can stop movement, narrow attention, and make the next attempt more difficult.

But a discrepancy does not guarantee that the model will update.

Sometimes the system learns. Sometimes it finds a way to explain the new experience so that the old prediction remains untouched.

THE AIRPORT, THE TICKET, AND TWO VERSIONS OF THE FUTURE

Imagine this situation. A traveler arrives at the airport, approaches the check-in desk, and presents the documents, but the employee cannot immediately find the reservation. They check the system several times, ask questions, and request that the traveler wait. A line forms behind them, time passes, departure approaches, and there is still no clarity.

Very little has actually happened: the information was not found immediately, the employee is continuing to search, and no final answer yet exists.

But the inner system dislikes empty space. It begins to complete the future.

In one state, the person feels understandable irritation but remains collected. They open their email, check the reservation number, look for proof of payment, and clarify the available options. Their prediction says: this is unpleasant, but these failures happen; we will try to sort it out.

The delay remains a problem to solve.

In another state, the same minutes rapidly become a catastrophe. The person already sees the ruined trip, lost money, the people waiting on the other side, missed agreements, and one more piece of evidence that everything in their life comes through obstacles.

If they slept badly, were rushing, worried about money, or had been living under overload for a long time, the ticket stops being a ticket. It becomes a symbol of all the chaos that has accumulated.

The person raises their voice, stops hearing the employee, enters the wrong information several times, argues with people in the line, loses focus, and reduces the chance of a calm solution. The state that initially merely read the delay as a catastrophe begins to create a new stream: conflict, mistakes, additional pressure, and lost time.

The airport is the same. The data are the same. But the inner code assembles two different realities.

In the first, the person is dealing with an unpleasant technical problem. In the second, they already inhabit a world that has once again turned against them.

This does not mean that the calm person will necessarily fly and the anxious person will miss the plane. External reality is not required to reward the correct state. The reservation may truly be lost, the employee may make a mistake, and the flight may close.

But internal prediction determines how the person will pass through the situation and what they will add to the difficulty that already exists.

If the reservation is found, a prediction error appears. The catastrophe did not happen. The only question is what the system will do with this new experience.

It may update: I was frightened, but the situation was resolved; not every delay means failure.

Or it may preserve the old model: I was simply lucky; next time everything will definitely fall apart.

WHY THE OLD CODE KEEPS RUNNING

We want to believe that once we understand the mistake, the system will automatically change. But inner code is not rewritten as easily as text in a document.

Old models were built not only from words. They were reinforced through the body, repetition, emotion, and consequences. Some of them formed during periods when a person had no other way to protect themselves.

A child who repeatedly met coldness after making a mistake may have learned that mistakes are dangerous. Someone who lived through betrayal may have recorded a broader code: closeness ends in loss. A person who was often mocked may learn to devalue their own ideas in advance, so that someone else's reaction will not come as a surprise.

Later, life changes. Different people appear, conditions change, and an adult develops the ability to talk, clarify, and protect boundaries. Yet the old program keeps launching because, to the system, it still looks like a proven way to survive.

New experience arrives, but the old code still opens it in the familiar way.

A person is praised, but hears politeness. They are chosen, but wait for the other person to change their mind. Help is offered, but they search for the hidden price. They meet love, yet live as though it must inevitably end in betrayal.

The system is not being stubborn on purpose. It is protecting the coherence of its picture of the world. If you have lived for years with the belief that people cannot be trusted, one reliable person does not erase the entire library of earlier cases. Their reliability may be recorded not as a new rule, but as a rare exception.

This is why experience does not always update the system.

WHEN THE PAST OPENS A NEW FILE

External life can change faster than the inner interpreter.

A person moves to another country, changes jobs, enters a new relationship, earns more, writes a book, receives recognition, or radically changes their body. A new file has appeared on the outside, but the old program opens it in the familiar way.

I know this well from my own experience of major weight loss and returning to movement.

My body genuinely changed. Walking, exercising, playing tennis, taking photographs, climbing into the mountains, and carrying a workload for longer all became easier. There was more physical freedom and a sense that I could once again participate in life not only through effort, but through pleasure.

The system received new data: I can do this; I endured it; I am changing; the body can be an ally.

But a new form does not automatically create a new inner version of the self. A person can lose weight and continue looking at themselves through the eyes of their former shame. They receive compliments and assume people are merely being polite. They search for flaws in the mirror. Every change in weight feels like the return of their entire previous life.

External reality is already different, but the old code still reads the body as a place where exposure may occur.

Then the result does not create freedom. It becomes a new form of control. The person must constantly prove, maintain, and check. Relaxation feels dangerous because the system treats the change as temporary.

The file has changed, but the program has opened it in the same old way.

The same thing happens after migration, professional growth, new relationships, and financial change. A person may live in another country, have a new family, a wider range of possibilities, and a more mature circle of people, yet still expect the old outcome: I will not be accepted; I am only here temporarily; all of this can disappear; I cannot fully belong here.

The past is not merely stored in memory. It participates in reading the present.

DIFFERENT VERSIONS OF THE SAME SYSTEM

People are sometimes surprised by their own inconsistency. In one situation, they are confident, collected, and capable of taking risks. In another, they become anxious and closed off, as though half their abilities have disappeared.

The question arises: Which of these people is real?

Both.

There is no single unchanging program inside us that always runs in the same way. There are different versions of the system, activated by context, state, and the kind of relationship involved.

In a professional environment, a person may be decisive because they know the rules, feel competent, and have experience of successful action. In intimacy, they become vulnerable because fear of loss, shame, and the old need to be chosen come online.

Another person expresses themselves easily in relationships but closes down under public evaluation. A third can withstand a crisis, yet becomes lost in ordinary uncertainty when there is no clear task and no way to tell exactly what should be done.

We often call this a contradictory character. But sometimes we are dealing with different inner versions, each of which opens its own set of predictions, reactions, and available actions.

State determines which version of the system takes the wheel.

THE PHOTOGRAPHER AND THE PREDICTED FRAME

Photography is impossible without prediction.

You have not yet pressed the shutter, but you are already imagining what the frame might become. You see the light, the direction of movement, the person's position, the background, the expression on the face, and the fraction of a second in which everything may come together.

A good photographer is slightly ahead of the event. They do not merely record what is happening. They anticipate the moment.

But prediction in photography is not a rigid script. The light may change, the person may turn differently, rain may begin, or an unplanned detail may enter the frame. Sometimes accident is what makes the photograph alive.

I have often watched a carefully prepared shooting plan stop working almost immediately. The weather changed, the chosen location was occupied, the person in front of the camera behaved differently than expected, or the needed light disappeared sooner than planned.

At that moment, internal prediction can become either a support or a trap.

If I hold on to it too tightly, I begin fighting reality. I become irritated because the world is not following my script. I continue searching for the frame I designed in advance and fail to notice that another frame has already appeared nearby, perhaps a more alive one.

If prediction remains a hypothesis rather than an order, it helps me orient myself without closing off the present. I can adjust, notice new light, change my position, and accept the rain not as the destruction of the plan, but as a new texture.

This is the difference between experience and rigid code.

Experience prepares us for the event. Rigid code demands that the event submit to the past.

Photographic prediction is a useful model for human life as a whole. We cannot exist without expectations. But sometimes it is precisely the ability to release the frame imagined in advance that allows us to see what is actually happening.

RELATIONSHIPS: “HE’S NOT REPLYING” OR “I’M BEING LEFT”

Relationships show especially clearly how internal prediction turns data into drama.

A partner does not reply for two hours. In factual terms, there is one event: no answer has arrived. There is still very little reliable information.

The person may be busy, driving, talking, working, resting, away from the phone, feeling unwell, or simply unwilling to answer in a hurry. Many possibilities remain open.

But when a prediction of loss is active inside, two hours stop being two hours. They become the beginning of an internal trial.

Why is he silent? What did I do wrong? He must have grown cold. Maybe there is someone else. He is tired of me. It is always the same. No one can be trusted.

The person begins acting not from the fact, but from the prediction. They send another message. Check the status. Look at when the partner was last online. Return to earlier grievances. Prepare an accusation. Or they become cold themselves, creating distance first so they will not be the one who gets left.

The partner replies: “Sorry, I was in a meeting.”

The system now has a chance to update. The absence of a reply did not mean rejection.

But old code can protect itself quickly: he could have warned me; clearly he does not care how I feel; if he loved me, he would have found a minute; he has explained himself now, but what about next time?

Sometimes these questions point to a real problem in the relationship. Predictability, respect, and a minimum level of availability genuinely matter between people who are close. But the conversation begins not with clarifying agreements, but with an attempt to make reality confirm the old prediction.

Then the person is no longer communicating with the living partner. They are speaking to an inner version of that partner that exists inside their own system.

A MESSAGE WITHOUT AN EMOJI

Sometimes a tiny detail is enough to launch the code.

Someone writes, “Okay.” No emoji, no additional phrase, just one word.

Analysis begins inside the other person. Why so dry? Is he offended? Is she angry? She used to write more warmly. Did I say something wrong? Something must have changed.

There is only one word, but the anxious system stops reading the message and begins writing the rest of it.

In a grounded state, a person may attach no special meaning to it or simply ask for clarification. In anxiety, they generate hypotheses. In resentment, they prepare a cold response. In shame, they blame themselves. In control, they begin checking the other person’s behavior.

A small detail becomes an entire reality.

This does not mean that emojis, pauses, and tone communicate nothing. Sometimes dryness really does reflect distance. Sometimes a person deliberately removes warmth. Sometimes a change in communication style is an important signal.

But a signal and a finished conclusion are not the same thing.

Maturity begins where a person can ask: Am I seeing a change, or am I completing it from my own state?

WHY WE DEFEND OUR PREDICTIONS

It might seem that a person would readily abandon a negative prediction once they saw that it was wrong. In practice, we often defend our expectations even when they cause pain.

A bad prediction also creates a sense of control.

If I expect the worst in advance, I feel prepared. If I trust no one, I cannot be caught off guard. If I devalue myself first, no one else can humiliate me more deeply. If I decide in advance that relationships are temporary, the loss may seem less devastating.

The price of this preparation is enormous. The person does not protect themselves from pain. They live through it in advance, again and again.

A prediction can also become part of identity. Someone takes pride in being the person who “sees people immediately,” “trusts no one,” “doesn’t fall for anything,” and “knows how it will end.” There may be genuine perceptiveness behind this. But sometimes an old wound has simply learned to speak in the voice of wisdom.

Anxiety calls itself intuition. Control calls itself responsibility. Cynicism calls itself realism. Refusal of closeness calls itself independence.

Letting go of the prediction can feel frightening because the person seems to be giving up their protection with it. If I stop expecting betrayal, will I become naive? If I allow for a good outcome, will disappointment hurt more? If I stop controlling, will everything fall apart?

The system prefers familiar pain to an unknown possibility.

PREDICTION AND THE SENSE OF CONTROL

Uncertainty is often harder to bear than negative certainty.

When a person does not know what will happen, the mind often chooses any version simply to escape the empty space. Even the conclusion “This will end badly” can bring brief relief. At least now there is something to prepare for.

This is how rigid certainty appears where very little data exist.

“He has definitely grown cold.” “They will not hire me.” “Nothing will work.” “This person cannot be trusted.” “I will lose everything again.”

Such conclusions reduce uncertainty, but at the same time they close off the possibility of another development.

A bad prediction creates an illusion of support: now I know. But this support is built not on reality, but on ending the state of not knowing.

Sometimes a person would rather be wrong in a familiar direction than remain open to a world that has not yet answered.

PREDICTION AND THE OTHER PERSON'S FREEDOM

In relationships, internal prediction meets a fundamental limit: the other person is free.

They may change their mind, become tired, grow afraid, move away, come closer, misunderstand, refuse, or choose another path. We cannot predict them completely because they are not an extension of our system.

But anxiety has difficulty tolerating this freedom.

It tries to make the other person understandable and manageable. It checks, asks the same questions again, demands reassurance, reads tone, analyzes pauses, and builds models of behavior. Control is often driven not by a desire for power, but by an attempt to reduce the uncertainty of closeness.

If I know in advance what you feel and what you will do, I am safer.

The problem is that the person begins relating not to the partner, but to an internal model of the partner. Every action is evaluated through a prediction already in place.

If they come closer, they must want something. If they move away, they no longer love me. If they are silent, they are punishing me. If they explain, they are making excuses. If they are calm, they are hiding their feelings.

The other person is left with almost no possibility of being different from the version that exists inside the system.

Prediction gradually displaces contact.

Love requires the capacity to tolerate the fact that the person beside us is separate, not a character written by our past.

THE INNER VERSION OF A PERSON

We rarely meet another person entirely anew.

Every new conversation carries the history of earlier conversations, expectations, promises, resentments, and disappointments. This is natural. Without memory, relationships would have no depth.

But memory can create an inner version of a person that becomes stronger than living contact.

A husband seriously let his wife down once, and she now reads every delay through his earlier unreliability. A woman withdrew several times during conflict, and the man now hears rejection in advance in every pause she takes. A manager once criticized someone's work harshly, and the employee prepares for humiliation whenever a new comment appears.

The inner version does not arise from nowhere. It is grounded in experience. The problem begins when a person stops checking whether that version still corresponds to the present.

The other person may have changed. The situation may be different. Sometimes they really are repeating the old pattern. But as long as prediction is treated as fact, it becomes almost impossible for a living person to reveal a new side.

Everything they do is interpreted through the old code.

KNOWING THE CODE DOES NOT STOP IT FROM RUNNING

A person may understand their mechanism perfectly and still continue acting in the old way.

They know they fear rejection. They understand that a partner's silence activates earlier experience. They can explain anxious attachment and may even warn, "I'm spiraling right now."

Then they send ten messages in a row.

Knowing the code does not mean the code has stopped.

This is an important disappointment for people who read a great deal about psychology. It seems that once a reaction has been explained accurately, it should disappear. But automatic routes were formed over years, while understanding often remains only the upper layer.

The person knows, but the body is already tense. They know, but attention has already narrowed. They know, but prediction has assembled the worst outcome and prepared the familiar action.

It is easy here to shame yourself even more: I understand all of this, and I still do not change.

But knowledge serves a different function. It makes execution visible. At first, only after everything has happened. Then somewhere in the middle of the process. Later, perhaps, before the macro has fully unfolded.

Understanding does not switch the program off instantly. It gradually makes the program visible.

PREDICTION AND RESPONSIBILITY

Internal prediction explains behavior, but it does not remove responsibility for consequences.

If a person expected betrayal and therefore became controlling, the partner encountered control. If they expected humiliation and attacked first, the other person encountered an attack. If they were certain no one would support them and asked for nothing, the people around them genuinely never learned that support was needed.

We cannot say, “This is only my old code, so none of it is my responsibility.”

But it is equally pointless to blame ourselves for the fact that an automatic prediction appeared at all. The first bodily wave, the familiar thought, and the old expectation often arise without conscious choice.

Responsibility does not begin with the demand that we never feel anxious. It begins with participation in what we do next.

I can acknowledge: right now, my system expects the worst. This prediction has a history and reasons behind it. But it is not yet a proven fact, while the action I take from it will become a real event for another person.

This is an adult position. It contains neither an excuse nor an inner whip.

A person is not to blame for the existence of the old code. But gradually, they become responsible for whether they continue executing it blindly.

THE PAUSE BETWEEN CODE AND EXECUTION

In Autopilot, the distance between prediction and action is almost absent.

Fear appears, and the person checks. Shame appears, and they begin explaining themselves. They sense threat and raise their voice. They decide they are not valued and close down. They expect rejection and reject first.

Inner code turns directly into behavior.

A pause does not mean the prediction has disappeared. It does not mean the person has calmed down and now sees objective reality. Inside, things may still be loud, the body may remain tense, and the old version may still feel convincing.

But several seconds, minutes, or hours appear between code and execution, during which the first action does not have to become mandatory.

You do not have to send ten messages. You do not have to answer with venom. You do not have to make a final decision from nighttime exhaustion. You do not have to turn another person's pause into an accusation. You do not have to enter the old game of "Now I understand everything."

The pause is not weakness. It is the place where the code can still remain only partially executed.

This is where the Observer begins to appear.

The Observer does not cancel prediction or guarantee the right decision. It notices the sequence: here are the data, here is the inner translation, here is the prediction, and here is the action I feel pulled toward.

Autopilot says, "This is reality."

The Observer adds, "This is the first version my system has assembled."

That is not yet enough to rebuild the entire inner architecture. But it is enough for the reaction to stop being absolutely inevitable.

WHEN NEW EXPERIENCE FAILS TO REGISTER

Sometimes a person says, “I have seen many times that things are not as frightening as they seem, and I am still afraid.”

This is an important observation. New experience does not automatically rewrite old code.

The system knows how to explain away exceptions.

I was not rejected, but that was an accident. They praised me, but people are simply polite. I managed it, but the task was easy. My partner proved reliable, but only because they have not shown their true face yet. Someone helped me, but only out of pity.

Each new fact receives an explanation that leaves the old model untouched. A person can spend years receiving evidence of their competence and continue believing they are incapable. They can be loved and not believe in love. They can change externally and fail to record the change inside.

For the system to update, it is not enough for an event to happen. The event must be noticed and recognized as meaningful new experience. A person must allow themselves to say: I did this, not chance. This person acted differently from those who came before. I endured a situation that once seemed impossible. My prediction was not confirmed.

Sometimes repetition is required. One safe conversation does not erase years of fear. But each time new experience is not devalued or discarded as an exception, the inner model receives a chance to change.

The Architect of the system will later appear precisely here, in the capacity not only to notice old code, but also to create conditions in which new experience can be recorded.

For now, it is enough to see this: the world sometimes already responds differently, while the old program may continue reading it in the same way.

CHAPTER 3 FORMULA

An event enters a person as data. State becomes the interpreter, past experience supplies the meaning, internal prediction prepares the future, and Autopilot launches the familiar action.

A person responds not only to the event, but also to what the event has become inside their system. Prediction does not merely describe a possible result. Through attention, the body, and behavior, it begins to participate in creating that result.

Observation begins where a person manages to distinguish the data, the inner translation, and the action the old program has already prepared.

WHERE WE GO NEXT

Internal prediction prepares a person for action, but not always in the same way. When the system encounters an obstacle, uncertainty, or threat, it may continue insisting on the old path, search for another option, or reduce its involvement and retreat.

One person stubbornly repeats an action even after it has stopped working. Another begins exploring, testing, and changing the approach. A third withdraws, loses interest, and seems to switch off from the task.

We are used to explaining this through character, willpower, curiosity, laziness, or weakness. But deeper modes of the system may stand behind those words.

Prediction has already answered the question of what the world looks like. Now the system must decide how to act in that world.

Continue. Search. Or step away.

These are the three strategies we will turn to in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4. THE SYSTEM'S THREE STRATEGIES

Once an event has acquired meaning, the system has to respond somehow. It cannot remain forever at the point of perception, because life keeps moving: another person is waiting for a reaction, a task requires a decision, money is running out, the body is sending a signal, a deadline is approaching, and uncertainty is gradually increasing inner tension.

This is where the next level of state mechanics begins. A person does not merely understand events differently. Depending on their inner configuration, different forms of participation become available to them.

One person keeps pressing on the same point even after the method has stopped producing results. They explain again, call again, check again, repeat the argument, intensify control, add more effort, and return to the same action as though reality had simply failed to understand their intention and now had to give way at last.

Another begins to search. They change the angle, ask a different question, try another route, gather more information, ask for help, return to the original conditions, and check whether they are trying to solve a new problem with an old method. They do not necessarily know the correct answer, but their system can still tolerate not knowing and resist closing uncertainty with the first familiar response.

A third reduces participation. They postpone the decision, stop replying, disappear into a screen, sleep, silence, household tasks, or an inner absence. From the outside, this may look like laziness, indifference, or coldness. But something else may be happening inside: the system can no longer hold the tension and is trying to preserve what remains of its resources by cutting contact with what feels too costly, dangerous, or meaningless.

These are not three types of people. They are three strategies of one system: persistence, exploration, and disengagement.

The same person may use them in different areas of life. At work, they may be open to novelty, test hypotheses calmly, and admit mistakes, while in relationships they repeat the same form of pressure for years. They may sustain long professional efforts and bring projects to completion, yet disengage from their own body by postponing medical examinations, movement, and rest. In the morning they can search for options, by afternoon they may be pounding stubbornly at the same wall, and by evening they switch off so completely that they do not want to talk, think, or make even simple decisions.

This chapter is therefore not about what kinds of people exist. It is about what the system does after it has already decided what the situation means.

THREE RESPONSES OF ONE SYSTEM

Persistence answers the question: how do I preserve direction when things become difficult? It helps a person continue when the result does not appear immediately, tolerate temporary discomfort, keep a commitment, avoid abandoning a relationship after the first conflict, and resist rebuilding their entire life after every obstacle.

Without persistence, almost nothing meaningful would be completed. You cannot write a book, build a relationship, restore the body, establish a professional reputation, or master a new field if every difficult stretch is treated as proof that the path is wrong. Sometimes reality resists not because the direction is mistaken, but because every serious movement requires time, repetition, and the ability to remain with the work after the first inspiration has disappeared.

Yet the same strategy becomes fixation when a person continues an action that has lost its meaning. They increase effort where the method needs to be reconsidered, continue an argument in which no one is listening, invest money in a model that no longer works, or demand the old workload from a body that has long been sending different signals.

Persistence easily looks like a virtue because culture admires people who do not give up. A person is praised for enduring, taking on more, continuing despite everything, and forcing a result through. That identity can provide real strength, but it can also make it almost impossible to admit that the route has changed or that the cost has become excessive.

Stopping becomes especially difficult after a great deal has already been invested. Time, money, reputation, hopes, years of life, and promises made to oneself become another argument: I cannot leave because I have already gone too far. But past investment does not always prove that further movement is right. Sometimes it shows only how much has already been given to a system that is returning no result.

Exploration answers a different question: what else is possible if the old method no longer works? It expands the map, allows a person to admit that they do not know enough, change the approach, test alternatives, and see possibility where persistence saw only the need for more force.

Exploration requires a particular inner resource. To search, a person must tolerate the absence of a ready answer. They must allow that their previous model may have been incomplete, ask for help, temporarily become a beginner, and permit themselves an imperfect attempt.

That is why exploration is not always available under tension. When a person feels unsafe, they often do not search. They return more quickly to the familiar, even when the familiar works badly. The old method is at least predictable, while a new route requires a temporary surrender of the illusion of control.

Exploration does not require absolute safety, which scarcely exists in real life. But the system needs at least a minimal inner foundation: the right not to know, the possibility of making a mistake, and confidence that one failed attempt will not become a verdict on the whole person. If every mistake is experienced as humiliation, loss of status, or proof of inadequacy, a person will hold on to the old method far longer than reason would suggest. Familiar failure then feels safer than an unknown

possibility. This is why the advice “Try a different way” sometimes evokes irritation rather than interest. The person does not hear an invitation to search. They hear a demand to abandon the last route they understand before a new one exists.

Exploration can also become a trap. A person tries one method, then another, then a third. They change direction, training, profession, concept, partner, working method, diet, planning system, and tools, yet remain with none of them long enough to see a result.

Search turns into restless switching. Novelty creates a feeling of movement even when no real progress is taking place. Each new possibility releases the person from the need to finish the previous one, endure the dull part of the process, and meet the limitations of the path they chose.

Disengagement solves the third problem: how can participation be reduced when further tension has become too costly? It may be necessary when the system is overheated, information can no longer be distinguished clearly, and every additional action only increases the chaos.

Sometimes a person truly needs to step away. Not surrender, but reduce the noise, sleep, stop making decisions for several hours, leave a conflict, postpone a conversation until they have recovered, or temporarily stop an action that has become destructive.

A good pause restores the ability to distinguish. After it, a person can once again see the task, themselves, and the available options. Here, disengagement performs a protective function: the system reduces participation so that it does not spend its last resources or commit an action whose consequences will take a long time to repair.

But a pause must be able to end. If the person does not return, disengagement becomes a gradual disappearance from their own life. The unpleasant document remains unopened, the conversation never happens, symptoms are not examined, the financial situation worsens, and the distance between partners slowly grows.

Brief relief reinforces the strategy. I did not open the letter and stopped feeling anxious for several hours. I did not make the call and did not have to face possible rejection. I did not go for the examination, so today I can still pretend there is no problem. But the task remains and returns with an additional cost.

All three strategies are necessary. Each can help. And each becomes destructive when it no longer fits the situation or loses the capacity to come to an end.

These modes follow a simple adaptive logic. Persistence preserves direction and protects invested effort from premature abandonment. Exploration prevents the system from dying alongside an outdated method and allows it to find another route when conditions change. Disengagement reduces energy expenditure and contact with overload when continuing has become too costly. The system did not create these strategies in order to make human life more difficult. Each once solved an important problem of preservation, adaptation, or recovery.

The problem lies not in the existence of a strategy, but in its monopoly. One mode begins answering every question: pressure is used where exploration is needed, exploration continues where it is time to choose, and withdrawal appears even before a task that could be solved by one small action.

In healthy dynamics, the strategies hand control from one to another. A person persists along a chosen path while it works. When they discover a mismatch, they shift into exploration and look for another method. If resources are depleted or there is not enough information, they pause, recover, and return.

The problem begins when this transfer of control breaks down. Persistence does not yield to exploration, exploration does not become a decision, and disengagement does not end in return.

Then a strategy stops being a tool and begins to feel like fate.

THE NEURAL SWITCH

Scientific language can sometimes help us see that these transitions are not only matters of character, upbringing, or willpower.

Behavioral research suggests that the brain contains systems involved in switching between continuing an existing action, exploring alternatives, and ending participation. In animal experiments, researchers have paid particular attention to the median raphe nucleus, where different groups of cells and neurochemical processes have been associated with persistence, exploratory behavior, and disengagement.

We should not reduce a complex human being to a table in which one neurotransmitter means stubbornness, another curiosity, and a third withdrawal. Human behavior emerges from the body, memory, context, relationships, meaning, culture, and many interconnected neural processes. But the idea of a switch matters.

It shows that a person does not always make a decision through a clear inner command: now I will stop persisting and begin exploring. A significant part of the transition begins earlier, in the system's broader assessment of safety, available resources, and expected outcome.

If the system considers the goal important and attainable, persistence becomes more available. If there is enough inner support and permission to make mistakes, exploration can emerge. If further participation feels too costly or meaningless, the system moves toward reducing contact.

This is why the instruction "Be more flexible" is often correct but useless. Flexibility is not merely a trait of good character. It is a function of state.

A person may understand perfectly that another method should be tried, yet their system is operating under threat and clinging to the familiar. They may know that they need to stop, but their identity as a strong person will not allow them to acknowledge a limit. They may understand the need to continue, while their resources are so depleted that every task feels dangerous.

The system does not obey commands directly. It switches when its internal assessment of safety, resources, and meaning changes.

Sometimes a new thought really is enough. Sometimes what is needed is a conversation with someone capable of holding a wider view. Sometimes sleep, a pause, food, movement, a smaller task, or the end of pressure. At times the system does not need to be told which strategy to choose. It needs conditions in which another mode can become available at all.

This is an important limit on freedom. A person does not stand above the system with an unlimited control panel. But neither are they completely helpless. They can learn to notice which conditions keep a mode in place and gradually influence those conditions.

Switching rarely happens in a clean, orderly sequence. A person may pass through all three modes in a single evening. First they persist in trying to solve the problem by the old method. Then they begin opening dozens of options, asking different people, changing decisions, and gathering

information. Finally they become completely overloaded, close everything, and stop doing anything at all. From the outside, this looks inconsistent. Inside, the system has simply run through the available ways of regulating tension and, when none produced a result, moved toward reducing participation.

The reverse sequence is possible as well. A person avoids a task for a long time, then after sleep, support, or a small success gains enough resources to begin exploring. Once a comprehensible route is found, they can then persist along it.

A strategy is therefore not a fixed personality trait. It is the current organization of action, and it can change when the conditions change. That mutability offers hope, but it does not promise ease: switching requires not only desire, but a new state of the system.

HOW STRATEGIES ENTER LIFE

The same outward behavior can belong to different strategies. This is especially visible in the simplest everyday actions.

Imagine someone working on a difficult document. The text has refused to come together for several hours. They stand up and go to make tea.

From the outside, one thing has happened: the person left the work and turned on the kettle. But the inner processes may be entirely different.

In one case, this is part of persistence. The person knows they are tired, gives themselves ten minutes, returns, and continues the work they chose. Tea helps them sustain the long effort without destroying themselves.

In another case, it is exploration. While the water boils, the person steps away from the familiar angle, looks out the window, and a new question appears: perhaps the problem is not the wording, but the structure of the document itself? They return, rearrange the sections, and the work begins to move again.

In the third case, tea becomes a form of disengagement. The person spends a long time choosing a cup, washes the kettle, wipes the table, opens their phone, then decides to make something to eat and gradually dissolves the task into household activity. The tension has decreased, but no return has taken place.

The action is the same. The strategies are different. Meaning is determined not by outward form, but by the function the action performs in the system and where it leads next.

In relationships, persistence appears when a person keeps returning to an important conversation even though the partners did not manage to hear one another the first time. Closeness sometimes genuinely requires endurance. A need may have to be explained more than once; a mismatch may have to be endured; another language of contact may have to be learned; and the relationship may have to be kept from being declared ruined after every conflict. But persistence turns into pressure when a person repeatedly demands the same answer while refusing to recognize the other's freedom. They explain, prove, check, ask the same question in different forms, and try to obtain the reaction that will reduce their anxiety.

Exploration in relationships begins where the previous method no longer works but contact still matters. A person tries to understand what the partner is actually hearing, changes the form of the conversation, notices their own fear, asks instead of accusing, and allows for the possibility that the problem may lie not only in the other person's unwillingness, but also in the way they themselves enter closeness.

Disengagement can be useful when a conversation has overheated and the people involved are no longer discussing the problem but merely defending themselves. Sometimes it is better to stop, name the pause, and return later than to continue the destruction. But if the pause turns into

punishment through silence, disappearance, or days of evading contact, the strategy is no longer restoring the relationship. It is depriving it of air.

The three modes are no less visible in money.

Persistence helps a person continue working, withstand instability, build a client base, repeat actions, and avoid abandoning a project after the first weak return. Every business and every professional path requires a period in which effort has not yet become a stable result.

But a person can spend years investing in a product the market does not accept, repeating the same advertisement, working with unprofitable clients, and treating every reconsideration as defeat. Then persistence is no longer holding the path. It is holding the refusal to admit that conditions have changed.

Exploration means looking for another offer, channel of promotion, service format, price, or audience. It asks: what exactly is not working? Do people fail to see the product, fail to understand its value, fail to trust it, remain unwilling to pay, or has the offer genuinely stopped matching their needs?

But exploration in money easily turns into chaotic switching. Today a person launches consultations, tomorrow a course, the day after that a website, then a new channel, service, partnership, and yet another idea, without giving any one solution enough time to meet reality.

Disengagement can provide a necessary pause after a difficult period, but becomes dangerous when a person stops looking at their accounts, refuses to open spreadsheets, avoids conversations about money, and lives in the hope that the situation will somehow change without their participation.

The same thing happens with the body.

Persistence is necessary when movement must be restored gradually, a routine maintained, rehabilitation completed, eating habits changed, or exercise continued beyond a few inspired days. The body responds to repetition, and many changes become visible only when a person remains with the process long enough. But when pain is increasing, recovery has stalled, and the person keeps demanding the old workload simply because they do not know how to stop, persistence becomes a form of internal violence.

Exploration allows a person to change the kind of movement, workload, nutrition, pace, consult a specialist, and stop repeating actions that do not suit this particular body. Yet the endless replacement of diets, programs, trainers, supplements, and methods can also protect a person from the simple repetition of what actually works.

Disengagement is necessary for recovery. The body does not become stronger through effort alone; it also needs a pause. But a pause from which return disappears gradually becomes an abandonment of one's own body.

The interaction of the three strategies is especially clear in creative work.

Exploration provides material. A person reads, observes, talks, photographs, travels, loves, loses, works, makes mistakes, and encounters other people's ideas. Different parts of experience exist beside one another for a long time until, one day, they join into a new construction.

Technical thinking can meet psychology, and human reaction begins to be understood through the metaphor of code. Photography meets perception, and state becomes an inner lens. The experience of loss meets attachment theory, while ordinary cooking unexpectedly reveals how creating form restores a person's participation in life.

But the stream of associations does not write a book, build a course, or deliver a photograph to a client by itself. At some point persistence must appear: it chooses a form, holds the task, returns to the text, revises, checks, and accepts that the result must be finite.

Exploration says: there are still many possibilities here. Persistence answers: one of them must be embodied.

Disengagement also has a place in creative work. Sometimes a text needs to rest, a photographer needs to step away from editing, and an author needs to stop staring for several hours at a fragment that has lost its shape. A good pause restores sight. But disengagement can easily disguise fear of completion. A project remains a beautiful promise while it does not have to be released into the world, evaluated, and accepted as a final version that will always be less rich than the infinite conception behind it.

I know this from working on this book. Exploration gives me an enormous amount of material. One thought opens another; a psychological mechanism joins with a scientific paper, personal experience, photography, relationships, migration, and philosophy. This is a living and necessary process, and much of the book is born there. But if every new source becomes a reason to expand the map a little further, the book never ends.

Then exploration no longer deepens the text. It protects me from the need to choose, assemble, and let go.

Persistence makes it possible to continue after the first clarity has disappeared and ordinary work begins. But if I press on the text for too long, it becomes correct and dead. I stop hearing its breathing and begin interrogating every sentence for perfection.

Sometimes I need to step away, prepare food, take a walk, switch to photography, or simply sleep. Yet it is important to distinguish a pause after which I return from a disappearance that calls itself creative waiting.

Photography offers a similar experience. At the beginning of a shoot, several possible routes may appear: another background, lens, light, movement, or position of the person. Exploration helps find a frame that was not designed in advance. But the photographer can begin to rush between possibilities, change three locations, four lenses, and several lighting schemes, and never allow the person in front of the camera to enter a natural state. Then the abundance of possibilities destroys the moment itself.

At some point, a composition must be chosen and held long enough. That is the persistence of form. At other times, the camera must be lowered, the attempt to force the frame abandoned, and the situation allowed to change. That is disengagement restoring sensitivity.

In a leader's work, the three strategies become part of managing not only oneself, but an entire system.

Imagine a team has launched a project, but the first results are weaker than expected. The leader can increase pressure: require more reports, demand more calls, add control, and repeat the previous actions with greater intensity. Sometimes this is correct. The strategy may be sound, while the team simply lacks rhythm, discipline, and time. But if the model itself is wrong, pressure only accelerates movement in the wrong direction.

Then exploration is needed: talk with people, examine the data, check the expectations of clients, and admit that the original plan failed to account for an important variable. This is difficult for a leader because exploration temporarily disrupts the image of the person who is supposed to know the answer in advance.

Disengagement can also be a mature managerial action. The leader steps out of the daily rush, stops responding immediately to every problem, and tries to see the system as a whole again. But if they disappear at the exact moment the team needs clarity, the pause becomes an evasion of responsibility.

Mature leadership is less like moving at maximum speed all the time and more like understanding which mode is needed on a particular stretch of the road.

Culture distributes respect among the strategies unequally. Persistence usually looks admirable: the person holds on, refuses to give up, takes responsibility, and continues. Exploration is admired after it produces a result, but during the search itself it may look like doubt, inconsistency, and the absence of a clear position. Disengagement receives the harshest judgment. A pause is treated as weakness, a reduced workload as laziness, and leaving an old route as defeat.

Because of this, a person sometimes continues persisting not because the path works, but because stopping would destroy their identity as a strong person. They demand movement from themselves until the body, psyche, or circumstances stop them without asking permission.

Yet maturity may consist precisely in stopping before destruction, tolerating the temporary uncertainty of exploration, or continuing calmly where novelty is no longer needed. Life does not have to submit to a moral hierarchy of strategies. Sometimes courage means continuing. Sometimes it means admitting that you do not know. Sometimes it means stepping away in time while preserving the possibility of return.

WHEN A STRATEGY BECOMES AN IDENTITY

When one strategy dominates for a long time, a person gradually builds an identity around it.

The persistent person says, “I am someone who never gives up.” This formula helps them survive difficulty, but makes it almost impossible to admit that the route is wrong. Stopping is experienced not as a decision, but as a loss of self.

The explorer sees themselves as free, developing, and open. But every form of completion begins to feel like a limitation, and structure like boredom. They are not simply looking for options; they are defending the right never to make a final choice.

The person who disengages calls themselves independent, calm, and not prone to drama. Yet behind that independence may lie an inability to tolerate closeness, conflict, commitment, and the emotional cost of participation.

Identity protects the strategy from examination. If changing the way you behave means ceasing to be yourself, the system will hold on to that way even at the cost of the result. But a person is much larger than any mode. They are not identical to their persistence, curiosity, or habit of leaving. A strategy is a way of participating from a particular state, not a final definition of the person.

This distinction matters to the whole book. What we are used to calling character sometimes turns out to be a mode that has remained in control for too long.

Each strategy not only expresses a state; it also strengthens it.

An anxious person persists in checking and finds more and more details that can be interpreted as threat. The system becomes even more anxious.

A person in exploratory mode finds a new option, experiences their own influence, and becomes more flexible. But if the search never ends, the number of open possibilities creates chaos that confirms: I cannot get myself together.

The disengaged person reduces contact with a difficult task and feels brief relief. But the task remains, accumulates consequences, and returns heavier. This strengthens the urge to step away again.

This creates a familiar loop: state makes a strategy available, the strategy produces an action, the action returns a new flow, and the new flow reinforces the state.

The strategy gradually builds an environment in which it seems even more necessary.

A person applies pressure and meets resistance, then concludes that the world understands only force. They rush between options and accumulate unfinished processes that seem to prove they need to keep searching. They disengage from problems and meet the accumulated consequences, which make returning even harder.

At some point, the person stops seeing a strategy and begins seeing fate.

MODES OF UNEQUAL FREEDOM

So far, we have spoken about persistence, exploration, and disengagement as response strategies. But a question arises: who chooses them?

The honest answer is that a person does not always choose them in the full sense of the word.

Much of the time, the system acts automatically. An event acquires meaning, state activates the available mode, and behavior begins before the person has time to consider alternatives. Fear launches control. Shame launches defense or attack. Uncertainty launches the old action. Overload launches disengagement. At that moment, the person is not observing the strategy from the outside. They coincide with what has been activated within them.

This is Autopilot.

Autopilot is not the enemy. Without it, life would become impossible. We could not relearn every morning how to walk, drive, use a phone, read, work, and communicate. The problem begins when an automatic strategy continues running after the situation has changed and produces repeated damage.

The first step out of complete fusion can be described through the debug mode used in information systems.

I borrow this term from technical language not to turn a person into a machine, but because it describes the process precisely. In debug mode, the system continues to run, but some of its processes become visible.

A person notices: I am applying pressure again. I am rushing between options and opening one more possibility so that I do not have to choose. I am leaving the conversation not because I am calm, but because I cannot tolerate it. I understand where this reaction will lead, even though I am not yet sure I can stop it.

Debugging does not provide full control. Observation often appears only after the action. At first a person sees their mode a day later, then an hour later, then during the conversation itself. But visibility already changes their position.

In the language of this book, debug mode becomes the first appearance of the Observer.

The Observer does not yet choose a strategy with complete freedom. The Observer notices which strategy has already chosen them.

The next level can be called developer mode. Here a person begins not only to see the automatic process but also to intervene partly in its execution. They take a pause, change the conditions, do not continue the familiar reaction, try another approach, or consciously choose recovery instead of meaningless pressure.

The developer does not delete programs or become master of the entire system. Fear does not disappear on command, impulses continue to arise, and old routes remain available. But some influence appears over which scenario will be executed.

This is where the Architect begins to emerge.

For now, the Architect is not a separate omnipotent inner character. The Architect grows gradually out of the ability to observe the system, understand the cost of its modes, and change particular conditions: pace, load, environment, sequence of actions, boundaries, the form of a conversation, and the size of the next step.

Freedom is unequal across these modes. Autopilot almost completely coincides with the reaction. The Observer sees, but cannot always stop it. The Architect can intervene, but does not control every circumstance or abolish the system's limits. This is not a weakness of the model. It is a more honest account of our possibilities and our freedom.

A person is not absolutely free from state, body, past, or environment. But within those limits, the space of participation can gradually expand.

HOW TO CHOOSE A STRATEGY

Choosing the appropriate strategy does not mean always preferring exploration. It is easy to declare exploration the most mature mode because it is associated with flexibility, creativity, and new possibilities. But constant searching can also damage a life.

There are situations in which the answer has already been found and what is needed is continuation. A long project, education, rebuilding the body, and building trust all require repetition even when it offers no vivid novelty. There are situations in which the old method is clearly not working and additional pressure only raises the cost. That is where exploration is needed.

There are also moments when neither continuing nor searching is possible any longer. The system is overheated, and the best action is a temporary reduction in participation. The value of a strategy is determined not by how admirable it looks, but by how well it fits reality.

It is useful to ask yourself three questions.

First: is the current method working? Not whether it promises a result someday, but whether it is creating real change now. If the method works, perhaps what is needed is not a new path but patience. If it does not, additional pressure is unlikely to turn it into the right one.

Second: does the system have enough resources to continue or explore? Sometimes the direction is right, but the person is depleted. In that case, choosing between persistence and exploration is premature. First, the capacity to distinguish must be restored.

Third: what will happen if I continue in this mode? Will it restore contact with life, clarity, and movement, or merely reduce tension quickly while leaving the problem heavier than before?

These questions are not an algorithm for flawless choice. A person may mistake persistence for loyalty, restless switching for exploration, and escape for a wise pause. But the questions create room for verification.

Persistence asks: does the goal still have meaning, and is the path working?

Exploration asks: what else is possible if the previous method no longer answers reality?

Disengagement asks: does the system need a pause in order to return, or is it simply disappearing from a difficult part of life?

The first step is precisely to distinguish the mode that is already operating. Sometimes this recognition is unpleasant. A person discovers that they called pressure responsibility, endless switching development, and withdrawal from contact calmness. Yet recognitions like these return the system from morality to reality.

This chapter matters to the whole book because it shows that state does not remain an inner background. It continues into strategy, and strategy itself begins to build a life.

A person perceives the world from a state, translates an event into meaning, selects an available form of response, and through that response creates a new stream. The stream then returns to the system and confirms or changes the original state.

This is why life does not change through understanding alone. We must see which mode repeatedly turns an inner configuration into concrete actions, relationships, money, the body, work, and creativity.

CHAPTER 4 FORMULA

Once an event has become meaning, the system selects a form of response. It may maintain the previous action, search for a new route, or reduce participation.

Persistence, exploration, and disengagement are not character traits or moral categories, but strategies of adaptation. Each is necessary, each can help, and each becomes destructive when it no longer fits the situation or loses the ability to come to an end.

The system does not always choose what is best. It chooses what is available at the current level of safety, resources, and meaning.

Autopilot executes the available strategy and mistakes it for the only possible one.

The Observer notices which mode has been activated and what price it creates.

The Architect gradually learns to change the conditions under which another form of response becomes available.

Maturity does not lie in loyalty to one strategy. It lies in the capacity to continue, search, or step away in accordance with reality rather than only with a familiar state.

WHERE WE GO NEXT

At this point, the task may seem almost solved. A person has understood how state assembles reality, seen the role of the body and internal prediction, and learned to distinguish persistence, exploration, and disengagement. All that appears to remain is choosing the appropriate strategy and beginning to act.

But this is precisely where the next gap appears.

You may understand perfectly what you want. You may see that the old method no longer works, choose a new route, make a plan, and sincerely decide that tomorrow everything will begin differently.

Then tomorrow arrives, and the action does not happen. The intention exists. The meaning is clear. The decision has been made. Yet a distance appears between the inner “I want” and the real step, a distance that cannot be explained by laziness, weak discipline, or insufficient motivation alone.

Why can a person want the result and simultaneously avoid the process from which that result must be made? Why does the right strategy remain in the mind but fail to enter life?

That is the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5. INTENTION AND ACTION

You probably know the strange state in which the decision has already been made, the meaning is clear, the benefit is obvious, the plan exists, and yet the action still does not begin. There is almost no doubt that you need to write the email, open the document, make the first call, return to exercise, sort out your finances, finish an important conversation, prepare a course, give form to an idea, or finally begin what has lived for too long on the list of your future life.

Such decisions are especially easy to make in the evening. The day is nearly over, its mistakes and lost time can no longer be repaired, and tomorrow seems free of today's exhaustion. A person tells themselves that in the morning they will get up earlier, leave the phone alone, eat breakfast calmly, open the work file, and spend several hours on what truly matters.

The evening self looks at tomorrow's self with remarkable trust. Tomorrow's self will be more collected, calmer, more disciplined, and somehow free of everything that got in the way today. There will be no poor sleep, unexpected messages, anxiety, household details, other people's requests, heavy body, or inner resistance. This future self will be almost an ideal version of us, with nothing left to do but carry out a sensible decision.

But morning comes, and with it arrives not the imagined person from the evening promise, but the real system. The body slept worse than hoped, the phone already contains several messages, an urgent task has appeared, yesterday's clarity is gone, and the document that looked like an entrance into a new life now feels heavy again.

The intention has not disappeared. The person still wants the result, understands its importance, and may even be angry with themselves for not beginning. But access to action has changed.

This is where one of the most important facts about human functioning becomes visible: intention and action do not exist on the same plane. An intention can be clear, sincere, reasonable, and mature, yet still be insufficient to make action possible in this particular body, this particular environment, and this particular state.

We explain this gap too easily through weakness: not enough willpower, discipline, character, responsibility, or genuine desire. If you truly wanted it, you would have done it already. The formula is convenient because it delivers an immediate verdict and removes the need to understand the system.

But a living person is more complex.

Between "I want" and "I do" stands state.

INTENTION LIVES IN THE FUTURE

Intention is always slightly detached from the present. Even when a person decides to act ten minutes from now, they are already addressing a future version of themselves who will be expected to carry out the decision.

The future is convenient because it does not yet resist. In it, you can write a book, transform your body, learn a language, build a business, repair a relationship, move to another country, begin counseling, record a course, and completely rebuild your life. The future does not ask you, right now, to open the file, tolerate awkwardness, make an imperfect attempt, name a price, hear a refusal, or face your own lack of readiness.

It presents the completed image without the cost of the path.

A person imagines the published book, not three hours spent on a paragraph that may later have to be deleted. They see a strong body, not an ordinary evening when they must change clothes and begin moving without inspiration. They imagine a new project, not dozens of emails, technical mistakes, negotiations, and days when the effort invested is barely visible.

You can want a book without wanting to sit with a draft. Want physical strength without wanting the repetition of training. Want close relationships without wanting difficult conversations. Want money without wanting to count, sell, hear no, and rebuild the offer. Want freedom without wanting to tolerate the uncertainty through which freedom is usually created.

This does not make a person a hypocrite. The result is almost always more attractive than the process because the result exists as a whole image, while the process consists of many partial actions, each of which may seem dull, difficult, or too insignificant on its own.

But life must be lived in the process.

Intention exists in the image of the whole; action always takes place in a part. When a person does not accept this difference, beginning feels like disappointment. They expected to feel the magnitude of the path, but instead they have to open the file, revise one sentence, put on their training shoes, look at one number, or speak the first uncomfortable phrase.

The inner conception is large. Real action is almost always more modest.

This is why a great dream sometimes does not move a person closer to action, but increases the distance between them and the first step. Each fragment of today is compared not with the absence of action, but with the completed image of the future, and against that image it inevitably loses.

THE FUTURE SELF WHO DOES NOT EXIST

Human beings have a curious habit of handing action over to a future version of themselves. I am tired today, but tomorrow I will pull myself together. My head is not right today, but I will begin in the morning. There is too much to do today, but on Monday a different order will finally appear.

The future self almost always seems calmer, wiser, stronger, and more disciplined than the present one. Somehow, that person will easily handle what we cannot handle now. They will sit down and write, call, begin, finish, go, explain, sort things out, and stop postponing.

The problem is that tomorrow does not bring an ideal future self. It brings the same person facing a new set of circumstances.

That person inherits today's body, environment, habits, fears, unfinished tasks, and consequences. If the phone lay nearby in the evening and kept tearing attention apart, it will not disappear by itself in the morning. If the task carries the threat of evaluation, one more night will not necessarily change its meaning. If the first point of entry has not been defined, tomorrow the person will once again see the entire project at once and have no idea which side to approach.

Postponement is sometimes reasonable. There are states in which a serious conversation should not be started, a financial decision should not be made, and complex intellectual work should not be demanded. But postponement makes sense only when the conditions of entry change: the person recovers, gathers information, prepares the environment, agrees on a time, or reduces the size of the task.

If nothing changes, postponement becomes not planning, but the repetition of the old prediction. We hope that time itself will create a different state, but more often it brings the same inner configuration into tighter deadlines.

The future gradually becomes a warehouse for actions we could not tolerate in the present. We send documents, health, money, creativity, difficult conversations, relationships, and our own maturity there, then receive all of it back with interest in the form of guilt, urgency, and accumulated debt.

This is why the word "tomorrow" can bring brief relief. A person has not abandoned the goal, but neither have they entered it. They preserve a favorable image of themselves: I am still the person who intends to write the book, change my life, begin training, repair the relationship, and sort out the money.

Abandoning the goal would hurt, action would be risky, and postponement allows a person, for a while, to choose neither.

But the longer the future is used as a warehouse, the less it resembles a space of possibility. A person looks ahead and sees not a life that may unfold, but a territory of obligations that will eventually have to be cleared.

Action requires at least a minimal inner image of a future in which today's step makes sense. Not an ecstatic faith in a beautiful result, but a working assumption that effort leads somewhere beyond the present tension.

When a person cannot see themselves in the future, long processes become almost inaccessible. It is difficult to study, write, build a project, care for the body, restore health, or develop a relationship when there is no felt sense that a future self exists who will genuinely benefit from today's step.

Under prolonged overload, anxiety, financial pressure, family chaos, uncertainty after migration, or major loss, a person may continue functioning, replying, doing the minimum, and solving what is urgent, while the future as an inner space nearly disappears. In such a state, the advice to "just begin" sounds cruel, because beginning is possible only when at least a thin thread connects today's effort with a possible continuation.

Sometimes that thread must be assembled through very small actions. Not build a new life, but do something today that will not make tomorrow morning worse. Not recover your former shape, but go to sleep in a way that makes morning slightly easier. Not write the book, but leave one clear thought you can return to. Not solve the entire financial history, but look at one number you have been avoiding.

A large future may be inaccessible. But a small future can begin to be created.

IT IS NOT ALWAYS THE TASK THAT GETS POSTPONED

Try to remember something you kept putting off. It need not be enormous. Sometimes it is an email, a document, a phone call, a doctor's appointment, a conversation with someone close, the first paragraph of a text, several photographs that need editing, or a financial spreadsheet you are afraid to open.

The task itself may take fifteen minutes. But over weeks and months, an entire inner layer grows around it: promises made to yourself, missed deadlines, irritation, guilt, fear of consequences, expectation of criticism, and the sense that once again you have failed.

The person is no longer postponing only the action. They are postponing the state that rises beside it.

An email may be short but tied to fear of the reply. A document may be simple but remind you of a possible mistake. A call takes only a few minutes but carries the risk of refusal. A financial spreadsheet returns the sense of insecurity. A text awakens the fear that the result will be weaker than the idea.

If the task were merely technical, it would have been done long ago. But it has become an entrance into an experience the system is trying to avoid.

One person had a small document hanging over them for a long time. They needed to fill in several fields, attach a scan, and send it. In objective terms, the whole task required fifteen minutes, perhaps half an hour at most, yet the document remained unopened for nearly two weeks.

Every day the person remembered it. Every day the thought returned: I need to do this. And every day something else appeared: an urgent reply, a phone call, a household detail, the urge to tidy up first, unexpected fatigue, the news, food, or the argument that it was already too late and tomorrow would be more convenient.

From the outside, it would be easy to call the person irresponsible. But a more honest look showed that the document was connected not with fields and a scan, but with a sense of their own disorder. They were afraid of discovering that something was missing, that they had once again failed to understand the process, that they would have to call, clarify, ask, explain, and face a system beside which they felt small and incompetent.

The task was small. The state around it had become large.

Once this became visible, the entrance changed. Instead of the command "Pull yourself together and finally fill it out," another question appeared: what actually needs to happen now? Not defeat the entire bureaucratic system or prove one's adulthood, but open the file and see which information is genuinely required.

Within a few minutes, it became clear that much of the fear had been prediction rather than fact. But before the document was opened, the prediction existed inside as reality and shaped behavior more strongly than the objective fifteen minutes.

This is how the gap between intention and action works. Sometimes a person does not begin not because the task is impossible, but because they have not seen what makes it impossible inside.

PROCRASTINATION AS STATE REGULATION

Procrastination is often described as poor time management. A person supposedly sets priorities badly, cannot plan, or simply likes entertainment too much. Sometimes organization really is the problem, but time is only the outer surface.

Inside procrastination there is often an attempt to change state right now.

The task creates tension. The person switches to the phone, cleaning, the news, food, someone else's question, or another task that offers a quicker and more predictable result. Tension drops slightly, and the system receives brief relief.

That relief is what reinforces postponement.

At the moment of switching, the system is not considering tomorrow's price. It is solving today's problem: make it easier now. Opening a difficult document means meeting uncertainty. Checking messages offers a familiar stream that does not require the same inner risk. Beginning an important presentation may expose weakness in the structure. Doing a small household task provides a quick completion and, for a moment, restores a sense of influence over life.

Procrastination does not necessarily mean that a person does nothing. Sometimes they are extremely busy. They answer emails, rearrange files, search for additional sources, configure tools, make a new plan, watch lectures, and organize the workspace. From the outside, work is happening. Yet the main entrance remains closed.

Procrastination becomes especially sophisticated in intelligent and responsible people. They can explain very convincingly why this is genuinely not the best moment, why more information must be gathered first, the concept refined, the space prepared, the right tool chosen, and only then the work begun.

Each argument may be reasonable on its own. But the entire construction sometimes serves one function: avoiding the state in which the result is not yet known.

After postponement, the tension decreases, but the task does not disappear. It returns later with additional weight. Now the person is not simply writing an email, but writing the email they could not send for a week. They are not simply beginning a workout, but returning after a month of promises. They are not simply opening a financial spreadsheet, but meeting the period during which they deliberately avoided it.

This creates a loop of temporary relief. The task produces tension, postponement lowers it, relief reinforces withdrawal, time increases the consequences, the task grows heavier, and the next entry produces even more tension.

The person tries to escape the loop through accusation. They call themselves lazy, weak-willed, feeble, and disorganized, hoping shame will finally mobilize them.

But when the task is already connected with fear of evaluation and a sense of inadequacy, self-punishment increases precisely the inner weight the system was trying to escape. Shame rarely makes entry easier. It makes the task more dangerous.

As a result, the problem is no longer only the unfinished task. It becomes a problem in the person's relationship with themselves. Each new promise sounds weaker because experience has accumulated inside: I have said many times that I would begin, and I did not begin.

This is how trust in one's own word is eroded.

INTENTION IS BORN AT THE PEAK

Some intentions arise in a state of elevation. A person hears a powerful idea, sees a new path, receives support, experiences success, speaks with someone important, or suddenly realizes they no longer want to live as before.

In such a moment, the decision may be entirely genuine. Inspiration should not be dismissed simply because it is temporary. It is often at an inner peak that a person first sees a possibility that had previously been closed.

The problem is not that the intention was born at the peak. The problem is the expectation that the same version of the person will carry it out.

The decision is made where the direction is visible. Execution takes place below, where one must walk, orient, go around obstacles, distribute effort, and sometimes continue without the beautiful feeling of the path.

A person decides to write a book while seeing its meaning and overall architecture. But the work must continue when only a difficult paragraph is visible. They decide to return to the body in a moment of inspiration, but movement must also happen on an ordinary day, without either enthusiasm or hatred toward oneself. They decide to change a relationship after a deep conversation, but the real work begins in the next small conflict, where the old response once again feels natural.

Intention must survive a change of state. Only then does it become part of life.

I see this gap especially clearly in my work on this book. At the moment of conception, the book exists almost as a whole. I can see its architecture, its central nerve, the reader who may need it, and the place the book should occupy in my own life.

In such a state, it is easy to say: I will write it.

But the real book does not appear at the moment of decision. It appears through hundreds of returns to the text after the idea no longer provides emotional support. I have to open the document, reread what is already there, see that a strong thought has been expressed badly, remove repetitions, check the logic, restore a personal example that was too quickly replaced by a correct abstraction, and sometimes admit that several days of work have produced not a finished passage, but only a clearer understanding of how it should not be written.

The phrase “I want to write an important book” is too large for a particular morning. It can even increase pressure, because every paragraph begins to be measured not against the task of the day, but against the future significance of the entire book.

Then the file becomes heavy. Opening it means meeting not only the text, but also the question: am I capable of bringing this conception into form?

Real work begins when the book can be returned to the size of today's action. Not write everything, prove the right to call oneself an author, or create a final philosophical system, but remain in contact with one chapter.

A book is written by different versions of a person. Some days bring clarity, others material, and still others permit only the correction of a mistake. Sometimes the work is not to write something new, but to avoid destroying what has already been found.

If an author waits only for the inspired version of themselves, the book will remain an idea. Form appears when the person who doubts, is tired, and cannot see the whole also returns, yet is still capable of one concrete action.

WHEN THE IDEAL IS PROTECTED FROM REALITY

Perfectionism often presents itself as a concern for quality. A person says they do not want to do poor work, release something raw, or treat an important task superficially. There is a reasonable part in this, because quality genuinely requires time, attention, and the ability to notice flaws.

But sometimes the ideal is used not to improve action, but to forbid it.

If the first text must immediately match the inner image of the book, writing becomes almost impossible. If the first workout must prove that fitness has returned, the body experiences it as an examination. If a new project must look professional and produce results from the very beginning, experimentation becomes too dangerous.

The person compares the beginning not with the emptiness that existed before it, but with the finished image. Naturally, the beginning loses.

The ideal is preserved at the price of reality. Inside remains a beautiful unwritten book, a powerful course that was never launched, harmonious relationships no one ever spoke about, and a new life that has not yet met a single real limitation.

Action takes perfection away from the dream. It carries the dream into a world where things will be slow, uneven, imperfect, and resistant, where there will be mistakes and revisions. If a person cannot tolerate the imperfection of the first form, they prefer to preserve intention as a beautiful possibility.

This way they do not fail. But neither do they live.

Sometimes procrastination appears not as an inability to begin, but as an inability to finish. A person enters the project, works a great deal, assembles almost the entire result, then stops before the point at which they must send, publish, name a price, sign a contract, show the work to a client, or complete the editing.

As long as the work remains unfinished, it retains the possibility of becoming better. Once it is completed, a specific result appears and can be judged.

Unfinishedness preserves potential; completion turns it into fact.

For someone whose self-worth is closely tied to the quality of their work, this can be especially difficult. They keep making changes, gathering additional material, and rebuilding the structure because exploration allows them to stay inside the project without crossing into the moment when the work begins to live separately from its author.

Fear of completion shows that action requires more than effort. It also requires releasing control.

A person may fear not only failure, but success. A published book will be read, misunderstood, praised, criticized, and compared. New clients will bring income, but will also demand time, presence,

and responsibility. Close relationships will bring warmth, but will make a person vulnerable. A higher level of income will expand possibilities, but will also require different decisions.

Sometimes we postpone because success will change the system too.

Consciousness says: I want this. Another part adds: not at the price of danger.

From the outside, this conflict looks like inexplicable procrastination. A person makes plans and sincerely wants the result, yet stops near the point after which the conception will cease being a fantasy and begin changing real life.

WILLPOWER EXISTS, BUT IT DOES NOT REPLACE THE SYSTEM

It would be a mistake to declare willpower a fiction. A person really can hold to a decision, do what is unpleasant, tolerate discomfort, and resist the first impulse. Without that capacity, no long path could be completed.

But willpower is greatly overrated as a universal answer.

Imagine someone who wants to work but sleeps five hours a night, lives in anxiety, eats chaotically, answers messages constantly, has no clear entry into the task, fears evaluation, and works in a space where attention is torn apart every few minutes.

You can tell that person, “Pull yourself together.” Sometimes they really will. They will tense the system, mute part of its signals, and do what is necessary. But when such conditions become permanent, willpower turns into an attempt to hold a door shut with your bare hands in the middle of a storm.

The question is no longer whether the person is trying hard enough. The question is why the door keeps being blown open.

Those who rely on willpower alone often live in cycles: a push, overload, collapse, guilt, and another push. They do not build a sustainable entry into action. They compensate for its absence with yet another surge of tension.

Tension can initiate movement, but it is not architecture.

Different actions require different states. A difficult conversation requires the ability to tolerate the other person’s answer. Creative work needs a space in which the right form can remain unknown for a while. A routine task may need nothing more than a clear beginning and a limited scope. A public step requires a willingness to meet evaluation. Returning to the body requires at least a minimal sense that the action is not a punishment.

In almost every case, however, the system must experience the task as possible enough. Not easy, pleasant, or guaranteed—possible.

If there is no visible transition between a person and a goal, action remains an abstraction. “Create a course” does not say what to do now. “Repair the relationship” is too large for one conversation. “Put my life in order” has no specific point of entry.

The less defined the first contact with the task is, the more the empty space fills with prediction. An anxious prediction rarely chooses the most generous version.

The system no longer sees an action. It sees the full volume of uncertainty.

THE FIRST ENTRY MUST BE REAL

A large task may be meaningful and important yet remain inaccessible because of its own size. A person sees the entire book and does not open the chapter, looks at the whole house and does not begin cleaning, imagines a complete transformation of the body and makes no short movement, thinks about their entire financial history and does not open a single category of expenses.

We sometimes treat the reduction of an action with contempt. It seems that an adult should simply do what is necessary rather than break it into small steps.

But the size of the entry determines whether the system can move from prediction into motion at all.

If an action is too large, it remains a symbol of the entire problem. When a specific boundary appears, the task takes form. One paragraph is not a book, but it is no longer only an intention. One square meter of order does not solve the chaos of life, but it creates a part of reality in which an action has been completed. One call does not build a business, but after it, the idea receives a response from the outside world.

At the same time, a small step must not become a merely decorative gesture. A person can prepare forever: buy notebooks, choose apps, watch motivational videos, create folders, arrange the workspace, and make yet another perfect plan.

All of that may be useful, but sometimes preparation allows the person to avoid entering the task itself.

A real first step must make contact with the actual point of resistance. If the task concerns text, the step must involve the text. If it concerns money, the numbers. If it concerns the body, movement or a real act of contact with the body. If it concerns a relationship, contact. If it concerns health, an appointment, an examination, or a conversation with a specialist.

Such a step enters the zone of resistance, but does so in a tolerable volume. It neither bypasses the difficulty entirely nor forces the system over its own limits.

For one person, money remained a space of vague anxiety for a long time. They earned reasonably well but avoided looking at the actual numbers. Money came in, went out, covered some needs and opened others, yet never formed a comprehensible picture.

The person decided many times: I need to sit down and sort this out. But they did not sit down.

The problem was not arithmetic. They knew how to count. The problem was the state that appeared when they met the numbers. The expense table did not feel like information. It felt like a trial: now it will become clear where I was irresponsible, what I missed, where I made mistakes, and why I am not living as I should.

So the system chose not to know. As long as the figures remained unopened, the illusion could survive. As long as the person did not look, they did not have to meet the anxiety directly.

But not knowing brought no peace. It merely turned anxiety into a constant background. Money remained inside as an unclear threat that could emerge at any moment.

The entry changed when the task stopped sounding like “sort out all my finances.” The person only had to open the account and write down three recurring payments. Not understand the entire financial strategy, but see one part of the picture without putting their whole life on trial.

That action did not solve the financial problem. But it broke an important connection: a number stopped being an absolute threat and became data again, something that could be worked with.

Sometimes movement begins not with a heroic decision, but with reducing shame to a level a person can bear.

INTENTION AS A CONTRACT WITH REALITY

An intention does not become serious at the moment a person wants something very badly. It becomes real when it begins to account for the conditions under which it will be carried out.

It is not enough to ask what I want. I also need to understand the state in which I will have to do it, where the first entry will occur, which prediction will activate, what I will do after inspiration disappears, and how I will return if I fall away from the process.

The criterion for today's result matters as well. What would count as an action that is good enough now, rather than in some ideal future version of life?

The intention "I want to write a book" moves closer to reality when a person accepts that the document must also be opened on days when the text does not feel important. "I want to care for my body" becomes more precise when movement stops being an examination and takes a form accessible to today's state. "I want to sort out my finances" acquires meaning when a person is prepared to see one part of the financial picture without immediately putting themselves on trial.

An intention must account for the trigger that will begin the action, the first step itself, the way the result will be checked, and the moment when today's cycle can be considered complete. Otherwise, the task remains shapeless and gives the system no information about how to move into action.

A person says, "I will write." But what will become the entry? Morning, an open file, a specific chapter, fifteen minutes before checking messages? How will they know the action has happened? By the number of pages, the time spent in contact with the text, or a completed unit of meaning? When will they stop so that the work does not become yet another push toward exhaustion?

Such questions may seem too technical for a large human intention. But it is precisely through this specificity that an idea stops being a declaration and becomes a contract with reality.

The Architect begins to appear not where a person has learned to demand more and more from themselves, but where the intention takes the system's design into account and stops treating it like a lazy subordinate.

While Autopilot meets a large amount of tension and moves toward familiar relief, the Observer notices the point of rupture. The Observer sees that the person is postponing not only a task, but a specific state. The Architect begins changing one node: the size of the entry, the timing, the environment, the criterion for completion, the way of returning, or the meaning surrounding the task.

The Architect does not guarantee a result. The Architect makes action more accessible.

THE PRESENT IS DENSER THAN THE DECISION

An evening promise is often built as though tomorrow will open a separate space untouched by work, family, calls, news, documents, household tasks, fatigue, and chance.

But action never takes place in a vacuum. It has to enter an already existing stream of life.

A person wants to begin counseling, but professional readiness is not enough. They must shape an offer, name a price, tolerate being visible, answer messages, organize a schedule, and meet the possibility that the first client may not arrive immediately.

They want to launch a course, but the idea has to pass through lesson structure, assignments, a platform, design, testing, and dozens of small decisions, none of which is inspiring on its own.

They want to speak with a partner, yet the real action includes not only the words they have prepared, but also the other person's answer. The partner may disagree, become hurt, close down, ask an uncomfortable question, or remind them of pain of their own.

As long as the conversation takes place in the mind, the person can be calm, precise, and convincing. In the actual encounter, they will have to meet the other person's freedom, which cannot be written into their own script in advance.

Sometimes, then, it is not the words that are being postponed. It is the unpredictability of the response.

A woman may understand for months that she needs to speak with her partner about the loneliness that has accumulated between them. She is tired of cold pauses, lack of involvement, and a life in which she has to pretend that everything is fine.

The intention exists, but the state required for the conversation is unavailable. A prediction rises inside: he will dismiss my feelings, say I am dramatizing, close down, leave, I will cry, I will not be able to bear it, everything will become worse.

Silence feels less dangerous than the conversation. The woman tells herself that now is not the right time, that her partner is tired, that she needs to choose a calmer moment. Sometimes that is true. But sometimes the search for the right moment becomes a way of avoiding the place where real pain may open.

The relationship does not remain still during all this time. The conversation does not happen outwardly, but inwardly the contact is already changing. Warmth decreases, irritation grows, trust weakens, and the person who remains silent feels more and more alone.

When the conversation finally begins, it is often no longer calm and precise, but loaded with everything that has accumulated. It was not only the words that were postponed. The state was postponed too, but it continued to build and intensify all the while.

Silence also becomes an action. Sometimes a far more destructive one than an imperfect conversation.

ACT OR RECOVER

There is a culture that treats every form of inaction as a problem. A person is supposed to begin, continue, refuse to give up, use time well, and turn intentions into results.

But sometimes the system is genuinely unable to act. Not because it is sabotaging life, but because resources are insufficient, the situation is unsafe, information is lacking, or an inner process has not yet come to completion.

After loss, illness, a severe conflict, or prolonged overload, a person may want to return to work and still have no access to their former concentration. Trying to force productivity back into place only deepens the sense that something inside is broken.

Sometimes the first action should not be directed toward the goal, but toward restoring a minimum of support. Sleep, eat, take a walk, remove unnecessary incoming signals, put a small space in order, speak with someone who does not amplify panic, or postpone an answer until morning.

This is not necessarily procrastination. A good pause returns a person to action.

But if every pause requires another preparatory round, one more video, one more cup of tea, one more day, and one more explanation of why now is not the right time, recovery gradually becomes a detour.

The difference is not always obvious. A person does not possess an inner instrument that can flawlessly identify the boundary between care and avoidance. But the question can still be asked honestly: is what I am doing now restoring my capacity to act, or merely helping me avoid, for a little longer, the state I am afraid to meet?

Maturity does not mean acting immediately in every situation. It appears in the ability to distinguish recovery from withdrawal.

ACTION AS AN ENCOUNTER WITH REALITY

Until an action has been taken, a person lives inside prediction. They may think, fear, hope, plan, argue with themselves, prepare, and avoid, but all of it remains an inner model.

Action tests the model against reality.

A person thought they would certainly be judged, but asked the question and received a calm answer. They were convinced they could not write, yet produced a weak first paragraph and discovered that imperfect text is more useful than an empty document. They feared the body would not cope, but ten minutes of movement proved possible. They expected the numbers to destroy the last of their calm, and one number turned out to be simply a number.

Sometimes the prediction is confirmed. The person is refused, criticized, misunderstood, the conversation becomes more difficult, and the task turns out to be harder than they had hoped.

But even then, action provides data, not just fantasy. Reality appears, and it can be worked with.

If a person continually avoids entry, the system receives no new information and continues living inside the old prediction. It does not learn that the answer may be different, that the body can bear more, that the task has boundaries, and that a mistake does not necessarily destroy a relationship or a sense of self-worth.

Action changes more than the outer world. It updates the inner model.

It is especially important that action creates a new foundation for the relationship with oneself. Not a slogan, a promise, or an ideal image, but the fact of participation. A person can say: I did not merely want it. I stepped into it.

This is how trust in one's own word gradually returns.

But living action is almost always uneven. A person misses a workout, writes a weak text, loses their way in a conversation, wakes later than planned, spends too much, and breaks their own routine.

If an intention cannot survive the first imperfection, it was more an image of an ideal self than a readiness to live through the process.

A real intention includes the right to return. Not a promise never to fall away again, but the ability to come back without destroying oneself. Not the demand to write perfectly, but the willingness to open the text again. Not a vow to remain calm forever, but the intention to notice sooner when Autopilot begins conducting the conversation.

The system does not change through one flawless step. It changes through repeated return.

NOT EVERY INTENTION NEEDS TO BE CARRIED OUT

A discussion of the gap between desire and action can easily turn into a cult of execution. Once you have decided, you must do it. But adult life includes the right to reconsider one's own intentions.

A person changes, circumstances change, a goal loses its meaning, the price proves higher than expected, and the earlier decision may have been made from fear, comparison, other people's expectations, or a temporary surge.

Not every "should" reflects a genuine "want."

A person may spend years planning an action they do not need, or do not need in that form. They do not really want to run a blog; they want recognition. They do not want that particular business; they want relief from financial anxiety. They do not want to lose weight at any cost; they want freedom of movement again and the right to like themselves. They do not want to preserve the relationship; they want to avoid feeling abandoned.

When an intention is built around someone else's form, the system resists not only the action. It resists the life into which that action is supposed to lead.

This does not mean that every form of resistance proves the goal is false. People often resist what matters most precisely because what matters is tied to risk, visibility, and change.

So the question has to become more honest: am I not doing this because it is no longer mine, or because it is mine and I am afraid to enter?

The distinction is difficult. But sometimes an honest "I no longer choose this" releases more energy than yet another promise to begin on Monday.

Such a refusal should not be quick relief after the first difficulty. It becomes a mature action when a person acknowledges: this intention no longer corresponds to my reality.

Maturity is connected not only with the ability to carry out decisions. It also includes the ability to cancel decisions that are no longer truly one's own.

CHAPTER 5 FORMULA

Intention points in a direction, but action requires a state in which that direction becomes accessible. An intention may be born in clarity, inspiration, hope, or intense pain, but it has to be carried out in ordinary life, where there is a body, fear, fatigue, environment, resistance, other people's needs, and the unpredictability of results.

Sincere desire is not enough if the system cannot see an accessible entry, cannot bear the state associated with the task, or does not believe that effort leads toward a future that matters.

Procrastination is often a way to reduce quickly the tension created by action. It brings brief relief, but raises the cost of the next entry and gradually erodes a person's trust in themselves.

Willpower can initiate movement, but it cannot continually replace the system. Sustainable action appears where intention accounts for state, the size of the first contact, environment, meaning, the possibility of error, the criterion for today's result, and the inevitable fading of the initial surge.

Autopilot meets tension and chooses the relief that is available.

The Observer notices which state stands at the entrance to action and what the person is actually postponing.

The Architect gradually builds a bridge: reduces the size of the entry, changes the conditions, defines a real first step, and leaves a path for returning after a lapse.

A person is not always inactive because they do not want to act. Sometimes they want to, but have no access to action. Sometimes they fear not failure, but the changes a successful result will bring. Sometimes they protect an ideal image from an imperfect beginning, and sometimes they keep promising themselves a goal they abandoned inwardly long ago.

Seeing the difference between these states matters more than ordering yourself, once again, to pull yourself together.

WHERE WE GO NEXT

We have now seen why a clear intention does not always become action. But a person can do more than postpone conscious movement. Sometimes they are pulled in another direction almost instantly.

They meant to open the work file, but their hand had already picked up the phone. They planned to go to sleep, but the screen offered one more short video. They decided to eat differently, yet the smell, appearance, and availability of food had already activated desire. They wanted to remain clear in a conversation, but an inner impulse demanded an immediate reply, a check, an accusation, or relief.

These movements often require no complex bridge between future and present. They arise faster than conscious decision and immediately offer the system an available way to change its state.

The next chapter will therefore be devoted to the biology of impulse. We will examine why a person can feel strongly drawn toward an action they do not choose in a broader sense, and how the body, memory of reward, and environment enter the process before the conscious “I want” appears.

CHAPTER 6. THE BIOLOGY OF IMPULSE

You probably know this strange feeling: the decision has already been made, the reasons are clear, the consequences of the old behavior have been examined almost down to the smallest detail, and yet a few seconds pass and your hand reaches in the wrong direction again. You meant to go to sleep, but opened your phone to check one message. You wanted a calm dinner, but saw something sweet, caught a familiar smell, and felt a movement begin inside that was difficult to call the result of a considered decision.

You were about to work when a notification appeared on the screen, and your attention left before you had time to decide whether you truly needed to open it. You had no intention of buying anything unnecessary, yet the light, the packaging, the discount, and the quiet thought that you could at least give yourself a little pleasure seemed to have held a meeting without the rational mind present and then handed it an almost finished decision.

The same thing happens beyond food, phones, and purchases. You wanted to answer someone close to you calmly, but heard a certain tone, your body tightened at once, your voice changed, and the words began coming out faster than you could check whether you genuinely wanted to say them. You meant not to enter another pointless argument, but someone's phrase struck shame, resentment, or an old sense of injustice, and the need to prove yourself rose immediately.

Viewed superficially, the explanation comes quickly: weak will, poor discipline, bad character, or lack of awareness. Such an explanation is convenient because it reduces a complex system to a single moral defect. But it does not answer the central question: why, in one state, can a person pass the stimulus with almost no effort, while in another the same stimulus becomes stronger than every decision already made?

In the previous chapter, we examined the gap between intention and action. A person may sincerely want something important yet lack the state from which that intention can become movement. Now we need to look at the reverse situation: sometimes a person cannot begin what they chose, but acts with remarkable speed on something they never meant to choose.

Impulse needs no long bridge between the future and the present. It offers an action immediately, while reason is still preparing to enter the room.

IMPULSE COMES BEFORE CHOICE

Conscious choice takes time. A person must notice the situation, understand the need, imagine the consequences, and compare a possible action with their values, plans, and broader interests. Impulse works faster. It links a signal with an already familiar route and offers the body a ready-made movement.

A smell appears, and you want to move closer. A screen lights up, and your hand is already reaching to check it. Inner tension rises, and you want to eat, buy, write, say, or open something immediately. Another person's silence creates an urge to check the connection. An alarming news item drives you toward the next one, even though more information is no longer helping and will probably make your state heavier.

A person often notices the impulse only when the action has almost begun. They are already standing before the open refrigerator, holding the phone, typing the sharp reply, or examining an item they were living perfectly well without only minutes earlier. Because the movement arose inside them, it is experienced as their own desire: if I felt drawn toward it, I must have wanted it.

But this entire book has been leading us toward a more complex understanding of the word "I." The body, memory, environment, habit, expectation of reward, fatigue, anxiety, past experience, and conscious intention are all operating within a person at once. Not every movement that arises in this system expresses the integrated choice of the whole person.

Sometimes a person does not want what they feel drawn to do. They may already know that the action will not make things better, yet the pull remains strong. This distinction seems subtle only until you begin noticing it in your own life.

In ordinary speech, we say, "I suddenly felt like it." The phrase creates the impression of a single point that appeared inside without a history or structure. In reality, an impulse is more often a small system that unfolds within a few seconds.

First comes a signal: an image, smell, sound, notification, tone of voice, memory, boredom, emptiness, or tension in the body. It meets the current state and activates a familiar expectation: this will bring pleasure, energy, control, connection, release, or at least a brief exit from what has become unpleasant. The body prepares to move, attention narrows around the object, memory retrieves earlier experience, and reason begins explaining why the action makes sense right now.

The system remembers that something sweet once soothed it, the phone brought interest, a purchase restored a feeling of freedom, a sharp reply reduced helplessness, and another piece of information created at least the illusion of control. From the outside, all of this looks like a simple "I felt like it." Inside, however, a small story has already unfolded: the signal met the state, the body responded, memory offered a familiar reward, attention captured the object, and reason prepared the justification.

This is why fighting only the final action is so difficult. By the time a person says "no," the prohibition is no longer confronting a neutral possibility. It is confronting an assembled promise of

relief, and the system experiences reason as trying to take away not a cookie, a phone, a purchase, or a message, but the only quick exit from the current state.

“I’M DRAWN TO IT” AND “I LIKE IT”

Researchers who study motivation distinguish between two processes that ordinary language often compresses into the word “want.” One concerns the pleasure a person actually receives; the other concerns craving, anticipation, and the motivational force of a signal. In the English-language literature, these processes are commonly described as liking and wanting.

They can coincide. You want good food, eat it, and genuinely enjoy it. You want to walk by the sea because your body needs air and movement, and the walk brings exactly the state you expected. You want closeness because there is warmth, interest, and mutuality beside another person, not only fear of being alone.

But wanting and liking can separate. A person opens an app again even though they found nothing interesting there during the previous twenty minutes. They keep eating after the brightness of the taste has faded and the body no longer needs more food. They buy something, feel a brief rise, and almost stop thinking about it a day later. They return to a conflict not because they enjoy arguing, but because the pull toward release becomes stronger than the wish to preserve contact.

Sometimes the system does not want pleasure. It wants the end of tension. Not taste, but a shift. Not information, but a microdose of control. Not conversation, but confirmation that the person has not been forgotten and the connection still exists. Not the purchase itself, but a brief sense of being able to decide again. Not victory in an argument, but a way to stop feeling helpless, ashamed, or vulnerable.

Imagine an ordinary evening. A person has eaten dinner and is genuinely full. They have not suppressed hunger or tried to hold out heroically; the body has received food. But they walk into the kitchen and see an open package of cookies.

Until that second, they were not thinking about the cookies. There was no deep philosophical desire to eat that particular thing, no plan, and no inner decision. Yet the shape and color of the package, the sight of the product, and the familiar taste already predicted by memory activate a pull. First comes bodily movement, then the arguments arrive: “One is fine,” “It was a hard day,” “I’ll start properly tomorrow,” “Nothing terrible will happen,” “At least it will improve my mood.”

The person feels that they are reasoning and making a decision. But sometimes consciousness is no longer directing the process at this point; it is acting as counsel for the impulse that has already arisen. It is not asking whether the action serves the system as a whole. It is explaining why the movement already underway should be considered reasonable.

Willpower does not enter an empty room. It enters a space already occupied by smell, image, memory of pleasure, fatigue, expectation of reward, habit, the accessibility of the object, and the cultural formula “I deserve it.” If this sequence remains invisible, a person begins fighting not the mechanism, but themselves.

The pull can be stronger than the pleasure itself because the system responds not only to the result, but also to its promise. While a person is walking toward the refrigerator, opening an online

store, checking messages, or preparing a sharp reply, an expectation exists inside: something is about to change. It will become more interesting, calmer, warmer, clearer, or at least less difficult.

After the action, it often turns out that the change was much shorter than the promise. But the system remembers not only the outcome; it also remembers the path toward a possible reward, especially when the reward did not appear every time but only sometimes. This is why a person can keep reaching toward something whose real pleasure has long since grown weak.

An impulse can resemble an advertisement that is far more convincing than the product itself. The promise is vivid, the packaging flawless, the music just right, and after unpacking it, the person discovers a fairly ordinary experience that ends quickly.

BODILY HUNGER AND STATE HUNGER

Food shows especially clearly how biology, memory, state, and environment can converge in a single impulse. There is genuine physiological hunger: the body needs energy, the person has not eaten for a long time, attention narrows, patience decreases, and the organism looks for a quick source of nourishment. In that state, a conversation about discipline may be almost meaningless. An exhausted body is under no obligation to philosophize elegantly about a balanced diet; it will look for available energy.

But there is another kind of hunger as well. A person may have eaten, yet still feel empty inside. Their stomach is not hungry, but their state is. They lack calm, completion, recognition, closeness, pleasure, rest, or the feeling that the day was not lived in vain. Then food begins doing work that reaches far beyond nutrition.

This often happens in the evening after a difficult but inwardly unfinished day. The person has done a great deal, answered, decided, endured, hurried, and met other people's requests, yet has not gained the feeling that they truly lived or completed anything. The refrigerator becomes a place where, for at least a few minutes, a clear reward is available: open it, take something, eat, taste, and close a short cycle.

Food becomes the period at the end of a day that otherwise never felt complete—in work, relationships, or inner life. If there was no joy, there will be taste; if there was no calm, there will be something sweet; if there was no recognition, the person will give themselves a small reward; if all day they were only a function, in the evening they will at least feel something of their own.

This is why fighting only the food can leave the main issue unseen: it has become a substitute for rest, completion, pleasure, love, or the right to a brief pause. Removing the food in such a situation does not simply mean changing the diet. Sometimes it means taking away the system's only available way of moving from a mode of effort into a state in which, at last, nothing is being demanded of it.

Satiety tells the organism that it has enough energy, but it does not necessarily make smells, images, rituals, and memories neutral. A person can be full and still respond to a display case, freshly baked goods, beautifully photographed food, a familiar taste from childhood, an evening ritual, company, or the advertising promise to "treat yourself."

This is especially easy where products are designed for fast, vivid reward, remain constantly available, and require almost no participation. The system receives not merely food, but a dense sequence of signals: appearance, smell, texture, sweetness, salt, fat, packaging, and the promise of immediate pleasure.

The brightest moment often occurs before the eating itself. You saw it, wanted it, gave yourself permission, picked it up, opened it, and took the first bite. The flavor then becomes more ordinary, but the process is already in motion. The person continues not because pleasure keeps increasing, but because the system is following the route it has begun.

There is an uncomfortable but useful truth here: anticipation of reward can be stronger than the reward itself. Many impulses resemble a mirage that looks like rescue from a distance but delivers far less on approach than the system had pictured.

THE EVENING IMPULSE BEGINS IN THE MORNING

A person often judges themselves by the final episode. They ate too much in the evening, spent another hour on the phone, drank more than intended, bought something unnecessary, or answered someone close to them harshly. It seems that this was the moment when they showed weakness and lost to their own character.

But the evening impulse may have been assembling all day. The person slept badly, rushed in the morning, did not eat properly, spent hours under tension, left important tasks unfinished, swallowed irritation, answered other people's demands constantly, and never paused once. By evening, the system had only a minimal reserve of flexibility left, yet it was expected to display perfect awareness in front of the most accessible source of relief.

You cannot exhaust the system all day and then expect it to behave in the evening like a wise monk with no interest in cookies, the phone, a glass of wine, or the chance to tell someone exactly what it thinks.

This extends far beyond food. The phone becomes stronger when attention is tired. A sharp reply comes out faster after a person has suppressed irritation all day. A purchase promises more when life has consisted only of obligations. News becomes especially magnetic where uncertainty has accumulated, because the next piece of information creates the illusion that the world can once again be understood and controlled.

A tired person does not necessarily lose every capacity for choice, but conscious choice becomes more expensive. It is harder to hold a complex perspective, account for future consequences, and refuse immediate relief in favor of a result that will arrive later.

An impulse therefore cannot be understood only in the second when the hand has already opened the refrigerator or the app. It has a history. Sometimes that history begins minutes earlier, sometimes hours earlier, and sometimes it is built into an entire way of life in which the system is kept at its limit and granted permission for pleasure only after complete exhaustion.

A person asks, "Why do I always lose control in the evening?" A more precise question might be: how did I live this day so that, by evening, this particular form of relief was the most accessible one left?

The question does not remove responsibility. It moves responsibility out of the final second and into a wider system where something can still be seen and changed.

QUICK REWARD ENTERS AN UNEQUAL CONTEST

Every long action has a cost of entry. To prepare real food, a person must get up, choose ingredients, spend time, and participate in the process. To speak with another person, they must tolerate that person's separateness and the possibility of hearing an unpleasant answer. To write a chapter, they must enter a state of concentration and remain for a while without any guarantee of immediate results. To recover, they may have to decline some tasks, go to sleep, take a walk, or endure silence without filling it constantly.

Quick reward is structured differently. It offers to change the state now and with almost no preparation. The phone is nearby. Something sweet is already open. The bank card is saved. The purchase button is one tap away from turning desire into action. A sharp reply requires no long construction; it is ready and promises to release inner pressure immediately.

A system under overload predictably takes the short route. There is no mystery in this. It is not comparing two equal possibilities, one good and one bad. It is comparing two paths with radically different costs of entry.

Deep work has to compete with a notification. Prepared food with something that can be eaten immediately. Live conversation with a brief digital response. Financial stability with an instant purchase that restores a sense of choice for several minutes. Walking, sleep, and recovery with a bright screen promising interest without the need to stand up.

A person feels free to choose between equal alternatives. But one path requires a state, time, participation, and the capacity to tolerate a delayed result, while the other is already waiting at the entrance to the system with a ready-made promise.

The environment does not make the entire decision, but it designs probability. Food in plain sight enters attention more often. A phone in the hand is easier to open than one in another room. A saved bank card shortens the distance from impulse to purchase. A notification turns the absence of any thought about an app into a concrete invitation to enter it now.

Much of what we call self-control is, in practice, a constant struggle against an architecture that has already placed a particular action at minimum distance. We will return later to the environment and its design. For now, it is enough to admit that a person does not have to prove their freedom every evening by placing themselves before the strongest signal and demanding a flawless refusal from an exhausted system.

Sometimes maturity does not mean becoming stronger than the signal. It means no longer making that signal a permanent neighbor of your state.

THE PHONE BESIDE THE BOOK

I see this mechanism especially clearly while working on a text. When you are writing a difficult chapter, you have to hold several levels at once: the sentence in front of you, the thought that came before it, the architecture of the book as a whole, the transition still ahead, personal examples, scientific sources, rhythm, and that human quality of voice without which the text becomes correct but lifeless.

This construction requires more than time. It requires a state. You have to enter the thought gradually, feel its direction, restore the connection between its parts, and remain inside that inner space long enough for the chapter to continue taking shape.

The phone is lying nearby. I have no intention of being distracted for long. A notification arrives, and the thought sounds entirely reasonable: I will check quickly; perhaps it is something important. It is not. But my attention has already crossed into another space. Then comes a message, publication statistics, new views, a reaction to a post, VK, MAX, the profile of another psychologist or photographer, the news, and several more doors I had no intention of opening.

A few minutes later I return to the document. The file is still there and the text has not disappeared, but the inner construction is gone. I have to enter the tone again, recover the direction of the thought, remember why the paragraph was being built, and deal with my irritation at having dismantled, with my own hands, a state that took time to assemble.

Outwardly, only a few minutes were lost. Inwardly, the mode in which the chapter could continue was lost, and restoring it may take far longer than the distraction itself.

The phone is not the enemy here. I need it for work, communication, notes, photography, sources, publishing, and staying in contact with people. The problem begins when a tool becomes an accidental entrance into dozens of other people's streams, each offering its own rhythm, emotion, and direction of attention.

The impulse to check the phone promises a brief reward: interest, important information, or confirmation that my work has reached people. But its real cost often lies not in the number of minutes spent, but in the destruction of the inner configuration.

This is why the pull of the phone becomes especially strong beside a difficult task. It offers more than entertainment. It offers an immediate exit from a state that requires effort, the ability to tolerate uncertainty, and work without the guarantee of a quick reward.

Unpredictability adds another layer. If every opening of the phone produced exactly the same thing, interest would decline fairly quickly. But sometimes there is an important message, an unexpected response, a good assignment, praise, news, or an answer from someone you have been waiting for. Sometimes there is nothing. It is precisely this "sometimes" that keeps expectation alive.

The system returns not because something good is guaranteed to be there, but because something good might be there. An unpredictable reward often holds attention longer than a

guaranteed one, so a person keeps checking even when the actual pleasure of checking has almost disappeared.

The same mechanism operates outside the digital environment. One rare warm response can sustain a pull toward someone who is cold most of the time. One successful purchase can support an endless search for the next one. An unexpectedly strong response to a publication can make a person check the statistics again and again, as though the previous rise might return with the next refresh.

The pull keeps leading the person along the same route even as the final experience corresponds less and less to the strength of the expectation.

MARKETING, PURCHASE, AND THE PROMISED VERSION OF THE SELF

After many years in marketing, I know well that people are rarely sold only the functional properties of an object. They are sold the state they expect to enter after the purchase.

Not simply a car, but freedom, status, movement, and the feeling that life has finally begun to match one's inner scale. Not only clothing, but a new version of the self. Not just a vacation, but permission to exhale. Not cosmetics, but the promise of youth, attention, and restored control. Not a course, but the image of a future person who already knows, can do, earns, and no longer doubts.

Even food is not sold as a set of calories and ingredients. It becomes care, reward, celebration, comfort, childhood, love, and the possibility of no longer being, for a little while, the adult who constantly owes something to someone.

In honest marketing, this may be a way of showing real value. A person is genuinely choosing more than a bed in an apartment. They are choosing safety, cleanliness, a beautiful morning, proximity to the sea, and a state of rest. A good photograph helps them imagine a future experience and make a considered decision.

But marketing can also work with vulnerability. It can intensify scarcity, shame, fear of falling behind, anxiety about age, the desire to belong, and exhaustion with one's own life. First, the person is reminded of what they lack; then an object or service is offered as the shortest route to the desired state.

If this remains unseen, desire is experienced as entirely one's own: I wanted it myself, decided for myself, understood for myself that I urgently needed exactly this. Yet part of the desire was assembled from the outside. It was not created from nothing, because the needs for freedom, acceptance, beauty, and safety are real. But those needs were linked to a particular object and turned into an emotionally convincing promise.

A person buys an object and expects a change in the self.

An impulsive purchase can serve an even simpler function: restoring a sense of influence. If the day consisted of restrictions, obligations, other people's demands, and decisions made by others, the possibility of buying something for oneself becomes a small act of power. I choose. I can. I receive something now, not after I have fulfilled every obligation and finally earned the right to pleasure.

This is why the pull toward buying often grows stronger in a state of powerlessness. The person needs not so much the object itself as proof that they are still capable of influencing their own life.

The problem is that a brief sense of control is paid for with real money. After the purchase, anxiety may become stronger, and the system receives another reason to seek relief. The impulse relieves the state in the moment but makes it worse over time.

The same thing happens with a sharp reply that restores a sense of strength and damages contact. With something sweet that brings warmth and leaves guilt behind. With a phone that relieves the

tension of a task and increases unfinishedness. With one more piece of news that creates a sense of being informed and leaves the person even more anxious.

Quick reward often turns out to carry a long cost.

WHEN IMPULSE ENTERS RELATIONSHIPS

When we talk about impulse, it is easy to imagine something almost harmless: a cookie, a phone, a purchase, or an extra cup of coffee. But impulsive action can alter a relationship far more deeply.

A partner says something that touches an old wound. The body tightens instantly, breathing changes, the urge to defend oneself appears, and the person says something they would not have chosen in a more grounded state. They do not necessarily want to hurt the other person. They want to stop feeling their own vulnerability.

A sharp reply brings brief relief. Helplessness becomes action, shame turns into attack, and anxiety becomes control. But the other person encounters not the inner cause, but specific words, a tone, and pressure.

Later, the person says, “I got carried away.” That is a fairly accurate description. An impulse can feel like a current that gathers the body and speech with great speed. But the accuracy of the description must not become an excuse. If we are repeatedly carried in the same direction, responsibility means studying not only the consequences, but also the system that creates the acceleration each time.

What signal launches the reaction? What state does it promise to end? What does the person receive in the first seconds after the sharp reply: control, a sense of strength, the end of shame, confirmation that they are right?

Impulsive action persists precisely because it performs an inner function, even when it damages the relationship. As long as that function remains invisible, the advice “Speak more calmly” will be correct but weak.

Sometimes the impulse is not attack, but checking. A partner has not replied for a long time, and the hand reaches automatically to see whether they were online. Then comes the urge to send another message, ask a clarifying question, or create a cold distance so as not to become the one who is left.

The person believes they are looking for information. In reality, the system is trying to reduce uncertainty. Checking brings a few seconds of relief, but at the same time teaches anxiety a lesson: to feel calmer, the connection must be checked again.

This is how impulse gradually becomes a habitual way of regulating closeness. The person turns less and less toward the living partner and more and more toward the screen, online status, the time of the last visit, and their own predictions.

ALCOHOL AS THE PROMISE OF A TRANSITION

Alcohol and other substances require a separate and much more serious conversation that lies beyond the boundaries of this chapter. Here it is enough to see one layer: a person often reaches for alcohol not because intoxication is a consciously chosen life goal, and not because they value the taste especially highly every time.

What they need is a transition.

After a tense day, they want to lower the internal noise, slow their thoughts, feel warmth, permit themselves not to control every process, and stop being responsible for their own complexity for a while. In such a case, the pull is directed not only toward the substance, but toward the state it promises.

If there is almost no other route to that state, giving up alcohol is experienced not as the loss of a drink. The person loses the only accessible off switch, the only familiar transition from tension to calm, from loneliness to warmth, from anxiety to at least temporary silence.

This is why the moral demand “Just don’t drink” may fail to address the real system at all. It points to the action, but does not answer the question of how the person will now end the day, reduce the noise, tolerate loneliness, return warmth to the body, and leave the mode of permanent control.

This does not excuse addiction and does not replace professional help if dependence has formed. But it helps explain why fighting only the object often leaves the system with the same need and no other way to meet it.

A prohibition removes the familiar route, but does not create a new one. The system continues searching for the state it once reached through the substance and, if no other paths are available, may return to the old route or choose another rapid impulse.

IMPULSE AS THE SYSTEM'S ROUGH FORM OF CARE

One of the central ideas of this chapter is that impulse is not always the enemy. Often it is the system's fast, rough, and shortsighted way of trying to help itself.

It wants to lower tension, gain energy, escape shame, feel influence, fill emptiness, switch states, receive a reward, or at least find a brief warmth. There is nothing wrong with these needs in themselves.

The problem lies not in the wish for relief, but in the route the system chooses.

Something sweet may soothe for several minutes, followed by heaviness and guilt. The phone may shift attention, but destroy the state of deep work. A purchase may restore a sense of choice and increase financial anxiety. A sharp reply may end helplessness for a moment and leave damage in the relationship that takes much longer to repair.

Impulse tries to change the state, but takes little account of the future. It resembles an emergency worker who knows how to silence the alarm quickly without investigating what is happening in the building or whether the danger will return.

If impulse is treated only as an enemy, a person begins fighting their own need for relief. They demand that they stop wanting, stop tiring, stop seeking warmth, stop needing contact, and stop looking for a way out of tension.

That war increases tension and therefore strengthens the need for a rapid exit. The system becomes trapped between the impulse itself and shame about having the impulse, after which the familiar route may become even stronger.

A more mature relationship begins with a different question: what state is the system trying to reach right now? Not "Why am I so weak?" but "What exactly am I missing that has made something sweet, a screen, a purchase, an argument, a check, or a drink the shortest route?"

The answer does not always mean the action must be forbidden. Food can be pleasure, the phone can be connection, a purchase can be a reasonable joy, rest can be an honest necessity, and a firm reply can protect an important boundary. Awareness does not turn life into a system of endless prohibitions and does not require every pleasure to be replaced with a breathing exercise and a glass of water.

The problem begins when the action happens almost without participation, promises one state, delivers another, and repeats despite stable consequences. A person can eat dessert, genuinely want it, and enjoy it without turning the event into a moral crisis. They can buy something beautiful if it fits their means and real life. They can open the phone, answer someone close, and return to work.

The question is not the object itself. The question is whether the person retains the ability to distinguish need, urge, and consequence.

RESPONSIBILITY BEGINS BEFORE THE FINAL SECOND

The biology of impulse does not remove responsibility. A person is responsible for what they eat, buy, write, say, and do, especially when their behavior affects other people. But responsibility should not remain primitive and begin only in the final second, when the action has almost happened.

If I know that I am especially vulnerable to impulse after too little sleep, hunger, and an overloaded day, responsibility includes the way I organize that day. If I understand that notifications destroy the state of writing, responsibility concerns not only willpower but also where the phone is placed. If I see that buying intensifies in moments of powerlessness, I need to work not only with the bank card, but also with a life in which too few other ways of feeling influence remain.

If a person knows that shame makes them attack, responsibility lies not only in regretting the conflict afterward. It includes noticing bodily tension earlier, refusing to continue the conversation at maximum acceleration, asking honestly for a pause, and returning when contact becomes available again.

Responsibility becomes more intelligent when it stops being reduced to the phrase “I should have resisted.” Sometimes responsibility means noticing the state earlier, keeping the system from reaching exhaustion, removing an unnecessary cue, creating another transition, asking for help, or recognizing that the familiar route has become too powerful to fight alone.

A person is responsible not only for the final choice. Gradually, they also become responsible for the conditions in which that choice becomes most likely.

This is where the Architect appears, still very cautiously. The Architect does not order the system never to feel an urge again. The Architect looks for one node that can be changed: move the phone away, prepare proper food in advance, avoid a difficult conversation when exhausted, stop keeping a constant stimulus in sight, create a different end-of-day ritual, or give the system a real source of pleasure before it starts demanding compensation.

The Architect does not defeat biology. The Architect stops forcing biology to fight each time under the most unfavorable conditions.

FREEDOM DOES NOT MEAN THE ABSENCE OF URGES

It would be convenient to imagine a free person as someone who no longer reacts automatically to anything. They calmly pass every stimulus, never reach for the phone, never crave something sweet, never buy what they do not need, never argue, grow jealous, check messages, or seek quick rewards.

But that is not freedom. It is a fantasy about a person without a body, memory, needs, fatigue, or environment. A living person reacts. Impulses, desires, and automatic movements arise within them. They may understand the mechanism and still feel the pull.

Freedom begins not where impulse disappears, but where it stops becoming action automatically.

Sometimes the space between them lasts only a few seconds. A person manages to notice: I am being pulled right now; I am not hungry, but I want comfort; I do not need the phone, I am trying to leave a difficult task; I do not want to continue the argument, I want to stop feeling shame; I do not need this purchase, I need the sense that I can decide at least something; I am not looking for new information, I am looking for a guarantee that the world is still predictable.

Such observation will not always stop the action. The person may still open the phone, eat, buy, check, or speak more sharply than intended. But even then something important has changed: the urge has become visible and no longer fully coincides with the person.

Autopilot says, “I wanted it, so I am doing it.”

The Observer begins to distinguish: “An urge has arisen in me, and it promises a particular state. That matters, but it is not yet my whole choice.”

The pause between these two positions may be very small. Yet it is precisely there that the possibility first appears not only to forbid the action, but to understand its inner function.

Sometimes it is useful to look not only at the impulse itself, but also at its history. What happened in the five minutes, the hour, or the whole day before it? Was the person hungry, depleted, lonely, irritated, carrying a sense of incompleteness, frightened, or deprived of ordinary pleasure? What signal entered the system, what reward did it promise, and what remained after the action?

These questions are not a mandatory practice for every cookie and every glance at a phone. A person should not turn life into twenty-four-hour surveillance of themselves. But a recurring impulse that brings brief relief and consistently makes life worse deserves closer examination.

Where visibility appears, influence may later become possible.

CHAPTER 6 FORMULA

An urge is the system's proposal to change state quickly, but it is not yet the integrated choice of the whole person. It often appears before a conscious decision and emerges from the meeting of an environmental cue, bodily state, memory, habit, and the expectation of reward.

This is why a person does not always want what they feel pulled to do. A strong urge does not guarantee great pleasure, because the system responds not only to the result, but also to its promise.

Food, a screen, a purchase, information, alcohol, checking for connection, or a sharp reply can perform inner work: restore energy, control, warmth, interest, release, or make it possible, for a little while, not to feel what has become too heavy.

Impulse is a small system: a signal enters the state, the body responds, memory offers a familiar reward, attention is captured by the object, the action creates a brief change, and the consequences enter the state again, either reinforcing or gradually changing the route.

Autopilot mistakes the urge for a finished desire and rapidly translates it into action.

The Observer notices what state the impulse promises and what price that promise usually carries.

The Architect changes not only the final action, but also the conditions in which a particular impulse becomes the shortest and most accessible path.

WHERE WE GO NEXT

After this chapter, it becomes clearer why a person is not a purely rational subject. They do not simply set goals and carry them out. They live in a body, among signals, and in an environment that enters the process before conscious decision.

But there is another extreme. Sometimes the system does not follow the impulse, seek reward, act, struggle, or explore. It seems to switch off.

The person no longer wants to check, argue, buy, prove, or even receive pleasure. They reduce participation, close down, lose energy, and gradually move away from what once mattered.

From the outside, this is easy to call laziness, indifference, or lack of character. From the inside, such withdrawal may be a way not to collapse completely when further contact with the task, person, pain, or uncertainty feels too costly.

The next chapter will therefore be devoted to disengagement and protection. We will distinguish a pause that returns a person to life from a slow disappearance from it; ordinary fatigue from states that require professional attention; and healthy distance from the loss of connection with oneself.

CHAPTER 7. DISENGAGEMENT AND PROTECTION

You probably know the state in which a person seems to go on living while being only partly present in their own life. They answer messages, do what is necessary, run errands, and may even carry on a conversation and appear entirely functional from the outside. Yet inwardly, the sense of participation gradually disappears. Words pass beside them, tasks feel as though they belong to someone else, other people demand too much simply by existing, and every new action seems like an extension of a burden that has long exceeded the system's capacity to process it.

A person in this state is not necessarily lying motionless and does not always look unhappy. They may work a great deal, fulfill obligations, prepare meals, drive children where they need to go, answer clients, and mechanically maintain the familiar order of life. The difference is not visible in the amount of movement, but in how much of the person is still present inside that movement. They do things without feeling that they are acting; they speak without meeting anyone; they rest without recovering; they look at the world, yet everything happening seems separated from them by a thin pane of glass.

Sometimes they open a work document, stare at the text for several minutes, and close it. Then they make tea even though they do not particularly want any, clear something from the desk, check one message, answer another, read the news, and quietly arrive at the end of the day, when they can honestly say that it is too late to begin. What remains inside is a familiar mixture of relief and guilt: today they managed not to enter the difficult state, but tomorrow the entry will cost even more because the task itself will now carry the memory of another retreat.

It is easy to call such behavior laziness, weakness, or lack of discipline, but these words explain almost nothing. They describe the outward result without showing why a system that could once tolerate work, relationships, and uncertainty now chooses to reduce its participation. Sometimes a person does not act not because they want nothing, but because every action has become an entrance into a state that feels too heavy: shame, possible failure, someone else's judgment, helplessness, overload, or an encounter with a reality they have managed to keep at a distance for a long time.

Disengagement begins when the system decides that continued contact will cost too much. It has already tried pressure, problem-solving, control, endurance, explanation, repair, and sheer persistence, yet received too little in return or lost the resources required to continue. What follows is not an elegant conscious choice but a gradual reduction of participation: attention narrows, sensitivity is muted, movement slows, and the distance between the person and life becomes slightly greater.

DISENGAGEMENT AS A STRATEGY, NOT A CHARACTER FLAW

In the chapter on the system's three strategies, we saw that a person may persist, explore, or reduce participation. Disengagement is one of these strategies, and it has a comprehensible biological and psychological logic. When active effort produces no result and further strain threatens depletion, lowering activity may preserve what remains and prevent a more serious collapse.

A living organism is not required to increase effort indefinitely. Sometimes it stops struggling, reduces the number of signals, limits contact with the problem, and temporarily shifts into an energy-conservation mode. A person stops answering, postpones decisions, sleeps more, speaks less, declines meetings, and tries not to think about what they cannot yet change. From the outside, this can look like a refusal of life. From within, it may be the system's attempt to protect itself from a load it can no longer carry in the old way.

In this sense, disengagement is not a malfunction. It becomes one later, when the protective mode remains after the immediate danger has diminished and the capacity to return has not come back. At first, the system closes the door to keep more pain from entering. After a while, the person discovers that the door no longer opens from the inside.

This is why disengagement cannot be judged by outward form alone. One person lies on the couch after a difficult week and genuinely recovers: the body releases tension, thought slows, and the capacity to feel food, music, silence, and personal desire begins to return. Another spends the same number of hours in the same position, but does not rest; they merely postpone the encounter with themselves. Outwardly, both are inactive. Yet the first pause restores participation, while the second gradually makes it even less accessible.

The function of behavior matters more than its form. Sleep can restore a person or become a way to disappear. Work can express creation or protect someone from relationships. A screen can provide a needed pause, or become a soft capsule in which time passes without life returning. Even a walk may be genuine recovery, or simply a way to postpone a conversation, an email, or a decision for one more hour.

THE PERSON WHO MAKES TEA

The scene with the tea may seem too ordinary for a serious discussion of state, but it is precisely in such details that the system reveals itself most honestly. A person has a task they consider important, and formally nothing prevents them from beginning. The document is on the computer, the email could be written in a few minutes, the phone number is known, the conversation has long been prepared, yet just before entry an almost innocent thought appears: first, I should make some tea.

While the water boils, their eyes notice the disorder on the desk. Then a message arrives that seems worth answering immediately so it will not remain in the mind. Next, the person decides to check one detail they need for the work, opens the browser, sees another important message, and gradually enters a stream of actions, each of which makes sense on its own. They were not idle. They did not lie down or stare blankly at the wall. Yet they did not move any closer to the main task.

When this happens once, there is no psychological mystery in it. Sometimes a person genuinely needs food, order, an answer, or additional materials. But when the scenario repeats, it shows that tea, tidying, and minor tasks are serving another function: they create a safe distance between the person and the state that will open with the task.

The person is not avoiding the file, the call, or the spreadsheet. They are avoiding the possible feeling of inadequacy, the shame of delay, the fear of seeing the numbers, the risk of rejection, or the need to admit that the problem grew while they refused to look in its direction. The outer task becomes a door into an inner experience, while domestic busyness allows the person to remain in the hallway for a little longer.

This is the protective nature of disengagement. It does not necessarily say, “I don’t want to.” Much more often, its hidden meaning is different: “I do not want, right now, to become the person I feel myself becoming beside this task.”

A PAUSE AND A DISAPPEARANCE

Every living system needs pauses. They reduce intensity, allow experience to be processed, restore bodily resources, and make it possible to see a situation more broadly than in the first wave of reaction. A person who steps away from an overheated conversation is not always avoiding closeness. They may be trying to preserve it, because they understand that several more minutes in the same state will produce only words that cannot be taken back.

A mature pause contains the memory of return. A person can tell their partner that they cannot speak calmly right now but will return to the subject that evening. They can close the document, walk, eat, sleep, attend to the body, and open the file again. They can reduce the load after an intense period without declaring that the entire profession has lost its meaning.

Disengagement becomes destructive when the road back disappears. The conversation does not continue, the document is not reopened, the person answers less and less often, and the word “later” stops naming a time and becomes a way of existing. They do not decide to leave the relationship, the work, or the project. They simply cease to be inwardly present within it.

This disappearance often develops slowly and therefore remains invisible for a long time. Nothing catastrophic happens. One more conversation fails to take place. One more idea remains in draft form. One more meeting is canceled. One more day passes in front of a screen, and once again the person does not do what they considered important. What accumulates is not a series of dramatic defeats, but a multitude of small absences.

After a while, the system begins to use those absences as evidence. The person sees that they have not written, exercised, talked, or shown initiative for a long time and concludes that they are no longer capable or no longer want anything. Yet part of this incapacity was created by prolonged disengagement itself: the less contact they have with the world, the fewer signals they receive that they are still able to act within it.

WHEN REST DOES NOT BRING YOU BACK

One important sign lies in what happens after rest. Ordinary fatigue gradually recedes when a person receives enough sleep, food, a lighter load, bodily stillness, and permission not to solve new problems for a while. The world does not become ideal, but it regains depth: a person can notice good weather, taste food, hear someone else, become interested in work, or at least see where to begin.

In protective disengagement, time passes but access to life does not return. The person sleeps, yet wakes wanting to disappear again. They watch a film but cannot remember what they saw. They go for a walk while remaining entirely inside a heavy background state. The day off ends not with a sense of rest, but with anxiety that tomorrow they will have to engage again.

It is especially easy to confuse recovery with digital suspension. A screen can genuinely lower tension for a while because it offers a ready-made stream that does not require the person to create, choose, or tolerate their own uncertainty. They can watch other people's stories, listen to voices, receive small emotional stimuli, and avoid meeting what has become too quiet or painful inside.

The problem begins when the system feels not rested afterward, but even more scattered and empty. The body is stiff, attention fragmented, time has disappeared, the task remains, and guilt has been added to the original tension. The person received an interruption of contact, but not recovery.

Rest returns the capacity to live, even if at first that capacity is very small. Disengagement leaves the person at the same distance from life or moves them farther away.

A LOAD THAT DOES NOT NECESSARILY BREAK YOU

Burnout is often linked to the amount of work, as though there were a particular number of hours or tasks after which the system inevitably breaks. Workload matters, but it does not act alone. What also matters is the meaning of the work, the degree of influence a person has, the quality of relationships, whether processes reach completion, the condition of the body, and whether expended energy can return through results, recognition, money, rest, or the feeling of having participated in something alive.

There were periods in my life when I had two or three photo shoots in a single day. I had to travel, carry equipment, adapt constantly to light and people, talk, make rapid decisions, and later sort and process a large volume of material. The body became seriously tired, and after several intense days I sometimes needed ten or twelve hours of sleep to regain normal functioning.

Yet that fatigue did not always become burnout. When the assignment was interesting, people respected my work, the tasks varied, there were pauses between them, and a visible result appeared at the end of the cycle, a sense of participation remained inside me. I did the work, delivered the photographs, received a response, payment, and the knowledge that the process was complete. The system could be physically depleted without feeling that it was giving itself into emptiness.

The opposite can also happen. There may be less work in formal terms, yet every task remains vague, keeps changing, has no clear criterion of completion, comes with devaluation, or leaves the person unable to influence the result. Fewer hours are spent, but the system remains in constant expectation of continuation: the client may write again, the manager may change the decision once more, payment is delayed, the work has not been finally accepted, and the open process continues to occupy attention.

This kind of load depletes in a particular way. It does not end with the workday because the inner circuit remains open. The person returns home, but part of them is still inside the conversation, the waiting, the debt, or the task that never received a clear ending.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS AND THE LOSS OF INNER CAPACITY

Every unfinished matter occupies a small portion of inner space. A person does not have to think about it constantly for it to keep operating in the background. It is enough to know that they need to answer, deliver, pay, correct, make an arrangement, return to a conversation, or make a decision that can no longer be postponed.

Individually, these processes may be small, but together they create the sense that life remains open everywhere and completed nowhere. A person tries to begin something new while the system is already holding many old obligations. Every additional action is experienced not as a separate task, but as one more open cycle that may also never be brought to an end.

I am drawn to a simple sequence: do it, deliver it, receive, close. Work is complete not only when it has been technically performed, but when it has been handed over, accepted, paid for, or brought to some other clear ending. When one of these stages remains suspended, a person can work a great deal while barely feeling any result.

In such a situation, disengagement may be not a refusal to act but an attempt to stop hearing too many unfinished signals. The system does not know what to address first and, instead of choosing, reduces sensitivity to the entire field. It resembles a room in which dozens of devices are sounding at once: when it is impossible to tell which signal matters most, the person eventually wants only to turn off the sound.

The problem is that along with the noise, the capacity to distinguish anything new is also switched off. The person stops noticing not only threats and obligations, but also interest, possibility, help, and personal desire.

BURNOUT AS A CHANGE IN THE RELATIONSHIP WITH WORK

The word burnout has become so familiar that it is used for almost any fatigue, irritation, or reluctance to work. The World Health Organization, however, connects burnout specifically with the occupational context and with chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed. Its description brings together exhaustion, growing mental distance from one's job or cynicism toward it, and a reduced sense of professional efficacy.

This matters because burnout is not only about the amount of energy available. The relationship with the activity itself changes. A person continues performing their functions but tries to engage as little as possible because genuine participation has become too costly. Clients are irritating before they have asked for anything, colleagues are experienced as sources of new problems, and work that once carried meaning becomes an endless stream of other people's demands.

Cynicism in such a state is sometimes not a worldview but a protective film. If a person stops believing that the work matters, they can suffer less from its failure to produce results, recognition, or influence. If all clients are declared the same, there is no need to hope for human contact each time. If every project is considered meaningless, its failure hurts less.

But protection has a cost. Along with pain, it mutes professional interest, curiosity, and the sense of living participation for which the person once chose the work. They do not simply grow tired; they gradually become smaller inside their own profession.

Burnout cannot be compensated for by weekends alone if a person returns to the same system of constant pressure, uncertainty, and lack of influence. Rest may temporarily increase available resources, but the environment then assembles the previous state again. Sometimes the problem lies not in a person's inability to recover, but in conditions that repeatedly demand more than they return.

FATIGUE, BURNOUT, AND DEPRESSION

Ordinary fatigue, occupational burnout, and depression may look similar from the outside. A person finds it hard to begin, communicates less, becomes irritable more quickly, lies down more often, and no longer feels their former energy. Yet there are important differences between these states, and it is dangerous to collapse them into a single word.

Fatigue usually has an understandable relationship to exertion and gradually lessens with recovery. A person may not want to work, but they still retain interest in other parts of life. They want to sleep, eat, take a walk, see people they love, watch a good film, or do something unrelated to the source of overload.

With burnout, the connection to professional activity changes most sharply. Work begins to evoke distance, irritation, and a sense of meaninglessness, while outside the work context the capacity to feel alive may remain partly intact.

Depression can affect the system far more broadly. Access may diminish not only to work, but also to pleasure, movement, the future, communication, and ordinary actions. Research on psychomotor slowing shows that in depressive states, physical activity may actually decrease, speech may slow, and even simple actions may take longer. A person is not merely deciding not to get up. Movement itself may be experienced as heavy and almost unavailable.

This is why the instruction to “pull yourself together” is sometimes not only useless but shaming. It assumes that the necessary capacity is already within reach and the person is simply refusing to use it. But when the regulation of state itself is seriously impaired, additional pressure creates one more layer of inner accusation.

This book is not intended for diagnosis, and no one is required to determine alone where fatigue ends and a clinical condition begins. If pleasure, hope, and energy remain absent for a long time, if sleep or appetite are seriously disrupted, or if life begins to feel as though it has no way out, professional help is needed. Particular attention is necessary if thoughts of death, worthlessness, or a wish to disappear appear.

Seeking help in such a situation does not contradict the idea of the Observer, nor does it mean that a person has lost all power over themselves. On the contrary, it may be the most mature recognition of reality available: the system does not need another command. It needs support that cannot now be created by inner effort alone.

WHEN EXHAUSTION SPEAKS IN THE VOICE OF PHILOSOPHY

Severe disengagement rarely announces itself directly. A person does not always say, “I am exhausted and have lost access to meaning.” Much more often, they arrive at philosophical conclusions: people are fundamentally uninteresting, work is meaningless, relationships always disappoint, creating anything is pointless because no one will appreciate it, and every effort disappears in the end anyway.

There may be some truth in these conclusions. The world does not guarantee a fair reward. People are imperfect. Work does not always produce the result we hoped for. Human life is finite. But the same thought spoken from mature clarity and from exhaustion is not the same inner event.

A mature understanding of finitude can make a person more attentive to life, to other people, and to their own time. An exhausted understanding narrows participation and advises against investing in anything, because investment may hurt again. It does not liberate. It flattens the world and devalues it in advance.

Sometimes a person says they have simply become a realist, when in fact they have lost access to hope, interest, and emotional complexity. They have not so much discovered that life is meaningless as temporarily lost the capacity to experience meaning.

This distinction matters because a system in urgent need of recovery should not be making final judgments about a person’s entire life. A philosophy born from a difficult night, chronic sleep deprivation, burnout, or depressive slowing may sound deeply convincing, but conviction is not proof of accuracy.

EMOTIONAL DISENGAGEMENT IN RELATIONSHIPS

In close relationships, disengagement often appears as an attempt not to intensify a conflict. One partner feels that there is already too much anger, shame, helplessness, or fear inside them and stops talking. They go into another room, answer in one-word sentences, occupy themselves with their phone, work, or household tasks, and hope the tension will gradually disappear on its own.

For the first few minutes, such a pause may genuinely save the conversation. The person does not say destructive things or act from the first wave of their state. But the partner left without an explanation experiences the silence not as care for the relationship, but as disappearance, punishment, or proof that their feelings do not matter.

They begin asking questions, pressing for an answer, increasing the pressure. The more insistently one partner tries to restore contact, the more strongly the other closes down, because every new question confirms the sense that they are not being given space. Before long, both are dealing not with the original issue but with a self-reinforcing loop: one protects themselves through silence, the other through pressure.

The problem is not the right to pause. An adult has the right not to discuss a difficult subject from a state in which they are capable only of causing damage. But a pause preserves connection when it is named and contains a road back. The words “I am shutting down right now. I need some time, but I will return to this conversation tonight” do not solve the problem, but they leave the partner in a reality where contact has not been severed completely.

Disengagement becomes dangerous when silence is used as a habitual form of power, or when a person repeatedly leaves and never returns. Then the other person is not living beside a pause, but beside chronic unavailability, where every conflict confirms that in a difficult moment the relationship ceases to exist.

DISENGAGEMENT FROM THE BODY

The system can also disappear from its own body. A person stops looking at themselves, avoids mirrors and photographs, postpones a medical examination, does not want to know their weight, ignores pain, and puts off movement until a more suitable time. From the outside, this looks like irresponsibility. Yet sometimes what lies behind it is not indifference, but the intolerable state activated by every contact with the body.

The mirror immediately brings up shame. The scale recalls broken promises. Exercise becomes a comparison with a former body. A doctor means the possibility of bad news. In such cases, disengagement protects the person not from the body itself, but from the inner tribunal that appears beside it.

Additional shame rarely helps. It merely confirms that contact with the body really is dangerous and will once again end in accusation. For return to become possible, the body must gradually stop serving as evidence of human failure and become again a living system we can learn from, care for, and make decisions about without passing a total verdict.

My own return to exercise illustrates this boundary well. Persistence is necessary, but if every movement is used only to punish the former body and prove strength, sooner or later the system begins defending itself against the process itself. Movement becomes sustainable not when the body has finally been subdued, but when it reenters life as an ally.

CREATIVE DISENGAGEMENT

Creative work is especially sensitive to disengagement because it requires a person both to remain open and to hold a form. Different ideas must be allowed to meet, but then something has to be chosen, limited, connected, and completed. When the system is overloaded, it may continue gathering material while losing the capacity to turn that material into a text, a photograph, a lecture, a course, or a finished project.

A writer reads one more article, opens another source, finds an important connection, and decides that before writing they need to understand several more things. Outwardly, the work continues. Notes accumulate, the structure becomes more elaborate, folders fill with material. But the point at which all of this must take on a limited and imperfect form keeps being postponed.

I know this state well from working on this book. The breadth of the material genuinely strengthens the text: psychology meets neuroscience, photography, programming, relationships, culture, and lived experience. Yet every new source can open another branch and create the feeling that it is still too early to write because the picture is not yet complete.

At some point, research stops expanding the book and begins protecting the writer from the need to finish it. The person is not lying on a couch and does not appear passive, but they are, in fact, withdrawing from the central action. They continue preparing to create a form instead of allowing the form to be born within limits.

This is how disengagement disguises itself as intellectual conscientiousness. It does not say, “I am afraid to finish.” It says, “I need to understand a little more.” That is precisely why it is so difficult to notice.

SMALL ACTIONS AND THE RETURN OF FEEDBACK

When a person has been disengaged for a long time, they often wait for the state to change first so that action can become possible afterward. Sometimes that is exactly what is needed. Without sleep, treatment, support, or a reduction in load, the system may truly be unable to move. But there is also a reverse path, in which the state begins to change after a small, real contact with life.

A person does not feel like walking, yet after a short time outside the body becomes slightly more alive. They do not want to open the text, but after several minutes inside the material a familiar interest reappears. They are not ready for a major conversation, yet they can say one honest sentence that reduces their isolation. They have no strength to put the entire house in order, but completing one small area restores a sense of influence.

This is the principle behind behavioral activation approaches used in depression. The point is not to order a person to be active or to suggest that every problem can be solved by taking a walk. It is to restore, gradually, the connection among action, environment, body, and experience, because a long absence of participation can itself help maintain a diminished state.

When a person barely touches the world, the world stops returning signals of movement. There is no result, encounter, bodily change, completion, or new experience capable of correcting the internal prediction. A small action does not solve an entire life, but it creates the first real response that could not have appeared inside reflection alone.

A theoretical book does not need to turn this idea into a set of instructions. Practical routes belong in a separate workbook. What matters here is the mechanism: sometimes a person returns to action because they feel better, and sometimes they feel a little better because they have returned to action.

RESPONSIBILITY WITHOUT INNER VIOLENCE

Understanding the protective function of disengagement must not become an excuse for endless absence. A person has a right to pause, recover, receive help, and reduce their load, but their disengagement still affects the people close to them, their work, their body, and their future. An unanswered message remains unanswered. A partner experiences the silence. A debt grows. A project loses time.

Responsibility does not begin with a demand to return immediately to one's former productivity. It begins with recognizing what is happening. I am not simply resting if rest makes me less available afterward. I am not simply calm if I have stopped feeling and responding. I am not merely tired of work if the thought of it evokes disgust, cynicism, and a wish to disappear. I am not simply lazy if for weeks I cannot enter even simple actions and have lost interest in life as a whole.

Sometimes the next adult step is a conversation with someone close, reducing the load, closing some open cycles, revising the conditions of work, or seeking professional help. In other cases, what is needed is sleep, bodily recovery, and permission not to demand one's former power for a while. There is no single correct answer, because similar outward immobility can arise from very different states.

What matters is this: protection must not present itself as the final form of life. If a mode that once helped a person avoid collapse now takes away the capacity to love, work, feel, and choose, the system needs a new way of participating.

CHAPTER 7 FORMULA

Disengagement is a way of reducing contact with a load the system can no longer carry in its former way. It can protect a person from collapse, create a pause, preserve a relationship, restore bodily resources, and allow an inner process to reach completion without additional pressure.

But a protective function does not make every form of disengagement healthy. If the person does not return, the pause becomes disappearance, and energy conservation gradually turns into a life with very little life in it. At first, the system reduces pain. But along with pain, it also mutes interest, closeness, creativity, and the sense of one's own participation.

This is why ordinary fatigue, occupational burnout, protective avoidance, and depressive slowing must be distinguished. They may look similar, but they require different responses. Sometimes sleep and the completion of a period of strain are enough. Sometimes the work system has to change. Sometimes small forms of action must be restored. And sometimes professional help is necessary.

The central question is no longer why the person once again failed to do something, but what their system is trying not to experience, and whether the chosen protection restores the capacity to live. If a pause produces more contact with the body, other people, the task, and the future, the protection has done its work. If the distance continues to grow, it has ceased to be a temporary shelter and has begun to turn into an inner prison.

Until now, we have looked at the person mainly as an individual system trying to carry the body, predictions, impulses, intentions, and overload on its own. But in real life, return often begins not in solitude. Another person's voice, presence, touch, and the experience of not having to carry the burden alone can change the cost of what is happening before a new explanation has been found.

The next chapter will therefore turn to the other person as mirror, witness, and part of the inner regulation of state.

PART II. THE INDIVIDUAL AMONG OTHERS AND WITHIN THE ENVIRONMENT

CHAPTER 8. THE OTHER PERSON AS A MIRROR

You may have noticed that beside some people, inner tension begins to ease before they have said anything truly important. They do not solve your problems, cancel the difficult conversation, heal the body, change the past, or guarantee the future. Yet beside them, breathing gradually becomes freer, the voice settles back into its natural register, and the world stops looking like a place where you must constantly justify yourself, defend yourself, and prove your right to exist.

Beside other people, the opposite happens. The conversation may appear calm, the subject may not be especially dangerous, and the words may be formally correct, yet the body is already organizing itself for defense. Attention begins searching for hidden meaning, while thought prepares the arguments with which it will have to explain what should have been obvious. Nothing serious has happened yet, but the state has already changed, and the person who only minutes ago felt free, clear, and adult becomes cautious, guilty, irritable, or unexpectedly helpless.

This becomes especially visible after the meeting. Sometimes you return home and feel that there is more air inside. A thought you could not shape has acquired form, a difficult decision no longer seems like the end of the world, and your own life feels real enough to reenter. On another occasion, the conversation was apparently ordinary. No one shouted or said anything openly cruel, yet afterward you want to remain silent, justify yourself to yourself, or spend a long time mentally proving what you were unable to say in the room.

This is one of the simplest ways to see that state is not solely an inner matter.

We do not live as autonomous philosophical islands, each independently producing its own stability, meaning, and self-worth. The body responds to another person's voice, memory preserves intonations, attention reorganizes itself under another person's gaze, and internal prediction calculates whether beside this person we will have to defend ourselves, conform, guess, or whether we will be allowed simply to be present.

Another person enters our inner configuration not only through the content of what they say. Sometimes their influence begins before words and continues after the conversation has ended.

WE DO NOT HOLD OURSELVES TOGETHER FROM WITHIN ALONE

Contemporary culture is fond of the image of a fully autonomous person. This person supports themselves, determines their own worth, does not depend on other people's opinions, needs no confirmation, and preserves inner balance regardless of who is nearby. There is an important aspiration toward maturity in this idea: another person should not become the sole source of self-worth, and the absence of approval should not have the power to destroy us.

But taken to its extreme, this ideal produces a being who resembles a hermetically sealed system more than a human being.

We are born completely dependent on others. Through voice, touch, the rhythm of presence, and an adult's responses, a child gradually learns whether the world is safe, whether needs may be expressed, whether calling out makes sense, and whether someone will remain nearby when life is frightening, painful, or incomprehensible. Before complex thought appears, the body learns regulation through connection.

Later, a person becomes more capable of holding themselves, but connection never stops participating in state. A familiar voice calms us. Trust helps us gather ourselves. Evaluation makes us contract. Recognition gives us courage. Sometimes reality itself returns through someone who can see more than our current state allows us to see.

There are situations that do not objectively change because another person is present, yet the subjective cost of passing through them becomes different. A medical appointment remains a medical appointment. A difficult document does not complete itself. The important conversation will still have to take place. But beside someone to whom you can say, "I am afraid," without having to defend your right to that fear, the system spends less energy holding the entire experience alone.

Psychology offers the idea of a social baseline: the human system is organized by default not for complete isolation, but for the presence of available others with whom load, attention, and responsibility can be shared. The presence of a reliable person can lower the perceived cost of threat and effort. Not because the other person performs the work for us, but because the system no longer has to pass through difficulty while simultaneously maintaining the conviction that no help exists.

This can be felt even in a simple action. Someone has to make sense of an unpleasant letter, a medical report, or a financial situation. Alone, the text feels shapeless and threatening. Attention attaches itself to the harshest words, and the future is rapidly completed in the worst direction. Another person sits down beside them, does not dictate a solution or promise that everything will be fine, but calmly helps distinguish what is actually written, which facts are already known, and what the next possible step might be.

The document has not changed. The cost of contact with it has.

Sometimes another person's presence lowers not the difficulty of the task, but the need to struggle with one's own state at the same time. The person no longer has to pretend to be completely

calm, prove their adulthood, or maintain the image of someone who always copes alone. Part of the energy is released and returns to action.

The phrase “It is easier for me when you are here” does not necessarily describe dependence or weakness. It may describe the natural work of a social system in which connection makes the path less costly without taking away a person’s autonomy.

The problem begins not with the need for another person, but with the loss of every other way of holding oneself together. Maturity does not require the destruction of the need for connection. It requires connection to support the capacity to live rather than replace it entirely.

THE OTHER PERSON AS A WITNESS TO REALITY

Sometimes a person needs neither advice nor comfort. They need what is happening to stop existing only inside their own mind.

After a powerful event, there is often an immediate urge to call someone and say, “You cannot imagine what just happened.” This movement contains more than a wish to exchange information. The person is trying to bring the experience out of a closed inner space and allow it to meet another consciousness.

As long as an event exists only inside one person, it may remain without form. They wonder whether they understood it correctly, whether they have the right to feel as they do, whether they are exaggerating, or whether the reaction is merely the result of weakness, fatigue, or an old wound. A calm witness helps the experience acquire boundaries.

The witness does not create reality for the person and is not required to agree with every conclusion. The function is subtler: to see, hear, and acknowledge that what happened deserves attention.

Such confirmation becomes especially important after experiences that are repeatedly minimized. A person is told that nothing serious happened, that they are too sensitive, misunderstood the situation, provoked it themselves, are dramatizing, or invented the problem entirely. When this happens often enough, they begin doubting not only their interpretation, but their right to trust perception itself.

In destructive relationships, this mechanism can become a form of control. One person continually rewrites the other’s reality, explaining that their pain is insignificant, their fear absurd, their boundary unreasonable, their memory unreliable, and every disagreement proof of ingratitude or instability. Gradually, the external voice becomes stronger than inner experience, and the person begins asking themselves whether every unpleasant feeling is further evidence that something is wrong with them.

Meeting someone who can calmly say that the event really was humiliating, dangerous, or unjust restores more than emotional support. It restores the right to one’s own reality.

At the same time, a good witness does not turn support into automatic agreement. They can say, “I see that this hurt you, but I am not certain the other person intended exactly what you think.” Or: “Your anger makes sense, but the action you are preparing to take may destroy more than it protects.” They distinguish fact, experience, prediction, and possible response without destroying the person in the process.

A poor witness immediately chooses one of two extremes. They either minimize: “Nothing happened, forget about it,” or intensify the first version completely: “It is obvious. That person has always been terrible. Leave immediately and never speak to them again.” In the first case, the person remains alone with the experience. In the second, their current state gains an external ally and begins to feel like final truth.

A witness is needed not only in pain. Joy also seeks to be shared.

Success that cannot be told to anyone sometimes feels less real. A photograph seeks a gaze, a text seeks a reader, work seeks recognition of its result, and a person seeks someone who will say, “I see what you did and what it cost you.” This is not necessarily a painful dependence on praise. Experience, by its nature, seeks entry into shared reality, because there a private event becomes part of human history.

I feel this clearly in photography. A frame may be technically precise, the light successful, and the composition complete, yet it fully comes alive only when it meets the person for whom it was made. Someone recognizes themselves, their family, an event, or a place, and the photograph stops being merely a file. It becomes shared memory.

Something similar happens with a book. While a thought exists only inside the author, it can feel both immense and doubtful. A reader, conversation partner, or editor becomes the external point where the text meets reality. Sometimes one precise response gives more than a dozen general compliments: “I recognized myself here.” “This is where the thought became clear.” “And here you hid behind correct language.”

Another person confirms more than the quality of the result. They help us discover that inner experience can be seen and shared.

THE MIRROR IN WHICH SELF-IMAGE TAKES SHAPE

The metaphor of the mirror has long been used in psychology, philosophy, and ordinary speech, but it is easily reduced to a cheap formula. People sometimes say that everything that irritates us in others must be a reflection of ourselves. That is not true, and it can be dangerous. Another person's cruelty does not become a spiritual reflection of our own cruelty, and a violation of boundaries does not turn into a useful lesson simply because someone else committed it.

A social mirror works differently. We come to know ourselves through the way other people respond to our presence.

A child tells a story and encounters interest or boredom. They ask a question and receive patience or irritation. They make a mistake and meet help, ridicule, shame, or calm explanation. From thousands of such responses, not only an image of other people but also a sense of how one is allowed to exist among them gradually takes shape.

May I speak at length when something matters? Is it acceptable not to know? What happens when I make a mistake? May I cry, become angry, feel joy too loudly, want more, take up space, refuse, ask, create, and show something unfinished?

Other people answer these questions long before a person learns to ask them in words.

If those nearby are continually irritated by a child's liveliness, the child may conclude that liveliness is excessive. If questions are mocked, curiosity becomes associated with shame. If love appears only after achievement, worth begins to depend on results. If vulnerability is repeatedly used against the person, reserve becomes a reasonable way to survive.

Later, the person says, "I have always been this way." But sometimes what they call character is a version of the self that was reflected for a long time by a particular environment.

A good mirror does not have to show only what is pleasant. A person may be mistaken, cause pain, overestimate their capacities, act arrogantly, avoid responsibility, and need honest feedback. But a healthy mirror returns clarity, not only shame.

After good feedback, you understand what happened, where your part lies, and what can be done differently. After poor feedback, what remains is a vague sense of being fundamentally wrong and a desire either to defend yourself or disappear.

The sentence "You interrupted that person here and did not hear them" contains an action, a context, and the possibility of change. The sentence "It is impossible to talk to you" turns one episode into a description of the whole personality. The first mirror may be unpleasant, but useful. The second leaves a person facing a distorted image from which little can be extracted except shame.

If you look into a warped mirror long enough, the distortion begins to feel like your own face.

A person may appear calm while continually controlling every expression. They may be considered a convenient employee because they never speak about overload. They may seem like a

good partner because they have abandoned their own needs. They may preserve family peace at the cost of making one part of their life invisible.

From the outside, such adaptation looks like maturity. Inside, it is often experienced as a chronic loss of self. The person does not understand why they become exhausted so quickly beside certain people even when no open conflict occurs. A considerable part of their resources is spent on continuous self-reduction and on checking whether they have stepped beyond the boundaries of the permitted version.

This is why leaving some relationships does not return freedom immediately. The external evaluator may disappear, but their gaze remains inside and continues regulating state. The person still edits a sentence before speaking, hides a desire, distrusts their own joy, and checks whether they are convenient enough for an imagined court.

The other person is no longer present, but the mirror is still hanging inside.

THE PROFESSIONAL MIRROR

In professional life, the other person is usually called a client, colleague, student, supervisor, partner, or audience. But every contact also contains a reflection. It tells us whether our work is visible, whether it matters, whether our competence can be trusted, and what kind of person we become inside the profession.

Photography makes this especially clear.

One client treats the work with respect, understands that a good result requires preparation, trusts the professional eye, and can discuss the task calmly. Beside such a person, you want to search more carefully for the light, work with the person in front of the camera, try another angle, and give slightly more than the agreement formally requires. Not because the photographer suddenly became better, but because the professional system received a space in which competence did not have to be defended every minute.

Another client devalues the process from the first message, negotiates not so much over price as over the specialist's right to be paid, continually changes the conditions, and demands a result while refusing to recognize the cost of the work. Formally, it is the same shoot, the same cameras, light, and professional skill, but a significant part of the energy is now spent not on photography but on defending dignity and anticipating the next pressure.

Two hours of such work can be more exhausting than a long, intense day with people who are engaged in the shared process. The other person has not changed the photographer's abilities. They have changed the state from which those abilities become available.

A person may be highly competent and still lose almost all pleasure in the work if the professional environment continually reflects them as a function required to produce results without boundaries, time, price, or human conditions of its own.

Something similar happens with a text. An author may trust the idea, yet after a conversation with someone who greets every idea with a skeptical smile, they begin devaluing the material in advance. They open the document not out of curiosity toward the thought, but out of the need to prove that they have the right to develop it.

The reverse is also true. One precise conversation can restore access to the text because the other person saw not only the imperfect wording, but the direction that had not yet taken shape. They did not write the chapter for the author and did not guarantee success. They helped the thought become real again.

A good professional mirror does not have to praise. Sometimes it speaks firmly, points to a weak place, and demands revision. But after such feedback, the person understands more and can act with greater precision. A poor mirror leaves only a sense of personal inadequacy without explaining what, specifically, needs to change.

This is especially important in education. One teacher may see a student's lack of knowledge and reflect it as a temporary stage: "You do not understand this mechanism yet. Let us see where

the logic was lost.” Another reflects not knowing as a characteristic of the whole person: “You are simply incapable of understanding something this basic.”

In both cases, the error is real. But one response preserves access to learning, while the other ties the question to shame and gradually teaches the person to remain silent where they most need to ask.

The professional mirror shapes more than an opinion about a particular piece of work. It participates in the version of the specialist a person becomes: exploratory, alive, and capable of correction, or chronically defensive, cautious, and afraid of visibility.

At this point, the Observer asks an important question: after contact with this person, do I understand the work better, or do I merely doubt more deeply that I have the right to do it?

The answer does not define the entire value of the relationship, but it reveals the state the relationship regularly assembles.

EMIGRATION AND THE LOSS OF THE FORMER REFLECTION

Moving to another country makes it especially clear how deeply self-image depends on social confirmation.

In a familiar environment, many people know your history. They remember where you studied, what work you did, which projects you created, what responsibility you carried, and who you were ten or twenty years ago. You do not have to retell your entire biography each time for the person you are today to have depth.

In Russia, I lived as a person with a long professional history behind me. There had been science, programming, management, the university, educational systems, marketing, projects, and people who knew not only the results but the path that led to them. A significant part of my identity was supported by the environment automatically. It was written into relationships, institutions, familiar places, and other people's memory.

When I moved to Montenegro, much of that mirror disappeared.

The new environment did not see the whole biography. It saw a person in a current role: a foreigner, a neighbor, a client, a photographer, a specialist with an accent and an unknown history who still had to show what he could do.

A strange discrepancy appears inside. You know who you have been and what you are capable of, but the outer world does not yet reflect that depth. It is not interested in the internal folder containing your degrees, projects, responsibilities, losses, and experience. It looks at what you can create here and now.

There is pain in this, but also freedom.

Relocation deprives a person of part of their familiar confirmation, but it also loosens the hold of the old image. You can begin to see what in the former identity was genuinely your own and what was sustained only by position, social environment, status, and the inertia of other people's gaze.

Freedom, however, does not cancel loneliness. When no one around you knows your history, it can feel as though part of your life has ceased to exist. Not because the past has disappeared, but because it no longer has living witnesses in the present environment.

This is why people who preserve the continuity of a biography become especially important in emigration. Beside them, you do not have to begin again from a new business card. They know that today's difficult period is not the whole personality. They remember former strength, mistakes, projects, love, losses, and the ways the person has changed.

But new mirrors are gradually needed as well: people who come to know you in the new country through work, actions, relationships, participation in common life, and the contribution being made here. Otherwise, the person remains caught between two reflections. The old one is far away, the new one has not yet formed, and inside there is a persistent sense of temporariness.

My photographic path in Montenegro became one way of receiving a new social reflection. At first, you are simply a person with a camera. Then people begin recognizing your work, inviting you to events, trusting you with important shoots, recommending you, greeting you in the street, and associating your name with a particular quality and way of seeing.

There is a professional result in this, but also a deeper process. The new environment gradually says: you exist here not only as a person from the past. You participate in this life, help create its memory, and have already become part of the local story.

Emigration reveals that self-image does not live only inside the mind. It is assembled in a continuous exchange between inner memory and what the surrounding world is able to see, recognize, and return.

LONELINESS AMONG PEOPLE

Loneliness cannot be measured only by the number of contacts.

A person may live alone and not feel abandoned because there are several relationships in which they are genuinely known, awaited, and heard. Another person may spend every day among colleagues, relatives, followers, clients, and acquaintances and still remain inwardly lonely because nowhere can they show up as a sufficiently complete version of themselves.

They speak, but not about what matters. They joke, but do not reveal anxiety. They perform the role of the strong, useful, convenient, cheerful, or professional person and receive a response precisely to that role. Those around them may sincerely consider them sociable and stable, while they feel that no one knows the person living beneath the well-organized surface.

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