

Towards the minimum

path to freedom

Isaac Álvarez Casasola

TOWARDS THE MINIMUM

Path to Freedom

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isaac.mahoh@gmail.com

Telf. +34 650 916 067

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isaac álvarez casasola

GDC

Editores

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Prologue

The simplest things are often the most real

- Richard Bach

We have evolve from consuming what is necessary to making consumption mandatory, I consume so I exist could be the philosophical motto of the moment we are living in. There seems to be no better expression of existence than the ability to buy, accumulate and modify our environment.

A book on minimalism should be brief, it hopes to provide a little irony, arguments to simplify life and some keys that have helped me to start the journey. The idea is to share experience, some interesting data, references to continue the search and, if it can help, even better.

As ignorance is very daring and I don't know what I don't know, I don't have many doubts and I will try to answer some questions about what we need, what we want and why we want it. I will also try to ask some new questions in order to move forward. I write as a therapeutic activity, to sort my ideas and learn, and that is enough for me. I hope that in this final outcome there will be more questions than answers.

This is a writing project that aims to improve the world through the achievement of individual happiness, which comes from experiences, friendship and health, not from possessions or ostentation. It will be a journey that focuses on the path, on having a clear direction to follow, not on reaching the destination.

Seen from a historical perspective, we are quite wealthy, not only because of the amount of goods we can accumulate, but also because of the quality of life that most people in the West enjoy. And, if we look at it from the perspective of the minimum, we will realize that we will continue to be happy even though we give away a great part of our possessions. What can you lose if you try? What can you earn? Peace, happiness, relief, health, self-esteem, time... a life.

The path to a simpler life does not have to be a path of deprivation, it has to do with finding what has meaning in our lives. It can also be a path of creativity and personal growth.

Minimalism is defined by the Spanish Language Academy in a clear way: An aesthetic and intellectual trend that aims to express the essential by eliminating the superfluous. Looking for a little more I stay with Joshua & Ryan's definition: "minimalism is simply the tool to get rid of everything unnecessary in your life, so you can focus on what is important". Let's move on, so what is important?

Do we have control over our destiny? Our will is hijacked by the system, through advertising communication, which is essential for the mantra of growth to go forward and prevent the collapse of the economy.

The path to the minimum is a journey to the unveiling of a new state of awareness, to what I truly am once I give up on what I have.

The story of this book.

During the nineties I discovered that I wanted to be happy (until then I wanted to be rich); two things worked for this discovery, on the one hand one of my

cousins suffered a heart attack, nothing strange if it wasn't for the fact that he was the same age as me, twenty-six years old. That made me start thinking a little about life goals. On the other hand I read the biography of JP Getty, one of the richest men in the world in the 70s... and an unhappy man, at least that's how the biography described him. After that book came many others, sometimes I think too many books, that were providing me with clues about happiness and finally I think I have my own theory.

In search of answers, during the last decade I have spent about six thousand hours reading: more than a whole year. Of the hundreds of books I've read, I barely own a couple dozen, most of them came from the library, others have been borrowed, and a large part of them are digital.

From all these readings and their subsequent reflections comes this book what I hope can be of some use.

*Fear less, expect more; eat less, chew
more;
moan less, breathe more; talk less, say
more;
love more, and all good things will be
yours.*

Swedish proverb

Concepts

Any intelligent fool can make things bigger,
more complex and more violent. It takes a
touch of genius - and a lot of courage - to move
in the opposite direction.

E.F. Schumacher

Over the years I have been attracted by some concepts related to minimalism and I have read whatever was available. Step by step, I have been digesting and internalizing some of them and putting into practice. I have been defining a relaxed life philosophy, without extremes, in which some of the next ideas can be found:

Minimalist Aesthetics

The word "minimalism" was used in the mid-sixties to refer to the art that was developed in the United States during that prodigious decade. Its main fields of development were painting, music, decoration and architecture. It was a movement that reacted to realistic and pop-art trends, a trend that aimed to reduce to the essential and to eliminate excess elements.

The characteristics that can describe the minimalist aesthetics are Abstraction - Concentration - Dematerialisation - Economy of language and means - Rectilinear elemental geometry - Order - Structural and functional purism - Precision in finishes - Reduction and synthesis - Simplicity.

Beyond art, the field where the concept is used more widely is decoration. A minimalist style in this field could be recognized by characteristics such as emptiness, clear spaces, balance, symmetry, orientation, light, temperature, pastel and neutral colors, soft and pure forms, pleasant textures, functional and simple furniture, textiles without prints...

I can think of a few characteristics that define a space to be comfortable and none have to do with expensive, shiny, metallic, dangerous, fragile or strident objects, therefore I think my aesthetic taste can fit with minimalism.

To continue with this ideal, there should be a minimum of decorations and images on the walls, clean and simple lines for the furniture, preferably with natural materials such as wood. This is one of the basic principles of minimalism, "less is more". It becomes especially real with the scarcity of decorative elements, with wide, well illuminated spaces, places where order, sobriety and simplicity reign.

The aim of minimalist decoration is to find harmony and calm in every space. The minimalist aesthetic is the first point of approaching to the philosophy and a minimalist way of life. Living in a diaphanous and harmonious space can be a great help to grow.

And to finish with the minimalist aesthetic I propose you to think a little bit: how would it be to apply the concept to other areas of our life? Food, a cocktail, a dance, sport, going out to a party, a talk, a movie, anger, sex...

Downshifting

The original meaning is "to slow down", whether in a car or on a bicycle. It is a movement that proposes to

simplify things as a way to achieve happiness, leaving the path of consumerism to reduce stress and enjoy more free time. Our civilization has complicated things enormously, taking some actions to levels of sophistication that are difficult to digest.

One of the most used examples to explain dowshifting is those parents who realize that they are working long hours, with alienating commuting times, in a job they don't like, with unpleasant bosses, to earn money that, in some cases, is going to be spent on paying others to do what they would like to do, such as taking care of their children.

There is another very illustrative story, sometimes told as a joke, in which a businessman is walking in the countryside and finds a shepherd sitting quietly next to the sheep. The businessman advises the shepherd to improve his productive systems in order to earn more money and thus be able to dedicate himself to what he loves in his free time, to which the shepherd replies that he is already doing what he loves most in the world, being in the field taking care of the cattle.

Slow Movement

It's a cultural trend that proposes to slow down the different activities we do every day, walking, cooking, eating, relating... It started in Italy as a claim against fast food, valuing the food made with time and consumed with parsimony. These "bad" Mediterranean customs (the mid-morning coffee, the siesta, the afternoon snack...) seem to be the solution to the stress of the West and a good recipe for the increase of the quality of life.

We must be aware that nobody is chasing us and the only ones pushing us are ourselves. The intensity of the experiences, in most cases, is incompatible with

speed. Leaving the clock aside and starting to enjoy ourselves is a priority to improve our emotional health.

The promoters of slow movement propose to work less hours, avoid multitasking, respect sleep hours, eat slowly and dedicate the necessary time to personal relationships.

Simple life

In some cases, this term could be tantamount to minimalism. The reasons to follow an ideal of simple life can be spiritual, health, ecological, social justice... An idea that is not easy to put into practice if we let ourselves be carried away by the hundreds of advertisements we encounter every day. Perhaps because of a global conspiracy, perhaps because of the accumulation of people in urban centres, it seems that living simply is a chimera. We live in abundance, in excess, in ostentation, in sophistication and complexity. Those who dare to simplify their lives are labelled as failures, unable to adapt to the challenges of modernity.

Living in rural areas can help to follow these vital approaches, with less pressure from the environment for consumption and activity. However, it is also feasible to find the options within a large city: walking to work or cycling, eating seasonal fruit and vegetables...

Asceticism

It is a philosophical and religious doctrine that seeks to purify the spirit through the denial of material pleasures or abstinence. Ascetic systems reject the physiologic needs of the individual as being of a lower state.

The practice of an austere lifestyle leads to the acquisition of habits, which leads to moral and spiritual perfection. In some religious traditions, mainly in Christianity, Buddhism and Islam, asceticism is a way to access mysticism.

In Buddhism, asceticism is materialized in detachment and meditation; in its daily practice, the path of the middle is sought between the extremes of sensual indulgence and self-mortification.

Cynicism

It is a philosophical doctrine founded by Antithenes in the fifth century BC, which is characterized by the rejection of social conventions and commonly accepted morality. His followers reinterpreted the Socratic doctrine considering that civilization and its way of life were evil and that happiness was given by adopting a simple life in accordance with nature. Man already carried within himself the elements to be happy and to conquer his autonomy was in fact the true Good, hence the contempt for material wealth and any form of material concern. The man with the least needs was the freest and happiest.

The concept has not stopped evolving and is a word widely used in our days, but with a somewhat different meaning. As Wikipedia tells us, today's cynicism is defined as the tendency to not believe in human sincerity or goodness, neither in its motivations nor in its actions, as well as a tendency to express this attitude through irony, sarcasm and mockery.

Stoicism

From cynicism appeared stoicism as a philosophical movement founded by Zeno of Cythia in the late

fourth century BC. This "vital" philosophy had an important development in Rome, highlighting the Emperor Marcus Aurelius and Seneca as the main supporters. Its philosophical doctrine was based on the control of facts, things and passions that disturb life, by using virtue and reason of personal character. His objective was to reach happiness and wisdom by dispensing with material goods.

The Stoics proclaimed that freedom and tranquility can be achieved only by being detached from material comforts and external fortune, and by dedicating oneself to a life guided by the principles of reason and virtue. According to Epictetus one could be sick and still be happy, in danger but happy, in exile and happy, in misfortune and happy... For the Stoics there were no special indications for living in a simple way, they could enjoy wealth, prestige or power in the case of possessing them, but they were prepared to live without them if the case arose.

The acceptance of all that is beyond our control is one of the basic principles of Stoicism. Zeno of Cythia was apparently a merchant and began to "philosophize" after he was shipwrecked near Athens. As Monica Cavalle describes, the common meaning of stoic applies to a morality of resignation, however stoic serenity should be understood as the possibility of maintaining inner peace, an objective and lucid view, and a capacity for focused action in the face of any polarity intrinsic to existence (health-sickness, pain-joy, success-failure...).

Attachment

Despite the distance that exists between Western and Eastern civilizations, there are common elements between the great philosophical and religious streams

of India and some Christian ones, for example, the idea that what produces unhappiness and ties existence to the cycle of suffering is the attachment or hold on to objects and acts and their results. And therefore, the opposite, which is detachment - in action, thought and word - is what leads to freedom, happiness and even the transcendence of conditioned existence.

The world we live in is made up of material elements, which are unimportant, subject to change, decadence and finally dissolution... Holding on to these elements is the source of unhappiness and suffering according to buddhism.

To complete the disaster, our greatest attachment is to ourselves, thinking that our identity is something different from the rest of reality and without the possibility of being changed. We don't really know what constitutes our identity, perhaps it's just a concept, a persistent illusion of memory. It is urgent that we take our ego out of the center of our lives.

Decrease

The global production of humanity has been very low through most of its history. Growths of 3% per year were impossible for subsistence farming economies but became the rule over the last century, considering average data from around the world. This growth leads to a twofold increase in production every 25 years.

Each generation has doubled what the previous generation was able to produce, which, added to the accumulation of infrastructure, has led to very high welfare levels. However, this exponential growth cannot be maintained forever, because the world's resources are finite. There are economists who argue that the market will be able to deal with these small

drawbacks, but it is better not to bet our entire future on this assumption.

Prosperity without growth is the great challenge we will have to face in our near future. It would not be a matter of involution, but of adjusting the pace of growth to the rate of recovery of natural resources. The lack of this type of adjustment in closed economies has led to the collapse of many communities in the past and, if we do not set limits, the unconscious capitalism in which we live could break down in a disproportionate and traumatic way.

The only way to maintain a constant use of resources on an island with no connection to the outside world is to consume less than or equal to the amount that is renewed each year. Ecologically, our planet is an island where the only external contributions are the energy of the sun and the meteorites.

The economic growth is developed mainly since the industrial revolution, until then the slow technological evolution made growth rates could be at around 1% every century. From the 18th century onwards this rate is above 1% per year...

It is time to be proactive, to start working, or we will be late in saving the earth. It is not easy to accept that we have run out of margin for growth and that we will have to adapt, even more in such an unequal world. Perhaps the global ecosystem we are part of can still digest the irruption of human intelligence during the anthropocene, but it wouldn't hurt to take some compensatory measures.

Paleo

The paleo movement, which is mainly materialized by the diet with that name, arises from the observation of

Homo sapiens' genetic adaptation to the environment where he is found. Throughout millions of years we have survived in food, temperature, physical activity and sun exposure conditions that defined our genome very slowly; however the civilizing process has radically changed all that in the last ten thousand years, especially in the last hundred. Although the stimuli have changed drastically, our body still responds to the environment with the same mechanisms as in the Paleolithic.

The most common threat to primitive humans was predators... senses on high alert and muscles in tension ready to flee, the heart racing and adrenaline flowing at full speed through the bloodstream. Although it has been a long time since we have had a predator threatening our lives at each step, neither is hunger or disease threatening us, still the neuronal and hormonal responses remain the same, and the reaction of our glands remains unevolved. A thousand generations have made our minds capable of dominating the world, but our brains are still ruled by the same chemistry that conditioned the reactions of those nomadic tribes.

Circular economy

It is only possible to survive in a finite world if we constantly reuse material resources. The circular economy recognizes this reality of scarcity in its basic definition: it is the science that studies the use of scarce resources with alternative uses. However, despite recognizing it, we are not doing much in order to find the solution of the problem that seems to be arriving to a point of no return.

Nowadays, a significant part of the production of commodities has its ending, sooner or later, in the

waste processing centers, without greater reuse than the storage for its disintegration after months, years, decades or the time required. A circular approach could turn the waste into the raw material for new processes, avoiding the long-term vanish of resources.

Awareness

The first step in this journey is to define the limits of the self. Beyond spiritual considerations, we could make a first incremental definition of what we are:

- My thoughts and ideas, my memories, my dreams and plans, the inner voice that makes me wake up in the morning. What can be held in my mind.
- My body, with all that it is capable of doing and that could be enlarged to my living space, the air that I warm around me, the shadow that I project or as far as my voice can reach...
- My image: What I think of me, what I think I know about me, what I think they think about me, what they know about me, what no one knows about me yet, not even me...
- The people I influence. My family, co-workers, customers, suppliers, friends and acquaintances, the neighbours...
- My close environment, what is modified by my presence, what I can keep organized or turned into chaos. The clothes I accumulate, my house and all its furniture, the garden or the yard, my vehicles...

- Everything that I can manage to possess, both material and immaterial and that can be measured monetarily.
- I am part of life, which is unique, everything on earth is united by the same initial DNA chain.

Zen

It is a Buddhist philosophical school that has its roots in Japan. Originally, it means meditation and its objective is the enlightenment by itself and today it is one of the most popular aesthetic currents in the West. Balance and minimalism are two of the elements of decoration that we could understand as Zen, especially successful in terms of garden design.

Some principles that we can recognize as zen would be: Live the present, give attention to everything you do, living means suffering, the origin of suffering is attachments, it is possible to end suffering, free yourself from attachments, don't oppose the stream of life, search for inner peace, live a balanced life...

Because it is a philosophy and not a religion with precepts to follow, it could be one of the last options of spirituality that will survive the crowning of man as a god according to Harari.

Mindfulness

One of the principles of Zen thinking is full consciousness, which has come to us from English as mindfulness. We try to achieve a deep state of consciousness, paying maximum attention to the present moment. It is about being aware of every action we perform at any time of the day. This

awareness will help us to enjoy all our senses, the most trivial activities, the people around us and our thoughts.

It can be understood as a technique that can be practiced for a few minutes each day to achieve a state of relaxation and deep meditation, but we can also understand it as a mental state of conscious attention to face the whole daily routine.

Time is so scarce that we think that by doing two things at the same time, we will be able to do everything and get some free time, which we believe should also be used to the fullest. The end result can be disastrous for our health and lead to very poor performance.

Reflections

There are two ways to be rich: One is to acquire much, and the other is to desire little.

- Jackie French Koller

To Have or To Be

The human being is a concept that could be defined as a biological, social and cultural entity, once rational, creative and free, possessing consciousness about itself. One of the first books that awakened my consciousness about myself was "To Have or To Be" by Erich Fromm. It seems clear who has won the battle of this duality in our world: having is the most important quality in the economic, political and social fields. Perhaps we could change the concept and call ourselves human havings. The reduction of possessions has to start with a state of mind. There has to be a deep conviction about the path we are taking and a complete agreement with oneself.

To know what our objective is we must define what we are and eliminate the rest. Each one will reach different conclusions in this meditation process and all the answers will be valid because framing this fundamental internal dialogue will lead to happiness. The ego has to decrease in size in a radical way.

Sometimes we don't accumulate material properties but we look for recognition, academic merits, diplomas... Mental enrichment and the search for wisdom are very important, but when we accumulate for the sole purpose of possession it is not very

different from the accumulation of physical possessions.

I have been reflecting for some time on what I have and I have discovered that I am extremely rich, not because of what I have, but because of what I am. And you?

Do I need this?

Questions are the most powerful dialectical resources, both when we talk to others and when we talk to ourselves. Some basic questions in this process might be: Do I need this? Does this possession improve my life in any way? Is the exchange of time I have to make to possess something beneficial? Where is the minimum? Do I consume or am I simply consuming my life time?

We have everything we need to feel good, but we live in a continuous state of dissatisfaction and uncovered expectations that make us yearn for more. Since we began to understand the world around us, we have been driven to believe that happiness lies in possessing as much as possible, perhaps it lies at the other extreme, in seeking the minimum, in being able to give up almost everything.

Culture = Consumption

We do not know how this happened, but if we stop for a moment to think about it, we can see that almost any cultural expression and community tradition in our society has been losing its spirit of celebration to focus on consumption. At Christmas, gathering the family takes a back seat to gifts, invisible friends, perfume advertising, lights on the shopping streets, and company or friend dinners. The religious celebrations

are only an excuse to make lists of gifts. Valentine's Day was originally a commercial invention and we have started to celebrate directly consumer parties such as Black Friday.

Culture has been privatized and is consumed through screens of all sizes, always under subscriptions.

If we consider sport as culture, we will reach the maximum expression of consumption. Any sport activity passes through the ticket office and millions of young practitioners, perfectly oriented towards professional structures, aspire to get the best salaries in the labor market.

I am in charge.

I do not think that a small elite is responsible for social and economic inequalities by controlling the powers of the state, nor do I think that large corporations decide for me; on the contrary, I am convinced that we are all responsible for our consumer decisions. A deep reflection is needed on the capacity for transformation that we have over our lives.

Living differently is possible, a few manage to do so. Enjoying freedom is not an impossible dream. To be able to get out of this network we have to have the will to do it.

The time has come to believe in ourselves in order to grow. The self-fulfilling prophecy, also known as the Pygmalion effect, has proven to be highly effective. We need to leave behind the adolescence in which we live and the tales about princes-at-large. Let us develop our possibilities, let us grow as people. When we stop growing, we start dying.

Why look for the minimum

Years of traveling, months away from home, accommodation with families, hostels, hotels, train stations, airports, nights out in the countryside and some benches in the street have helped me to find the most suitable size of the backpack, giving me reasons to look for the lightest weight possible. Beyond the time I spend traveling, in my case a third of the year, I can think of some reasons to look for the minimum:

- It is easier to have a calm mind in a tidy, clean space adapted to the size of a person.
- Possession is addictive, the more you have, the more you think you need. Buying activates our pleasure centers and can become a dangerous addiction. Our mental balance is at stake.
- The less things we possess, the less dependence we have on others.
- With lighter agendas we will have time to reflect and go deeper, more time for ourselves, to take care of ourselves and grow.
- Simplification is an intellectual challenge that can help us stay creative and full of energy.
- There is a very sharp phrase that says that if you do not live as you think, you will end up thinking as you live. We could go a step further and say that we end up living as we can and think that we live as we want to. Looking for the minimum is definitely easier than looking for the maximum, the limit below is a more concrete value.
- Minimalism is a path of discovery but it could also be the path to sustainability. As we move from micro to macro we see the enormous potential of consumer awareness in the global

economy, we really have the power to transform the world. Minimalism may be a good option to solve some of the great problems that humanity is facing.

How to get close to the minimum.

Start with yourself first and give up on yourself. Truly, if you do not first run away from your own self, wherever you run away you will find hindrances and discord, wherever it may be.

- Master Eckhart

The process towards the minimum is a very complicated task and I greatly doubt that there are general formulas to achieve it. Looking for some answers I have found many blogs and books with good advice that help you change your world and save time and money, but they assume that you accept the kind of life that this implies: "move to a smaller house to have to clean less..." what happens then if what you like is to clean?

Everyone has to find their own way, perfectly adapted to their character. I have discovered some ways after several years of evolution and I think I may be halfway there, far from being a good example for others.

To achieve the challenge it will be necessary to overcome many difficulties, the environment has been driving us to consumption for our whole lives and has made us victims of the system. Mental inertia and our lives full of toxic habits are not going to be easily changed.

Many others have walked the path over the centuries: ascetics, hermits, anchorites, Stoics, Luddites, minimalists or simply poor people, lived with the minimum, many of them as a choice.

Along the life we are accumulating objects, memories, useless gifts, broken tools, mismatched socks, contacts in social networks, people, properties, rights, obligations, contracts, relationships, digital files, emails... always wanting more of everything to be complete. The time has come to establish a new relationship with things.

A life of luxury

Luxury is defined as: 1. m. Too much in decoration, pomp and gift. 2. m. Abundance of things not needed. 3. m. Anything that exceeds someone's normal means to get it.

These could be some of the luxuries I would like to give myself every day:

Do not use an alarm clock. Stay in bed after waking up. Watching life go by. Walking slowly. Talking without limits. Saying what I think. Dressing for myself. To be myself in any circumstance. Turn the music up very loud at two in the morning. Eat when I'm hungry. Eat fruit on the spot. Enjoy the taste of every bite. Knowing how to accept everything that happens to me. Walk barefoot. Listen to the birds. Breathing clean air. Seeing the stars at night. Understanding the world. Need little. Not to be afraid. To be happy.

I don't seem to need much money to give me those luxuries. Most things are just personal choices, especially being happy, only you can decide.

What do I want to have more of: Time for my family, my friends and to read and write. Time to waste. Empty space in the closet.

The value of things... and their price

The most shocking news for me this morning was a new record in an art auction. A painting by Leonardo da Vinci has sold for \$450 million. I discovered long ago what the difference between the value and the price is: the latter is what someone is willing to pay, and that is what it is worth to him, but even to the one who lost the bid this painting is not worth that much.

There was a time when I didn't think it was ethical to invest such huge amounts of money in such unproductive objects, but then I understood what a deposit of value and an investment asset is, and there is nothing to object to there. If two people agree on the price of a transaction, they will both be happy.

I can understand the concept of investment in art, unique pieces that mark a milestone in history, but what I can't grasp is the collection of plastic figurines, the manufacture of objects to be stored on shelves, the exorbitant price of sports cards, the passion for philately...

The price of a thing does not usually correspond to its value. Value is a subjective concept and will depend on the moment we find ourselves. A bottle of water costs a few cents but it is of enormous value when we are dehydrating.

Dilemmas and false dilemmas.

The great questions that life poses us usually have many possible answers and many shades of meaning,

but for simplicity I'm going to pose some dilemmas and false dilemmas:

- Do I go with the flow or do I get out of the river? Battling the stream is not an option unless you're a salmon, getting carried away is what dry leaves do...
- The river has two banks, which side do I go? You have to be careful and make the decision before the stream drags you down and hits the rocks or takes you to the sea.
- Do I think deeply about my life goals or do I let the advertising mark them? It takes a great deal of mental resources to constantly fight such a powerful machine.
- To give up chocolate or to be happy with the contribution of hormones. We can also consider stopping eating after an adequate daily portion.
- Exercising or being lazy. Who has more power, the endorphins generated by physical activity or those produced by a good nap?
- Losing or gaining time. It is not always clear whether an activity is a waste of time or an investment in the future.
- Putting up with the boss or looking for new horizons. The odds of failure in business are very high... but coping with this for 40 years does not seem easy.
- Do I save the world, or do I spend that time meditating? Napping is also allowed. Maybe while we're napping we'll help save the world.
- If something needs to be pushed... is it worth it? A relationship, a possession... It depends on the expected reward, I guess.

- Do I consume sustainably or do I sustain my economy? When will everything be sustainable and we won't have to face this dilemma?
- Do we listen to all the media alarms about toxic food or do we continue to enjoy the same old thing?
- The progress of science is at stake. The great advances of humanity are sometimes made possible by excesses. The research to reach the limits at any field allows technical improvements that can be applied to the production of goods for the majority. Thus, for example, some of the elements of safety and energy efficiency developed in Formula 1 have ended up being the standards in street vehicles. There is also no question that large companies invest large budgets in research because of their huge profits. Could we then find ourselves with a slowdown in human progress if we wake up from the consumerist nightmare? How could we keep up with research without huge corporations?

I consume so I exist

Make everything as simple as possible, but not simpler.

- *Albert Einstein*

Capitalism is the economic-political system that won the great ideological battle of the 20th century. Throughout its 500 years of development it has gone through different phases. The first stage we identify is called mercantilism, which allowed access to distant goods and markets through trade. Then came industrial capitalism which, thanks to the energy revolution of the steam engine, allowed us to make available to a large part of the population the goods and services that raised the quality of life exponentially. Thanks to imperialism we brought the whole world into the dynamics of consumption and production. And we arrived into the present, where financial capitalism, together with the digital revolution, has multiplied wealth and accumulation.

At this point in history we could certify that the most correct name for our economic system is Consumerism. We could go a little further and ensure that consumerism is the winning philosophical and spiritual trend in the great battle of ideas that developed throughout the 20th century. The capitalist system needs us to buy in order to continue working, its survival is in danger if we stop doing so. Without a strong consumer demand, all other macroeconomic variables will collapse.

For citizens to become the devoted consumers that the state needs, they must be motivated, and violence

is no longer a valid tool to achieve objectives. In this task the system has great allies: the media and social networks. Dozens of television channels, youtube, facebook, instagram... capture the attention of the vast majority of the population, who consume their content while receiving intense manipulation. The TV continues to be the queen, despite the fact that competition with the Internet has lowered the average time of use, TV still remains on top, with an average of four hours a day for all Spaniards. In our country, every hour of television, by law, can broadcast a maximum of twelve minutes of advertising, each minute can hold three ads... let's do the math... more than fifty thousand messages a year, with happy, healthy people with symmetrical faces and bright teeth who tell us that by consuming you will achieve happiness. It is a mantra that has taken deep root in our generation and may have modified our memetic heritage.

TV commercials are just one part of the advertising impacts we receive every day. Radio and Internet are sustained by advertisers and in a city there are few spaces free of consumption messages: billboards, awnings, facades, buses, trams, subways, taxis, delivery vans, video panels...

To make things worse, advertising on children offers products that transmit values that we do not share (violence, sexism...)

We have been programmed to consume throughout our lives and there is little we can do to avoid this conditioning. Once the basic needs (food and shelter) and safety needs defined by Maslow have been met, we should not need much more on a material level, however it seems that there is no other way than consumption to continue climbing up the motivation pyramid. Daily survival has to do with the social and

psychological processes of identity, affiliation, aspirations and self-realization, which we cannot do without and we see no other way than buying objects that identify us, that allow us to belong to a group. The social process, from which it is almost impossible to escape, explains our insatiable desire to consume.

Possessing and accumulating seems to be the only way to be happy. Consumption has gone from being necessary to becoming obligatory. The ability to buy has become vital, some people commit suicide when they lose their economic position and politicians consider first class flights to be a fundamental right.

It is in everyone's interest that we consume, especially the state, since consumption is a good indicator for being able to tax. When we show economic capacity, it can confiscate, which can make it bigger and increase its power.

How much do we need?

There's an interesting relationship between number three and survival. We can go three minutes without breathing, three hours without balanced body temperature, three days without water and three weeks without eating

From my experience working with teenagers I could come up with a different list, many can't go more than three minutes without consulting the Whatsapp, three hours without a data connection, three days without buying something they don't need or three weeks without eating a McDonalds ice cream. These lengths of time are significantly reduced if the youngsters are in a herd.

At the pathological end we find people who become addicted to shopping, completely losing control and

falling into a desperate financial situation which in turn destroys their family and personal relationships.

It's up to you to ask the question... how much do you need?

Accumulate

Too many people spend money they haven't earned, to buy things they don't want, to impress people they don't like.

- Will Rogers

There is a fine line between "what if one day we need it" and the Diogenes syndrome, between saving things we could use again in the future and occupying our space and time with useless objects. Our genetics are adapted to scarcity and we are conditioned to fear the future, so it feels easier to accumulate than to live lightly.

Do I really need this? This is the big question that could keep us safe, but we rarely ask it. It would be a very radical change to start looking for less, instead of stopping the race we are stuck in, always chasing more.

There's a popular reality show on the thematic channels, the junk auction. The format has several attractive points for me, on the one hand the psychological game of bidding, the risk, the correct estimation of the value of the store; on the other hand there is the possibility of finding the hidden and inexplicably abandoned treasures. Also noteworthy is the incredible ability to market unique objects to those who assign a value far above their real utility and that we do not think is possible outside the United States. Last but not least, the enormous capacity of accumulation that human beings have.

There is an anecdote about Socrates, about how he liked to go to the markets and carefully admire everything displayed in the stalls and then he would leave without buying anything "I love to see so many things that I don't need to be happy".

Possessing things is something very recent in the history of man. It has only been 500 generations since humanity became sedentary and the ownership of things is beginning to be relevant. Until then we could only own what we could carry on our backs. Perhaps that is the reason for so much confusion between what we want and what we need.

Food

Up to 50% of all food produced in the West ends up in garbage cans... this does not seem to be a very efficient way of using resources. In the first steps of food production, the pieces that are not the right shape or size (if they are chickens, the ones that are not the right sex...) are put aside, then huge quantities of food deteriorate in storage and transport, they get out of date on the shelves, and finally they are cooked and do not please the consumer...

I have always had an excellent relationship with food, I like almost everything, I eat in large quantities and nothing hurts. It's a pity that my genetics have not been so accommodating to this relationship, the graph of the evolution of my weight could be drawn as a saw, with continuous peaks and valleys. I can identify three major movements in my history, the weekly, the annual and the one from each decade. There has been a common key factor in the weight loss of these great cycles, the reduction of sugar consumption. Leaving sugar addiction behind is relatively easy on a physical

level, but all the advertising around us reminds us of all the happiness we would give up.

Obesity is a serious public health problem, in some regions of our country the prevalence of overweight in the child population exceeds 40%, which implies that their future development is conditioned by diseases that could be avoided, in addition to being a huge burden on public finances. An interesting study found that in Cuba, after the fall of the Soviet Union, there was an intense drop in mortality due to diabetes and coronary disease, the reason seems to be the drastic reduction in caloric intake.

We are a society in need of guardianship and especially of protection against the excesses of advertising. Over the last generation we have seen how the limitation of alcohol and tobacco advertising, as well as the application of stricter laws has significantly improved the addiction to these legal toxins and reduced their incidence in the healthcare system costs. Should sugar be the next toxic to be banned in advertising? Sugar intake seems to stimulate the same areas in the brain as other addictive substances.

We live for happiness and sugar brings it to us quickly, cheaply and legally, but it is not the only way. Another addictive substance of massive consumption in our civilized world is caffeine, there are those who are not a human being until they take their dose in the morning. It is interesting to observe how the companies that commercialize energy drinks prosper, combining the action of sugar and caffeine, linking their image to risky activities that generate high doses of adrenaline.

Information

We don't think it's right for our kids to spend all day connected to Instagram but we find it perfectly reasonable to spend our time going over the news. Being "well-informed" is a welcome activity among adults. I confess that I am addicted to online newspaper headlines. It's the first thing I do in the morning when I go online and the last thing before I close my computer... and in between I check them several times throughout the day. If I have a time-out waiting outside the house, I immediately grab my pocket to connect to my mobile and check that there is not a big news item...

When the information was printed it was only updated once a day, now it is updated as soon as there is a change. The number of journalists and media outlets has multiplied and few succeed in doing so because the business model based on advertising is not suitable for everyone. Part of the time we spend on information is spent on removing the advertising that pays for the contents from the screen: pop-ups, huge banners that take up the whole screen for several seconds, advertising videos prior to viewing curious videos.

In some cases the time investment in getting rid of the advertisements could reach the maximum levels of advertising by law in free television (1/6 approximately). And to complete the picture, this is advertising that is very much related to our interests, so it will be quite effective. Any keyword that we introduce in a search engine will be one of the advertising arguments that you will find in the pages you browse during the next days. Not only on Google, when you search for a destination on an airline page, you will receive messages about cheap flights, which usually do not correspond to reality. There is no room for privacy, when you receive a personal email,

keywords will become the basis for the ads you receive.

As if that payment of time to inform us was not enough, it is also common that there are news paid by advertisers among the contents, as well as sponsored sections, advertorials... It seems that we are informed for free but we pay a high price in time and conditioning.

We live conditioned by infoxication, the information overwhelms us. We have data and more data available at all times but the worst thing is that we do not manage to digest the information and transform it into knowledge, not to mention that it becomes wisdom.

Car

It's not just a means of transport that allows you the perfect autonomy, it's much more. It shows everyone who looks at you, even if they don't know you at all, that you are a winning, powerful person... There is probably a deep connection with animal behavior in strength demonstrations: it is clear that if we occupy ten square meters and stand above the rest of the vehicles with a large, high-end off-road vehicle, everyone will be able to appreciate our physical and economic superiority. Perhaps it is time to reconsider the resources that our mobility consumes.

In addition to taking away enormous financial resources there are those who devote their free time to it. The car becomes a passion and completes us, whether it is watching the sports competitions, knowing the technical specifications of any model, improving the aesthetics and mechanics of your creature or simply cleaning it every day. There are people who show more love for their car than for the

people around them, at least they spend more time with them.

Let's also consider the enormous cost of private transportation. Imagine that we are an average consumer and we renew our average car every eight years. Nobody could tell us that we are wasting resources or taking bad economic decisions, unless we analyze the costs. 20,000 euros for an average family car, to cover about 15,000 km per year, with a residual value of 5,000 euros after 8 years implies a cost per kilometer for depreciation of 12.5 cents. If we add to that cost all the costs of fuel, maintenance, insurance, taxes... we can easily reach a number close to 30 cents per kilometer... The cost per kilometre of our fantastic public transport service can be under 10 cents... and for urban journeys we have the bicycle :-)

It is very curious that my cost Accounting professor at the university still keeps the same car for twenty five years. It is possible that she knows something about the costs that the rest of us don't.

The house

We live in the house we can afford, but in some cases it takes half our effort for most of our working life. Is it worth the effort? Is this where we want to live? Is it the right size for what I need?

The bigger, the better, so that we can fill it with things, expensive and useless, and if possible, that the facade shows all our spending power, in a neighborhood that is in line with my social position.

It represents the greatest financial effort for families and, although it is usually a very well pondered decision, it does not seem to be right in all cases. Those who can afford it buy more than one house, in some cases as an investment but mainly as a leisure

space. Those who have their leisure home just ten minutes away from their main home win the day.

Buying a home is usually a complex financial and investment operation that is not exempt from risk. Many families took out mortgages knowing that the financial expenses that increase the price would be compensated by an increase in the price of the house. However, due to the collapse of the bubble, this was not the case and thousands of families have had serious financial losses.

At the other end we have the tiny houses. Tiny spaces where you can barely stretch your arms without hitting a wall. This is an idea that may be useful to some people, not to me.

What is the meaning of the fashion in the furniture, in the tiling, in the color of the walls, in the design of lamps...? A very clear one, to be able to continue spending a lot of money.

A home is not more comfortable because of the things in it but because of the people in it and this is not something that is taken into account too much. Maybe we need to reconsider the concept of home.

Wardrobe

For some people, the main part of the house, made up of some of these elements:

- Basic wardrobe. By definition it seems that these are the basic items that cannot be missed. I am not very clear about this... Within this background you have to take into account the seasons of the year so you have to have planned clothes for the case of a snow storm, even if such an eventuality has not occurred in the last century in your region.

- Season. What sets the trend and what you have to have in order not to feel an outsider. If any creative has thought that Hawaiian shirts with parrots are the trend this year, you have to be very daring not to listen to him.
- Accessories. It is fundamental for our image to be complete, a bag that fits every possible situation of the day, the week, the season and of course that it is not out of fashion. Belts, scarves, hats... those little things that have to accompany us in life so that they can be lost.
- Shoes. Little is said about the countless functions these dragging fellow travelers provide us with. They protect our feet (sometimes they seriously damage them, but let's say they protect them), they lift us off the ground making us look taller (with the important improvement in self-esteem that this implies), they perfectly transmit the sloppiness in which we live when they are not clean, they isolate us from the cold and the humidity of the ground (as long as we are not victims of fashion and we have to keep our shape), they deform all our skeletal structure (especially the impossible heels in women's shoes).
- Underwear. It is necessary to have underwear with logos that only you can see (in case you don't follow the fashion of wearing your pants halfway up your ass).
- Sleepwear. One of the best resources to give away at Christmas, and which accumulates without fail season after season.
- Party clothes. A dress for a single night, which also forces you to be cold or uncomfortable.

- Sportswear. Only the best brands make the best marks, and if we don't fight the clock we won't be able to do without huge logos for our own self-esteem.
- Work clothes. If we have to wear a uniform we will have been lucky, if on the contrary we have to dress for work...

How big does the wardrobe need to be in order to shine in society? How many times can you wear one of those exclusive models so that it doesn't lose its exclusivity?

Why do we advertise the brands? I can understand that teenagers are looking for an identity, affiliation groups, idols to follow... but that mature adults wear big brand logos on their clothes, share advertisements in social networks or buy merchandising of their icons is beyond me. Brands have become so highly valued in our consciousness that we sometimes pay for the brand, not the product.

By definition fashion is a passing phenomenon, that which can be worn for a season and no longer, after a while everyone realizes that it is very ugly.

Jewelry

Basic jewelry, imitation jewelry, watches, luxury electronics, glasses, accessories... if you are in this dynamic it is easy to understand, but for me, the list of shiny ornaments is hard to digest, as I never wear any accessories of this type. This section seems the least necessary but there are people who would feel naked without all this glitter. With a very brief reflection we can realize the futility of these elements and how simple it would be to do without rings, necklaces, cuff

links, bracelets, tie clips, jacket pins, anklets, brooches... not to mention earrings, piercings, dilators and other mutilating devices.

It seems that the price of diamonds and the price of the companies that make them have not stopped falling over the last decade. It could be that we are entering a new phase of ostentation... One of the reasons given is that, in part, the needs that were covered by ornaments are now covered by electronic toys that sometimes have an even higher price.

Electronics

Our generation has witnessed the emergence of digital electronics and multiple devices that solve problems we didn't know we had: mobile phones, photo and video cameras, GPS, e-books, tablets, laptops, headsets... and the worst thing about these toys is that their technology ages in a few months and it becomes very difficult to keep our arsenal up to date. How many megapixels do we need to get a good look in a photo? How much storage memory do we need to save the photos we will never see again? How much extra speed is needed in our processors to be more productive? Any excuse is good enough to throw away a model, put it in the bottom of the drawer and buy the latest version.

It won't be long before Blade Runner is a reality and it is not possible to distinguish people from "replicants". But for now we are living a moment of adjustment to the technology, of integration of the hardware in our lives and in many occasions it seems that with little success. Instead of gaining time to enjoy life it seems that we are slaves of the mobile phone and the Internet: charging the batteries of the electronic devices and protecting them from falls and humidity,

updating programs, deleting files, attending to incoming messages, freeing up space to be able to install new applications, answering mail, eliminating spam, keeping our social networks updated... Becoming cyborgs is proving to be quite complex.

Body care

There is a powerful industrial sector related to the pharmaceutical industry that invests enormous amounts of money in research, but above all in marketing to stimulate the great human need to stay young and attractive. At this point I have some questions about this whole effort:

How many products does your hair need to be happy? Why does straight hair have to be curled and curls ironed? How many layers of creams and powders does your face need to show its best version? How do tropical fruit aromas contribute to skin health? How much cologne can you put on every day without your environment needing gas masks? How much tiling (make-up) is needed to leave the house decent? Who decides the length of your eyelashes this season? How much time per day can you spend on becoming someone else?

Porcelain nails, false eyelashes, four layers of make-up, fillings in clothes, surgery, wellness sessions... The final result can mean a really significant change in a person's exterior appearance but at the cost of a considerable investment of money and time. What would happen if all that time investment was made every day in learning? Unfortunately, we have to admit that if we replace make-up with training we may lose competitive advantages. In a world where image is more highly valued than content, you have to make short-term decisions in order to survive.

Pets

So far, I have many moral questions about consumption and accumulation of possessions, but I could find some coherence in these decisions. But when it comes to consumerist excesses for pets, I am faced with two options. On the one hand I can understand them because I am a libertarian and I think that economic freedom is a basic human right, so everyone can do what they want with their money. But on the other hand, I recognize myself as a human supremacist and I find it very difficult to understand the fact that people are at the service of animals.

It all starts with pedigree certificates, childbirth care, high-end medical care... and continues with the big jewelry firms, furniture manufacturers, fashion designers and accessories that do not neglect a very lucrative market for pets. Luxury hotels, specialized chefs, beauty services and spas... so that your beloved animals can enjoy lives of luxury... that in no case will they be able to appreciate.

The Money

Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication.

- Leonardo da Vinci

When the functions of money are defined in economic theory, you are told that there are three of them: value deposit, unit of account or measurement and means of payment. The problem arises when it becomes a value in itself, the unit in which we measure success and the maximum aspiration of a significant part of the population.

We work to get money and then we consume to show how much money we have got, without even trying to get any happiness beyond possession and without paying too much attention to our consumption. We do not realize that money cannot be eaten, it is only our accumulated time that becomes, very easily, lost time. We have spent this time working to turn it into money and then turning it into things.

We should continue to deepen the knowledge that the economy can give us and analyze the concept of the opportunity cost of things. Not many people are happy with the job they have. The majority of the working population spends at least two thousand hours every year on work (in the workplace and traveling to it) and, as money is the unit of measure, we are not aware of the time it has taken us to earn it and what we do is waste our time.

We have lived for decades in the latest version of capitalism, financial capitalism. This phase is characterized by the supremacy of financial resources over the other means of production. The retribution of capital is overvalued compared to the rest of the productive factors and it is also exposed to lower taxes. Clearly those who have capital control the laws and the system as a whole.

This looks like a party where everybody owes everybody money: the state gets into debt by asking for funds from companies, individuals and other states; companies are financed by public loans, bonds that individuals can buy and loans from other companies; individuals apply for public aid and ask for loans from financial and commercial companies. They all seek financial leverage that allows them to work less and live off the capital. They are all optimistic that the future will be better than the present, that growth will be sustained, that they will be able to generate more

money to pay back the loans... What usually happens is that we pass the problems on to the next generation. In this process central banks increase the amount of money in flow, banks create money and more money, giving more weight to financial resources within the economic system.

Financing further dilutes the correct perception of the value of things, also adding a higher cost to the price, let us not forget that this is our time. We live on credit even in the most everyday purchases, without being aware that we are adding costs and that it does not give us greater value, we buy something because we can pay for it in the future, without stopping to think about the loss of freedom that it entails. If we could choose, for example, between a superior model of car and a year without working every ten years, or what about a house in a situation of privilege and ostentation with an overprice of fifty percent that can imply five years of work in a lifetime.

Taking economic decisions, understood as those which achieve optimum efficiency, does not have to entail the loss of one ounce of quality of life but, on the contrary, if we understood the functioning of the monetary system, we would have an extra life to enjoy. If we stop for a moment to calculate how much time of work the acquisition of goods means, perhaps we would decide to do without them, or we would opt for others of smaller size, design or prestige, which would continue to fulfill the same function.

A step further in craziness is taken when we accumulate real estate, planned as an investment or as a deposit of value, with the intention of bequeathing it to the next generation, we are making a transfer of our time so that our future genes can enjoy it, if everything goes well and a real estate crisis

does not take the investments away. The selfish gene is very strong and makes us do very complex things.

How much anxiety is produced by every hour of work, with all the negative elements that your job has. Does it compensate for that discomfort and the deep impression it leaves on our minds, the brief moments of happiness that buying useless objects brings?

This morning, waiting in line at the bank, the teller at the other window told her client that we work to pay. Why do we work is a fantastic book by Barry Schwartz in which there are many examples of meaningful jobs, and money is not the main value.

Drive is another fantastic book written by Daniel Pink, which explains an experiment in India on motivation and money. The conclusion is that there is a point where money is motivating, but once that point is passed, there is no longer a better performance from the worker even if more money is given in return for his or her effort.

How to do it without money. It may be impossible to eliminate all monetary transactions in our world but surely by reducing its use we can reduce its need. Some of the things we can do have to do with changing our lives. Prosumer is the word that brings us the new economy, an activity that is quite simple in terms of food production and a good part of the services we consume (culture, leisure, education). We just need to jump out of the box.

A good part of our life is related to money: how to get it, where to keep it, how to invest it, when to spend it... Money is overvalued, it is valued far above its main substitute product, leisure. Maybe when money stops being a problem, we will stop having problems.

What drives us

You have succeeded in life when all you want is only what you really need.

- *Vernon Howard*

The 99 Coin Club

Once upon a time, there lived a King who, despite his luxurious lifestyle, was neither happy nor content. One day, the King came upon a servant who was singing happily while he worked.

This fascinated the King; why was he, the Supreme Ruler of the Land, unhappy and gloomy, while a lowly servant had so much joy. The King asked the servant, "Why are you so happy?"

The man replied, "Your Majesty, I am a mere servant, but my family and I don't require much - just a roof over our heads and warm food to fill our tummies. We're content with that."

The king was not satisfied with that reply. Later in the day, he sought the advice of his most trusted advisor. After hearing the King's woes and the servant's story, the advisor said, "Your Majesty, I believe that the servant has not been made part of the 99 Club."

"The 99 Club? And what exactly is that?" the King inquired.

The advisor replied, "Your Majesty, you shall see if you place 99 Gold coins in a bag and leave it at this servant's doorstep."

The curious king had it done. When the servant saw the bag lying at the door, he took it into his house. When he opened the bag, he let out a great shout of joy... So many gold coins!

He began to count them. After several counts, he was at last convinced that there were 99 coins. He wondered, "What could've happened to that last gold coin? Surely, no one would leave 99 coins!"

He looked everywhere he could, but that final coin was elusive. Finally, exhausted, he decided that he was going to have to work harder than ever to earn that gold coin and complete his collection.

From that day, the servant's life changed. He became overworked, horribly grumpy, and castigated his family for not helping him make that 100th gold coin. He stopped singing while he worked.

Witnessing this drastic transformation, the King became more curious. He summoned his advisor who explained: "Your Majesty, the servant has now officially joined The 99 Club."

He continued, "There are those people who have enough to be happy but are never contented, because they're always yearning and striving for that extra coin. They keep telling themselves: "Let me get that one final thing and then I will be happy for life. And this goes on and on.."

We can be happy, even with very little in our lives, but the minute we're given something bigger and better, we want even more! We lose sleep, happiness and we hurt the people around us who care; all these as a price for our growing needs and desires. Then we've joined the 99 club!

Deadly Sins

A few years ago I watched an interesting documentary that supported the theory that deadly sins were a great contribution to the survival of the human species.

Envy, lust, laziness, anger, pride, gluttony, greed... these words seem to sum up perfectly the society where we live in. It would seem that they are all linked to the selfish gene and some are clearly connected to the accumulation of possessions.

It would be time to become aware of the unnecessariness of letting ourselves be carried away by those instincts in the society of opulence in which we live. Well, the sin of lust, we can leave it as it is :-)

Maslow

Maslow's basic theory of motivation seems to be the most accurate in explaining much of human behavior. The mismatch between the satisfaction of needs and consumption is enormous. If we were to act rationally we would stop consuming once basic needs had been satisfied and secured, yet we continue without measure to exhaust our resources while using our most valuable possession, time.

Advertising assures us that we can reach the top of the pyramid thanks to consumption, I am of the opinion that it is possible to achieve it by the opposite way.

Beyond those basic physiological needs (air, shelter, water and food) it is clear that there is a very wide margin until completing the self-realization that Maslow proposes and that each person will live in a very different way the satisfaction of their needs. In some cases, some people could reach self-realization by managing to live with the minimum possible and others would only consider the goal achieved by

reaching a Nobel Prize or entering the list of the three richest men in the world. In any case, the climbing of the pyramid has no relation with the accumulation of properties, but with the feelings of the individual.

The selfish gene

Another interesting theory about motivation is the one of the selfish gene. Richard Dawkins is the author of the book written in the 1970s that has become a classic. Dawkins maintains that the beginning of life is nothing more than a set of complex cells that combined by chance in specific environmental conditions that managed to replicate themselves. This primeval life has been mutating through millions of years without losing its initial identity and now forms part of each and every one of the cells of each and every living being on earth. The survival of life has been made possible because these genes have replication as their ultimate goal and all the complex mechanisms that are formed to complete a living individual have survival as their ultimate motivation. It seems that humans are not designed to be happy but to reproduce at any cost.

The human being is the most advanced evolutionary link in this chain that lasts more than three thousand million years and it seems that, having become aware of himself, he has overcome that basic motivation. However, all the very complicated relationships and abstractions in which we are immersed continue to give the same result, we are looking for transcendence.

The fear of loss

As the paleo idea points out, our defense systems are not adapted to the environment in which modern man lives. In the savanna, our senses should always be alert to predators with the adrenaline always ready to provide us with the reflexes and extra energy to get through any eventuality, and with the cortisol running through our veins and making us fearful.

Today, thanks to the enormous mastery we have achieved over our environment, the dangers to our physical integrity or safety are minimal, but the flow of self-generated drugs through our brain remains the same. Large cats are not a threat, but the heart races, our blood pressure shoots up and our breathing goes into hyperventilation levels for fear of losing:

Things, People, Prestige, Friends, Self-Esteem, Hair, Sight, Fitness, Memory, The Doctor's Appointment, The Baggage Hollow on the Ryanair Flight...

Fear motivates us, but it also stresses us out. If we stop to think about it for a while, we can realize that both words are synonymous. Stress is a survival and adaptation mechanism that continues to influence our daily actions. However, threats have evolved since the primate species began to dominate its environment and spread throughout the world. No doubt there can still be situations where a good dose of adrenaline can save our lives, but this is not the general norm.

In the absence of any real danger or threat, anything, no matter how tiny, becomes a source of stress: I have nothing to wear that matches my new bag and shoes... there is someone at the party wearing the same jacket... my son's plane landed 10 minutes ago and he still hasn't called me... the conditions at my job have changed and they have cut in half one of my extra pays... it has started to rain and I am wearing my new leather jacket... the driver in front of me is not leaving the safety distance... the queue at the supermarket

that I have been in has stopped because a bar code does not enter the reader and I will have to wait 30 seconds for my turn to come...

We live on a roller coaster of emotions, with our heart rising in beats every few seconds, adding to the strain on our nervous system, allowing heart disease to be the leading cause of death in our civilized world.

It all starts with the conditioning our parents do so that we don't engage in dangerous things. It continues with fear as a constant in the media, the headlines make us afraid and make us think that bad things are all around us. It is also one of the main arguments in political campaigns.

Fear is big business, fear of others makes us lock ourselves up in our homes with alarms, video cameras, fences and watchmen. We fear losing our possessions and that opens up huge business opportunities for security companies, but it does a disservice to our happiness.

The desire for independence.

This is a very popular argument in the success story: Financial independence. Hundreds of self-help books, movies, audios, theories and methods offer the way to get enough money to allow us to not worry about money and be happy. Hard work, intelligent investments, a positive and determined attitude, a deep knowledge of the economic system, the right decision making... leads us to the accumulation of enough capital to devote to our hobbies, without having to work anymore.

A beautiful fiction that usually comes to fruition on very few occasions, people who seek to reach that independence through accumulation seem to have

"enough" too high to stop at their task of hoarding wealth.

Manipulation and Marketing

Perfection is achieved, not when there is nothing more to add, but when there is nothing left to take away.

- Antoine de Saint-Exupery

We are victims of a great system of manipulation that pushes us to consumption. However, it is not a global conspiracy, there is no secret society of powerful evil behind it. What happens, in my opinion, is that the sum of individual decisions does not always result in an optimal situation for the majority, in this case the opposite is true.

Each of the economic actors has valid and legitimate objectives but, when they are added up... we all lose. Businesses, large and small, governments, non-profit organizations... they all use the media, advertising and publicity to get the most from their resources. Together, they launch thousands of messages every day, on television, radio, and the Internet, using any surface, on buses, roads, streets, shopping centers, institutions, telephones... it is difficult to find a space that is not used as a support for these messages. The basic mantra in most messages is to encourage us to buy, because that is the only way the system will continue to exist.

The link between sport and advertising promotion is total and accepted as the best way of financing, but not even artistic expressions are exempt from

manipulative intoxication: one of the most important sources of financing for major film productions is brand promotion, music is a basic element of advertising storytelling and sometimes the hit of the summer has come from advertising, exhibitions and museums are sponsored, so is the theater..

We live in societies that call themselves "liberal democracy, social democracy..", with systems of government that have such elegant names as "parliamentary monarchy", "presidentialist republic"... and where we think the citizens have a wide power of decision. Every few years we are called upon to elect our representatives at different levels and we think that we live under the rule of law and freedom, where the limits have been set by society as a whole.

The system in which we are trapped is very complex, the will of individuals is manipulated down to the smallest detail and we in turn become manipulators of others.

We buy products and services that we do not need, we intoxicate our bodies, we work on what society needs, we accept the fundamental principles of the state and our economic system, all without stopping for a second to think critically.

The media form a unit together with the marketing departments of companies and the communication offices of public administrations, on which they are completely dependent. The information will be conditioned by the advertisers and the media will rarely be able to dare to bite the hand that feeds them.

Advertising, like a fine rain, ends up soaking our conscience, deeply fixing the idea that we need to possess things to achieve happiness. With continuous repetition and collective reinforcement we end up

creating a massive mental programming that nullifies the will of individuals.

Manipulation strategies

Within the analysis of conspiracy theories we have to make a special mention of the work of Noah Chomsky. In his books he has identified the strategies that governments and large corporations use to manipulate public opinion, their employees and customers, and to profit from it.

Here is a list drawn up by Sylvain Timsit in an article from 2002 that seems to be the bedside book of those who govern us:

1. Distraction strategy: They divert our attention from important issues by continuously saturating with unimportant information.
2. Create problems and then offer the solutions. Let public services deteriorate to the point where public opinion reacts and then offer the solution including a tax increase.
3. The gradual strategy. Raising the retirement age to 70 would be very unpopular, so a small extension is made every year.
4. The strategy of deferring. When a change is unpopular, a date is set far away and protests are silenced, but the change will happen.
5. Treating the public as a child. Just as we respond angrily to an authoritarian order, we modulate the childish response when we are treated like children.

6. Using emotion over reflection. Messages try to fast-track our unconscious to avoid rational, thoughtful responses.
7. Keeping the audience in ignorance and mediocrity. It is easier to control an untrained mass that has not developed critical thinking.
8. Getting the public used to being complacent about mediocrity. This seems to be especially easy to achieve through television, through dozens of reality shows in which stupid, vulgar and bad education are in vogue.
9. Blaming the individual. It conveys the positive idea that the best succeed in spite of any difficulty, blaming our weakness and not the unfair system for our inability to achieve our goals.
10. Knowing individuals better than themselves. Advances in biology, neurology and psychology are used by the system to control people's behavior thanks to scientific knowledge.

We do not make the best economic decisions influenced by advertising, but quite the opposite. Neither companies nor the state are interested in our happiness, health or longevity. Without thinking of a global conspiracy, state structures are interested in the fact that we do not use health services, that we work to pay taxes and that people die soon when they retire.

It is in the interest of companies that we are healthy in order to be more efficient at work and that we buy their products even though we do not need them. If we are good people they will miss us at home at dinner time, beyond that, we are only appreciated for what we can pay or consume.

All this manipulation is not part of a conspiracy, perhaps it is the best we can achieve in our state of cognitive and social development. Sapiens began by dominating his physical environment, later became a super predator and finally dominated the geosphere. On this path of domination, it has evolved socially at great speed; from the family group to the tribe, then the clan, the state, the empire and finally a global community. Everything is linked and plays a part in a great unity where each individual, guided by his or her selfish gene, seeks his or her best options. A great beehive has no human resources or logistics department, nor public services or entrepreneurs, but it surprises us with its complexity and functionality. The human anthill is possible thanks to the complex and functional relationships that are established among the economic actors.

Marketing

A special and outstanding place, within the process of manipulation in which we are submitted, is occupied by marketing; without a doubt the main section of any company. If we manage to convince consumers of the need to buy something, we have a company, if we fail in that task, there will be no business. Marketing has been perfecting its techniques while capitalism was being develop, and we can say that it is a mature technique.

Sales techniques are everywhere, we can't stop their messages from reaching us from any direction. Walking around the city everything seems to be a good medium to invade our minds saturating our retinas: posters, buses, street furniture, taxis, shops... even people are carrying huge logos looking proud.

If we observe perspicaciously what marketing does, we would realize that it should be a crime against people's freedom. There are already some rules that limit overly imaginative expressions of advertising aimed at children; for example, it is not allowed for dolls to move without being manipulated on screen by someone.

When we make a purchase decision we believe we are making use of our freedom to act but on many occasions we are nothing more than puppets, driven by the will of the brands.

Marketing benefits from economies of scale, the larger a company is, the more financial resources and technology it can employ to develop its attack strategies. The target is people.

The persuasive power of marketing is so great that it has come to convince us that a certain brand is associated with specific values or qualities. They have convinced us that Santa Claus wears red, and that if on the day we commemorate the martyrdom of a Christian saint we don't give away something valuable to our partner we may endanger the pillars of civilization :-)

The development of a science is closely related to the economic performance of research. Psychology cannot be understood without the link to economics, we could come to think that the latter is a branch of the first one. The link can be clearly seen in the fact that some Nobel Prize in economics has been awarded to a psychologist. It is in the sales sector that the study of the human mind becomes particularly interesting, anything that helps us to understand decision-making and to modify these processes is of great interest and therefore heavily funded.

An unequal battle is being fought, on the one hand our will, and on the other huge corporations that invest an average of 10% of their gross sales budget in advertising, sometimes over 20%, with the sole aim of stimulating our imagination, provoking our buying impulses, building loyalty to our character and completely dominating our will.

This enormous financial effort is one of the reasons for the success of the capitalist system, and perhaps also for the great global problems. In the following pages I detail some of the most efficient tools that Marketing uses, always without bad intention, just to dominate the world.

Emotions

There is an interesting theory developed by Paul MacLean in which he identifies three differentiated parts in our brain: the reptilian, which is responsible for maintaining the functions necessary for immediate survival; the limbic, which is in charge of managing the emotions associated with the experiences we live; and the neocortex, the seat of rationality in our nervous system, where systematic and logical thinking takes place.

Marketing is not interested in informing about the characteristics of the product so that the customer can decide rationally, it focuses on attacking the emotions, offering sensations associated with the product, or telling stories that are linked to a lifestyle.

Our western civilization has long been able to provide the majority of the population with products and services far beyond the level of mere survival. Most of our purchases are not linked to the essentials of our lives, and when we buy something, we are not buying an object, but the emotional fulfillment. We don't buy a

car to satisfy our transportation needs, we do it to acquire the qualities of the brand, to be able to show the world our strength and size, our success. We don't buy a shampoo to clean our hair, we buy beauty, eroticism, and we want to be as happy as the actress who appears in the ad. We don't buy a mobile phone to stay in touch, we buy a way of life. When a company finds the emotional satisfaction of its brand, it can be confident in its survival.

Within the section of emotions, fear has a prominent role. It is a safe value when it comes to manipulating consumer behavior.

Neuromarketing

The brain is one of the broadest frontiers of science in the 21st century. Only recently are there teams analyzing neuronal activity, developed to the latest advances in theoretical physics. Thanks to powerful and sophisticated scanners, we can start to understand the chemical and electrical processes that take place inside our heads. One of the first practical applications for all this scientific development has been found in marketing.

Neuromarketing studies the cognitive and affective reactions of individuals exposed to marketing stimuli. When a big company launches a global advertising campaign, it wants to have the maximum guarantee about the effectiveness of its huge investment. Anything that helps to have more information about the possible results in the customer's behavior will be welcome. When they make an advertisement in which they look for a certain action by potential customers, several versions are made and tested on a sample of the target audience. The opinion of the individuals is not precise enough because it might not correspond with the real feelings so they measure the physical

reactions of the participants in the tests by using electrocardiograms, electrical conductivity of the skin... and in some cases they analyze the response of the brain by connecting the subjects to precise brain scanners while they visualize the advertisements.

Not only large companies work in this line, there are also university departments entirely dedicated to this research and development effort and, of course, governments take advantage of this knowledge.

The Big Data

Without a doubt, one of the biggest businesses in our economy is data analysis and management. The great references of the Internet are those that handle the data of hundreds of millions of users. When we click the "accept" button when signing up for a social network service, we are giving away our information, on which the huge companies on the network base their business model. We are connected to three major social networks and each of them knows our tastes, friends, hobbies, travel, political trends, purchasing power, aesthetic preferences, causes we sympathize with, books we read, see our photos...

Sometimes we do not give away our data completely, but we give it away for small discounts that, sooner or later, make our consumption bigger. This is the case of loyalty cards. The clearest example of how the digestion of all this information works happened to a family that received a congratulation from the supermarket for their teenage daughter. It was not her birthday, the store was congratulating her for being pregnant. The outraged father asked for an explanation, and the company apologized for the mistake, which, in the end, was not a mistake. The girl was pregnant and the system had deduced this from

the last purchases she had made. Maybe it's an urban legend, but I'll bet it can happen.

And finally we have our phone, telling your company where you are all the time, to the precision of meters. Supposedly that information is irrelevant but when you add it to all the phones you can get a mine of information to make marketing decisions and get more effective campaigns... Telecommunication companies sell that information to companies that manage the billboards, without detailing users, and thanks to that information they can know how many mobiles come to a doughnut franchise after an ad is placed on a road...

Priming

Priming is an effect related to implicit memory. It has been proven through numerous experiments that exposure to certain stimuli influences the response to stimuli presented later. Thus, for example, it has been seen how a word or image, apparently irrelevant, triggers behaviors associated with that stimulus. In one of the studies, the subjects were implicitly primed with a series of words usually linked to the stereotype of older people. Although the words did not explicitly mention speed or slowness, those who were primed with these types of words walked more slowly when leaving the test room than those who had been primed with neutral stimuli.

Similar studies have been done with brand images, resulting for example in the subliminal display of the Apple logo causing participants to think more creatively, and the display of the Walmart logo leading to more frugal behavior.

Biases, fallacies and illusions

Economics and psychology are sister sciences, closely related actually. So much a psychologist was awarded the Nobel Prize in economics in 2002 and more recently, in 2017, the prize was awarded to an economist working on behavioral issues. Marketing, as a business management tool, uses all the knowledge about communication that psychology can provide, and I'm afraid, it does not do so for society to move towards harmony and personal growth.

It will take a lot of critical thinking to defend ourselves from the strategies of marketing experts. A simple example can serve to understand the type of resources we can use to sell: the halo effect. The term was coined by Edward Thorndike in 1920 and has been proven through numerous experiments since then. This effect is a cognitive bias by which we tend to generalize the positive perception of a particular trait, influenced by our previous assessments. Thus, for example, it is common that if we like a person for a specific quality (good actor, singer...) we assimilate that he or she will have many other positive qualities (good friend, intelligent...), even if we have no reference of them. Advertising uses this effect in a systematic way to try to transmit positive qualities to its products, using public celebrities in the ads. We tend to assimilate the quality of an idea with the person transmitting it, so we will trust an insurance policy sold to us by a news anchor, or a car driven by an elite sportsman.

We can find logical traps like this effect in every communication we do at any level and marketing experts will take advantage of them at every step.

Group membership

Buy when the malls tell you and you'll be happy. The commercial dynamic has become social with a calendar full of events that reinforce our belonging to the group. The rhythm of happiness is directed by the baton of celebrations, and every year it seems that there is more to celebrate by buying something:

If you are in love, if you are a mother, if you are a father, if your name is Joseph, if it is the day of the book, if your teeth fall out, if it is your birthday, if it is your saint, if it is the weekend of Thanksgiving, if it is Christmas, if the sales begin, if the season starts, if the course begins, if you finish the course, if you graduate in something, if it is your anniversary, if it is your monthly, if a child is born, if you get married, if you go on vacation, if you make the First Communion...

Group membership is especially important among adolescents. Any fashion or trend is quickly adopted by millions of young people around the world, regardless of functionality or aesthetics. If you find what motivates a group you can get a good economic return, if you also get your brand image to become a reference you can save expensive advertising campaigns, your customers will be your posters, paying exorbitant amounts for a piece of cotton with your logo.

One of the latest business strategies to take advantage of this basic need of mankind to belonging is to use references. The influencers.

Narrative of the advertising argumentation

Some studies suggest that people activate defense mechanisms when they detect any attempt of persuasion. Let's look for arguments that will keep us

from buying. However, marketing is very resourceful and employs a lot of talented people. One strategy to jump over these mechanisms is to tell a story in which there is no reference to the purchase or the product, provoking a feeling that you will remember and as the last image the brand and its slogan appear, so the connection is made... the defenses have been demolished.

An advertising film is built on two levels: one level of appeal and argument in favor of the values that identify the brand; another, which builds a story in which the viewer is emotionally involved, letting himself be carried away by the story, the narrative level.

Stories developed in twenty seconds can be as complex as any other of the long-lasting oral, written or visual traditions. They often seek to positively reference other known stories and associate with accepted stereotypes. With a brief reference, we are able to complete the narrative and visualize all the details of a character.

The hero's journey, dreams, imagination, stories, myths, legends, values, magic... are basic themes, repeated in thousands of stories over a hundred generations (the last 2500 years).

The single monomyth or myth, also known as a journey or, better, because of its connotations, a hero's journey, is a term coined by the American anthropologist Joseph Campbell to define the basic pattern of many epic stories around the world. This widely distributed pattern is described by Campbell in his *The Hero of a Thousand Faces* (1949). Campbell argues that the heroes of numerous myths from different times and regions share fundamental structures and developments.

In the past, real heroes were used to set an example for young people, to make them proud of their group's values. Today, things have changed a little, sports heroes are used to sell, artists are linked to brands, actors develop perfumes, explorers live on sponsorship.

Not only by heroes alone does marketing live; irony, reality, pleasures, games... are many other common resources in advertising campaigns. Whatever is motivating you, they will find a way to use it in their advantage.

The incitement to buy is something that is done with subtlety, although we can also find messages in which the imperative is used, the objective is to manage the association of your brand or product with an emotion or a value. If you manage to identify yourself in the mind of the buyer with some differentiated characteristic you will be able to survive.

Cultivation Theory has led to the conclusion that continuous and repeated exposure to fictional television content influences the attitudes and beliefs of the viewers (Shrum, 2002). The theory proposes that, as people spend more and more time living in the world of television, it will be easier for them to believe that social reality resembles the reality portrayed by television.

Theory of identification

Many studies have confirmed the fact that we tend to identify with the protagonist of the stories and that is very useful when you want to tell one, being this the case of commercials and advertising campaigns.

Social identification is a phenomenon that is used as an advantage by marketing. Identities can be

generated from dominant institutions and only become a reality when individuals internalize them and define themselves as members of the identity.

If we identify ourselves with a social group, a sports club, values... we will very possibly consume those products and services that we consider belong to that identity. The clothes, the kind of music we listen to, the jewelry, the cars... everything is part of people's identity. Unfortunately, sometimes it is the only sign of identity of many people. I recognize it, I'm anti-Apple :-)

Archetypes by Carl Jung

One of the fathers of psychology, Carl Jung, developed the theory of archetypes to explain the concept of the collective unconscious. An archetype would be the set of characteristics that define the cognitive and emotional bases of the common behaviors of a society.

Jung acknowledges the existence of many archetypes, but highlights the importance of twelve major ones. He identified universal patterns of behavior, which are part of our social consciousness, independent of our culture, sex, age or beliefs. Our actions and how we see the world fit into the patterns of behavior to which we conform. Taking advantage of this universality, many brands try to build their personality following this path and build their stories so that they always adapt to these archetypes.

Attitudes, fears, colors, objectives, messages, descriptions and strategies are associated with each archetype... and the advertising campaigns maintained over time are very careful not to produce inconsistencies: it will be difficult for us to see an advertisement for Haribo bears linked to risky

activities or one for Ikea promoting the transgression of rules.

And as the saying goes, breed fame and go to sleep. It doesn't matter if you've left behind the innovative spirit of your products, if you have an image that is embedded in the subconscious of consumers, they will remain loyal.

For a brand to be coherent it must have a personality that is recognizable to consumers, features that make it easier for your customers to identify with them and strengthen their loyalty over the years. To achieve this personality, brands try to assume some of the archetypes, seeking to promote a clear image of themselves, differentiating themselves from the competition, highlighting their advantages and qualities and thus creating an emotional bond with the public.

1. The Innocent: Coca-Cola, McDonalds, Disney. It aims to be happy by relying on faith and optimism. They build their brand identity on simplicity, nostalgia, childhood and pure innocence. Good vibes distilled :-)
2. The Ordinary Man: Ikea, VW, KFC. He seeks out the general public, shows common sense, empathy and realism and aims to embody simple values, such as equality or friendship. He avoids ostentation.
3. The Explorer: Virgin, Amazon, Jeep, Red Bull. Try to be identified with an independent and daring spirit. Freedom and authenticity are his values and he is challenged to find himself and live his own way, without barriers or control.
4. The Wise Man: Cambridge, Vega Sicilia, HP, Google, Philips, CNN. He is a free thinker who puts knowledge at his center. The mission he

pursues is to understand the world, using intelligence and analysis.

5. The Hero: Nike, Marines, Tag Heuer, Hummer. He identifies with power, effort, honor and victory. He shows his courage through heroic acts, saving the world. He's a winner.
6. The Outlaw (outlaw): Diesel, Harley-Davidson, Unequal. He is a rebel, his maxim is that rules are made to be broken. He avoids common ideas and conventions. He looks for his equals among those who feel different.
7. The Wizard: Sky, Axe, Absolut Vodka, Steve Jobs. Born to transform the world and people, he is creative and dynamic. He seeks to make his dreams come true, developing an exciting vision.
8. The Lover: Cadbury, Ferrari, Martini, Alfa Romeo, L'Oreal, Häagen-Dazs. In a continuous search for higher values, he is romantic and idealistic. Passion and enthusiasm are his motivations. The desire to please and help others feel desired are his missions.
9. The Jester: Fanta, Ben & Jerry, 7UP, Magners, Sprite. Easy to identify by their irreverence, originality and good humor. Enjoy life because there is only one. Joy and fun with few responsibilities. I usually identify with this guy.
10. The Caretaker: Volvo, Fairy, Flora, Actimel, Nestle. Born to care for others, he takes responsibility for everything and everyone. He seeks to protect and help, with large doses of generosity. A clear paternal vocation.
11. The Creator: Apple, Lego, Sony, Swatch. Innovative, creative person, with a high

aesthetic sense, an inventor... He is capable of defining his own style based on imagination and following his path.

12. The Ruler: IBM, Mercedes, American Express, Rolex. He is the leader who dictates the rules of the game with authority. His values are safety, quality and stability. He is powerful and takes control. Far from being my favorite.

Audio Marketing

Music and sounds are great emotional inducers and as such they are used systematically by manipulation experts. The type of music can be an essential part of the brand in many sectors: clothing distribution, bars and restaurants, shopping centers... can define much of their style and choose their customers with the musical style that sounds in their facilities. It can also be used to increase your sales.

A type of music that we find pleasant stimulates the production of endorphins, predisposing to purchase. Rhythm conditions our level of activity and is used to make shoppers move faster in the supermarket aisles when there are many people. High volume can make us make unthinking decisions and will also make a selection of the type of customers who enter a store. Nature sounds are used in decoration and gardening shops because that's how we would like our living space to sound...

Not only in shopping, it has also been experimentally proven that the rhythm of the music influences the speed at which we eat. Fast food restaurants use this knowledge to speed up customers and make room for the next ones.

Music, like the rest of the arts, is at the service of brands. It is used to position itself in the minds of consumers, generate memories, stimulate emotions and build lifestyles that connect with the feelings of the customers.

In the same way, music is a basic element for any video advertising campaign and we can also find some brands with audio-type, trademark melody, audio branding... that strongly support brand loyalty. Mercadona, McDonalds, Nokia, Intel, Windows... sound familiar? A great company will define the sounds, the volume and the music that relates to it, in its offices, in its shops and even in the waiting tone of its telephone answering machine.

Olfactory Marketing

The sense of smell seems to have important advantages in marketing: it is the only one of the five basic senses that is directly connected to the part of the brain that processes emotions, memory and associated learning. We seem to be a hundred times more likely to remember something that smells than something that is seen, heard or touched, which is very important when it comes to building a brand image.

It is common to use scents to attract customers in restaurants and food stores, it is no coincidence that there are smoke extractors on the street even though kitchens are usually on the opposite side of the entrance door. On certain shelves, evocative smells are used to activate emotions. Numerous studies support the effectiveness of smell in the sales process.

The big brands invest a lot of money in defining their odotype and take care that their brand smell is easily recognized in all their centers and that it is part of

every experience that the customer has in every visit. One of the most striking cases is the one of an American fashion brand, the smell is so intense in the stores that all the clothes are impregnated with it, and the aroma ends up being part of the identity of the trousers for a season.

When it comes to designing the personalized scent, perfumers are able to define the most specific characteristics in order to target the smallest segments: reliability, confidence, energy, nervousness, freshness... so that they can address any group of customers: young, adult, urban, adventurous...

It seems that the most famous cafeteria in the world eliminated a product from its menu because it distorted the smell generated in its stores. A luxury hotel chain based in Switzerland included in its odotype shades of money.

Minimalism can save the world

Life is very simple,
but we insist on complicating it.

- *Confucius*

Jared Diamond convinced me in his book *Collapse*, that our civilization faces the real possibility of a great disaster. This has happened throughout history with those communities that exceeded the limit of consumption allowed by the resources of their environment. The Mayas, Easter Island or Petra are some examples of flourishing societies that exceeded these limits and were reduced to nothing and have left us impressive archaeological remains.

With a new global consciousness, arising from the attitudes of all individuals, it might be possible to solve the great challenges our planet is currently facing: demographic, environmental, social, technological... We have to find a way to prevent individual decisions from collapsing the global system.

Economic prosperity can be defined as the increase in the quality of life perceived by society, not always linked to an increase in the production of goods and services. Variables such as unemployment rates, balanced income distribution, equality and social stability, and healthy environments are what define prosperity. Until now, the only way to increase prosperity was through growth, but we have reached a point where it is no longer possible to follow that path

because we will soon reach a point of no return for many natural resources.

What a happy minimalist society would look like

Happiness is a completely subjective construct and therefore a happy society is a difficult thing to achieve. Each individual can imagine a different environment where they can develop and achieve the highest levels of happiness. It is also very difficult to make a ranking of countries by their levels of global happiness, cultural differences make surveys unreliable meters.

In my version of utopia, I would propose considering a success if a majority of the population reaches self-realization. In order to do that, we would have to climb Maslow's pyramid, first by meeting all the basic physical needs and then by providing security for everyone. From there we will need a new collective consciousness to be able to reach the top of a really steep mountain. These would be some of the characteristics of my ideal happy society:

- **Rich:** No social imbalances, no unmet needs, no exclusion, with all the population covered by the highest quality health and education. With a population dedicated a minimum part of their time to work and making creative use of their lives.
- **Free:** Less dependence on things, people and rules leads, by definition, to greater individual freedom.
- **Egalitarian:** Looking at the various human development indices, it is striking that the happiest countries are not only the richest. Statistics show that equality within the

population and social relations are an important part of achieving happiness.

- Collaborative and supportive: There is a deep implication in the Darwinian explanation of evolution, the survival of the best adapted, which has been nuanced to justify competition as a basic mechanism of evolution. However, it is not thanks to competition that we have made the greatest progress, we have achieved the position we are in thanks to the collaboration between individuals and groups.
- With a minimum state. The development of a more supportive society allows us to reduce the size of the state because many of the services it provides will no longer be necessary. This minimum state should be able to provide the whole population with a basic income, universal health and higher education, equal justice for all and infrastructures at the highest level. We reduce the size of the state and therefore taxes. If we reduce the economy's output by half there will be less administrative costs arising from taxes, social security...
- With common open spaces. Adapted, clean, simple and tidy. When citizens are aware that they own the spaces, they keep them operational, in perfect use and improve them to adapt them to their needs, without having to pay for it.
- Creative: We should stop wasting talent, it is not a very common resource. All the effort dedicated to selling, inventing weapons, creating limits and frontiers could be channeled into more positive activities that allow us to solve real problems and make us evolve.

- Relaxed: With a little effort to rationalize, short working hours, long vacation periods, reduced commuting could be achieved. A stress-free society that could control mental illness...
- Healthy: Free of addictions that limit our options, of pollution that shortens our life and of stress that deteriorates our organism. Health must be understood holistically, with full attention to both body and mind, both individually and collectively.
- In balance with nature: Free from aggression against ourselves. As we deepen our understanding of global ecology, we better understand the dependence we have on our entire ecosystem. Without balance, the chances of collapse are multiplied for the human species.
- Safe: Today, the causes of death are very much related to the consumerist lifestyle we lead. Workplace and traffic accidents, stress-related diseases, consumption of toxins and excess food... all these circumstances would be significantly reduced in a minimalist society.
- Peaceful and open: With a higher, more advanced awareness. No need for borders that exclude others, nor walls that we think will protect us.
- Efficient: Natural resources would be used responsibly and consciously, the circular economy seems the only way to continue on the path.

A society is the sum of individuals, maybe starting with oneself we can go, little by little, widening the range.

Possible scenarios in our near future

Progress and improvement are the highest aspirations of life for both governments and individuals. We live in an extremely complex environment and many simple solutions will be needed to overcome the challenges we face if we want to continue to grow and develop. Here are some possible scenarios of what can happen to us in the next generation.

According to some economists, there is a small window to get out of the situation we are in. If we change too quickly or too slowly everything can collapse.

Scenario 1: Adjustment through the market.

Everything is fine as it is, the invisible hand that guides the economy is leading us to a promising future, we just have to wait and the solution will appear in front of us. Through the magic of two words, supply and demand, we will be able to balance the economies of families, businesses, states, and even ecosystems, moving along macro-magnitude curves thanks to price and quantity fluctuations.

Capitalism has brought us to this point and thanks to this system we live in the best world that humanity has ever known, we enjoy enormous quantities of goods and services and our life expectancy is the longest possible and increasing.

Why worrying about future generations, if we have been able to face the challenges of the present, all the more reason for our heirs to be able to follow the path of growth.

The supply of products and services will cover global demand, externalizations will be minimized by corporate social responsibility and the state will eliminate imbalances.

There are also people who believe that unicorns are real...

Scenario 2: Collapse due to a crisis

This scenario could happen abruptly when the imbalances in the system precipitate a major crisis. The situation we are experiencing could be compared to a glass of water being added little by little. We can add liquid above the level of the glass thanks to the surface tension of the water, but there comes a point when an extra drop precipitates a good part of the water that does not fit. Worse still, we could think of a structure that supports a weight until one more gram destroys everything. This is what could happen in our economy and take away our whole system.

This crack in the economy would start a situation like the ones the cinema has been envisioning for decades. As a result of the economic collapse, enormous social tensions appear, leading to devastating wars, which give way to a world represented by the great productions of any saga of adolescent dystopia, starting with Mad Max.

Without going so far, we could make a projection exercise based on our closest experiences. A sudden reduction in consumption caused by a financial crisis would cause the entire economic system to collapse, a reduction in consumption would lead to a reduction in the production of goods and services, an abrupt fall in prices that would imply a drop in business profits and in productive activity and investment with the consequent increase in unemployment. A greater number of unemployed would, in turn, mean less consumption, and we would fall into a vicious circle in which the theory is that we could only get out by increasing state spending and a dramatic contraction

in public services. An entire generation could suffer the effects of a collapse of this nature.

We can also imagine the opposite and that a big crisis can help us make adjustments more quickly and evolve into a new equilibrium. And this is where we change the paradigm and instead of entering a spiral of despair, we think things through differently and transform the system.

Scenario 3: Progressive adjustment with happy ending

This would be my favorite future. It is based on thinking that we cannot continue to grow forever, that the excesses of consumption are leading us in the wrong direction and we are beginning to develop a new social conscience. The last three hundred years have been great, a great feast of accumulation of wealth where human civilization is about to dominate the planet, but it cannot continue at the cost of increasing consumption. We have reached a turning point from which we reverse the trend and reduce consumption.

Small personal changes end up translating into a progressive adjustment of macroeconomic variables

- Imagine, for example, that workers decide to work fewer hours, earn less and consume in the same proportion, giving other workers the option of entering the labor market and consuming more because of the effect of fixed consumption, which could lead to full employment, greater social equity, lower tax pressure due to the reduction of social benefits that the state would have to face... In an open and global economy, regions with full employment would export jobs to countries

with high unemployment. If we reduce our consumption by 20%, we would need 20% less income, which would mean that we would need 20% less time spent at work, so we could enjoy... three months of holiday a year or six-hour working days. When there is a division of labor and redistribution of income, there is no need for a decrease in production.

- We stand up to the manipulation of marketing, producing an incredible butterfly effect. The reduction of consumption and the search for simplicity in products and services would lead to a reduction in packaging and the volume of materials transported, less use of raw materials, a reduction in the over-exploitation of natural resources, less emissions of gases responsible for the greenhouse effect and diseases caused by pollution. Perhaps we will arrive in time to stop global warming, the drying up of aquifers, desertification, air poisoning...
- A conscious society could eliminate the processes that do not create wealth and only speculate with it: some financial investments, real estate speculation, the inflation of the art market... Jobs in these speculative sectors could be transformed into trainers and researchers, which would accelerate technological development.
- By eliminating abuses of the system and creating real democracy, the state moves to the next level and becomes an institution at the service of all, not just those who control it (politicians and officials). By putting the productivity of public institutions on an equal

level with private ones, public services could be doubled.

- We recover spaces for nature. Once we are aware of our needs, the need to limit the spaces will decline and nature could start developing again, recovering the capital that we have squandered over the last two centuries.

Our system can assume a progressive decrease in the size of the markets, say a 2% annual reduction in the size of the GDP. In just over 30 years we could halve the economic structure without a collapse.

Scenario 4: Zero marginal cost society

Along with many other elements, Jeremy Rifkin has developed a theory that could explain the evolution of our economy, he calls it the zero marginal cost society and poses a very interesting post-capitalist future that some call The Commons. The economic world to which technological and social development leads us will have much to do with the economy of use, not of possession, which is an important step towards minimalism. In our environment we can see more and more examples of things that, before, you could only own, and now you can rent, borrow, buy and then sell or share. Collaborative websites and also new businesses provide us with accommodation, tools, transport, vehicles, party wear, furniture, books...

It is easy to see that this vision can be real because collaborative economy and third sector are having more and more weight in the whole economy.

In this new economy, the cost of many products and services is close to zero thanks to the development of

renewable energies, 3D printing, shared information and open source, and of course Artificial Intelligence.

One of the consequences of our technological development is the disappearance of employment. Rifkin thinks that the third sector will be one of the main alternatives to the activity and solution to the shortages that would be generated in a society where the income will only be accessible to a minority. Of course, we also have the universal basic income to face this enormous challenge.

This model of development marks the beginning of the end to financial capitalism, in which we are bogged down, but it will still take some time for the system to develop and be transformed. We may not see it for the next two generations or perhaps the uniqueness of artificial intelligence will precipitate events and we may see change in a decade.

Towards the minimum

A good traveller has no fixed plans, and has no intention of arriving.

- Lao Tzu

The experiences that brought me here

I like to see my way to the minimum as a long journey. For many years, I have been lucky enough to enjoy experiences that have forced some good habits, which have finally made me who I am:

- A good example is usually a good starting point. When your parents have grown up in the post-war period and lived accustomed to scarcity, it is easy to know frugality thanks to their example. I had a youth without any kind of need, I had money to spend, but they had taught me to not consume in excess, so there was no big deal. One of the tips I remember most from my grandfather was: Always carry money in your purse when you go out, but make sure it comes home.
- The mountain is a constant presence in Leon, you can see it majestically whenever you look north and it is easy to be drawn into its paths at some point in your life. When you become a regular hiker, you learn to distinguish the necessary from the superfluous so you don't have to carry it around for hours. In my case, I also did some marches and the Camino de

Santiago, and each time my back was carrying less weight.

- Inter-rail. This is the maximum expression of the urban backpacker. So far, I've done twelve trips around Europe by train, which have given me a lot of experience. Traveling around Europe, all you need is food, it's the only element that can demotivate the group. You can go several days without showers, beds, telephone... but you can't go without eating. After planning and living the adventure so many times, the backpack went from 60 to 30 liters of capacity, and I'm sure I can still do it with less.
- A great help in my process has been the airlines. First I learned how to fit things in a suitcase, then how to keep the weight of the suitcase to a minimum to save you a few euros, later you realize that you don't need all the pants you put in your luggage and wandering your closet around airports is not practical at all. The big moment arrives when you discover that you can travel without checked-in luggage, you feel like floating :-). And then we get to the next level, you find a low cost company that limits hand luggage to five kilos. On the outgoing flight I accepted the blackmail and paid to put the backpack in the hold of the plane, but on the return flight I accepted the challenge and reached the limit. Traveling light is a given.

These steps have put me on the path to the minimum, but I'm still aware of being a long way from the goal. I would like to make it clear at this point that I do not intend to give advice on what you should do to travel this road, everyone should travel their own. What I

collect on the following pages is a guide to help me on my own path. It is a search that must have the optimum as an objective.

Let's imagine a utopia and put it into practice

Let's imagine that we can transform the world, it's a simple process, we just have to start by transforming our small world, from there, the sum of small improvements will multiply and, barely noticing, everything will change for the better. These first changes could consist of making our environment smaller and much more relaxed, if we manage to maintain that change over time we can get more free time and a greater range of options to fill it with good times.

For this path we will make a deep analysis of our world, deconstructing and then re-constructing everything we do and use: tasks, spaces, things, processes, relationships, business models, habits, activities, food. We will have to make some plans to detail which things go and which ones stay.

When facing a change, it has been useful for me to meditate on the changes, usually by making lists, so I propose some things to think about. Living with the minimum can be a huge change in the way you live. You have to think looking from the outside: If you were not you and saw how you consume, use your time and manage your body... what would you think? If you saw your things through the eyes of others... what would you see? Reflect on the things you have and their process of desire, purchase, use and disposal. How they have come to us, at which moment, what use we have given them while we have had them, the future they will have. In this inner journey, it will be very

important to analyze our fears in order to overcome them.

For this path we will need more words starting with re: redesign, rethink, repair, redistribute, recover energy... but most importantly, rethink. Well, maybe a little thinking will be enough, because it seems that we are not thinking much on our own, letting others think and decide.

Time you are

If you can't afford anything at the moment, at least offer yourself the one priceless luxury that no one can take away from you: your time.

- Lauren Klarfeld

The only really valuable property is time. At the moment the individual is a being with an expiration date. What makes a life worth living? Do we consume or do the things we possess consume our time?

Effective time management is the basis for enjoying all time. For both professional and personal life it can be very useful to use this simple scheme:

- Urgent + Important: Do it now.
- Not urgent + Important: Plan and do.
- Urgent + Not important: Delegate.
- Non-urgent + Non-important: Discard.

Since life is time, this is our greatest capital, which we should take care of and invest in the best way possible. How much time we spend every day on different activities, earning money, feeding ourselves, taking care of our body, taking care of our image... Time is a very scarce good, and we don't know its exact amount, so we should use it in the best way.

A good way to optimize the use of our time could be to calculate the costs of what we consume in terms of the time we exchange, using time as a measure of price. If watching TV on the air means having to spend 1/6 of that time exposed to commercials, that would be the price we pay for enjoying audiovisual content and we would have to take that into account. We are giving our attention to the marketing companies so that they go deeper into the idea of unsatisfied needs... it does not seem good business. If commuting to work consumes two hours of our lives every day, we have to add it to our working time. When a leisure activity needs preparation time, we should not forget that cost.

Some ideas for time management

To reduce mental activity and worries, it is good to get rid of the unfinished business, which is not easy when you practice strategic procrastination, as I do.

Among the books on time management that are in the sections on personal transformation there is one that is having a remarkable success Get Things Done, develops a management technique that can be very useful. Like many others he makes a double-entry box:

- Write down the pending tasks. I've been doing that for several years now, not because this author said so, but because my wife said so :-)
- Those that require less than two minutes, must be done immediately. It's not easy every time... when the task is something you have to do but don't want to do.
- Organize the rest of the tasks and plan when to do them.

David Allen, author of the theory proposes 5 steps to be more efficient:

1. Capture: Collect everything that catches our attention, put in the same space everything that occupies us, work, personal, leisure, business, projects... Very interesting from the point of view of considering only one life.
2. Clarify: If you can't do something about the situation at the moment, you have to discard it or make the file for the future. If it can be done in less than two minutes, now is the time. If it takes more than two minutes, decide what needs to be done, delegate it, put it into pending tasks...
3. Organize: make lists with the pending duties, calls, mails, tasks, ideas to work...
4. Reflect: Review the lists often to see what the next task is to finish, updating the lists and removing them from our minds.
5. Commit: Just do it. Use the system. Whether it is these five steps or fifty, the result can totally change our lives.

What to do with the extra time? Everyone must decide what their list of priorities is, what activities will make them happier.

Keeping our physical and mental health optimal seems to be a good starting point for achieving happiness and we should not skimp on it.

Cultivate friendship and social relationships, but only those that lead to achieving the goal. How many fronts can we keep open at the same time, how many friends can we manage... According to Dunbar's number, about 150.

The work.

We need a deep reflection on the dichotomy of work vs. life. Most people spend half of their life time converting their time into monetary resources for the other half, supposedly life. A deep reflection will make us wonder if we are really in the right job, if we are doing it right, if we are spending a lot of time, if we are doing it in the best place. This is a good time to ask questions and accept the answers. A good question is, if we were not being paid, would we be doing what we are doing?

The work is so unpleasant that, in most cases, we have to be paid to do it. Many times work is meaningless to workers, a tedious list of alienating tasks; other times we are forced to perform it alongside toxic co-workers or despotic superiors, in unhealthy conditions that will have physical or psychological consequences in the future. The fear of losing it threatens us because of the inability to survive in our society.

In spite of all the inconveniences it seems to cause, with the only compensation of money, in many occasions we live to work... If we can reduce the time of work it seems logical to think that we would increase happiness. If we can integrate it into a healthy life it would also help to multiply our life satisfaction. If we make it a tool to grow every day, surely it would make society as a whole evolve.

Kaizen

The concept of Kaizen (改善) has been translated into English as continuous improvement and gives name to a method of quality management that began to be used in Japanese car factories in the 1980s.

This method is based on developing a process of continuous improvement, through concrete, simple

and inexpensive actions, which, once accumulated, represent a huge improvement in any activity. Personally, it can be an extremely useful tool and can best be translated as "continuous self development".

The books and blogs that propose the path to minimalism usually are of the opinion that the transformation must be fast and must be done in one go, I am following the path of kaizen. I guess it's easier to transition when it's individual. If you share space with other people, everyone has to agree to the change and the new attitude.

Tasks

In the beginnings of mass production capitalism, there was a figure who marked a path to follow: Taylor and his studies to improve the efficiency of human work made management a science. We can be inspired by his analysis of tasks to try to improve some things in our lives.

1. Analyze the tasks we perform each day, either at home or at work. Think about the Zen story of the master who had a restless cat that he had to tie up before starting the meditation practice. After a while the restless cat died and so did the teacher, but the practice of tying up a cat before the practice continued in the dojo without anyone asking why.
2. Simplify. Complex solutions are rarely the best. The machines work better the less elements they contain, the groups are better directed when they are formed by less members... Before two possible solutions, it is always better to choose the simplest one.

3. Divide. There are tasks that are delayed because they are too complex for our lazy mind to find a place for them. By breaking them into smaller pieces we can break this inertia.
4. Remove: Thoughts, reading the news several times a day, getting to the bottom of the wall on Facebook, Whatsapp groups, spam, mailing list subscriptions, downloaded files, pending tasks.
5. Share: There are tasks that we like to do or have to do even if we don't like it very much. Not all tasks can be shared but it is worth trying your luck, working in company generates synergies, usually pretty positive.
6. Delegate: When we take part on all the tasks, we are losing the opportunity for our children, colleagues, employees, to learn how to do the tasks and develop their skills. Maybe this is what we want to keep doing forever... It doesn't look like the best way.
7. Shortens time: From a time analysis we can discover how to optimize the movements and reduce the time to perform tasks.
8. One by one: A good idea that we can guarantee by numerous personal experiences and that also has its echo in the popular wisdom, "haste is waste".
9. Mindfulness: Living the present, paying full attention to what we do and being conscious in every moment are essential elements in the path to perfection. We will enjoy each action more, it will be better.

Space

What can be done with the spaces we inhabit to help us grow.

1. Right size: A smaller size is not always the right choice for the space we are going to use. I admire those who are able to live in micro houses, but it's definitely not for me. I can't imagine living continuously in an attic space where I have to bend over to avoid knocking my head. Living temporarily in a super small space can be an interesting mental exercise, but it better be temporary. Hobbit houses are for hobbits.
2. Tidy: A tidy space is safer, cleaner and more relaxing, it will make us more effective, it will avoid distractions.
3. Storage: Having the right storage system will help us hide things that are not used, while keeping them ready for use.
4. Harmonious and relaxing decoration: Colors have a very important influence on the mood. We can achieve a significant improvement.
5. Oxygenated and flavored: The quality of the air is a very important element for our health. Ventilating will avoid the mold formation, and provide a good proportion of oxygen and a relaxing aroma.
6. Clean and healthy: A little dirt has proved positive to avoid allergies, but beyond that we can find other contraindications. Living with an excessive variety of flora and fauna in the home is not usually synonymous with a healthy lifestyle. Making an extension to the Latin

“Mens sana in corpore sano”, we could say
“Healthy mind in healthy house”.

7. Illuminated: Depending on the use we are going to give to a space, it should have different intensity or color of light. Our state of mind can be very seriously affected by the amount of sunlight we receive each day, as well as our vital productivity.
8. Thermally adequate: Like the lighting, each room should have a temperature according to the activity that will be done in it.
9. Multipurpose: It is impossible to occupy two rooms at the same time, the best option is to have a space in which to do multiple activities.

Things that are superfluous

Are we our memories, the things we accumulate? According to the most serious research, our memory is not what it seems. It is true that things can help us to link our memory but it is also true that we build our memories, forget the unpleasant parts and strengthen our ego.

There comes a point in the process when you realize you already have everything you need. It will be a magical moment from which to build a new relationship with things and end attachments.

We will have to eliminate from our lives everything that does not give us anything, that occupies our mind, our financial resources and our available space. A good way can be getting rid of one thing every day, with a couple of questions: Does it add value to my life? Is there any chance that you will use it in the future?

1. Garbage. Sometimes it is not easy to recognize it as such, it has been there for a long time and seems to be a memory waiting for its time, but when we look at it with other people's eyes we can see that it has no use, no value, it makes our environment ugly and takes up valuable space.
2. Just in case. The future is a great unknown, so, in anticipation of our future needs and to try to be covered before any eventuality, we are accumulating things that have ceased to be useful in the present. This can become a serious psychological dysfunction called Diogenes syndrome. Without reaching this pathological extreme, it is clear that this snow shovel is not going to be very useful if there is a snowfall in your house that requires its use once every twenty years.
3. Redundant. Some risky activities need to have maximum safety measures in place and redundant elements prepared, but in life we don't have many of these circumstances. Wearing a belt and suspenders is not only impractical, but it also denotes a certain paranoia.
4. Deteriorated. In our life there are many objects that still do the function for which they were designed, but do not meet all expectations. Very possibly it consumes more time in maintenance than the benefit it generates. In Japan, they have turned the repair of crockery into an art form they call Kintsugi, you can either join that trend, or get rid of that glass with the chipped rim for once :-)
5. Ornaments. The concept of embellishment is overrated. Beauty is in simplicity. We use these

objects in our houses, cars and ourselves and, if we look at anthropological explanations, we can see that they are completely unnecessary. The ideal would be to be able to achieve functional and beautiful designs without the need to use adjuncts of subjective beauty. As I write this, I am in a hotel room in the Czech Republic, in a fairly comfortable bamboo chair, but looking at a sort of red velvet armchair in the shape of a flower, of dubious functionality.

6. Ugly. We think it's ugly, we know it's ugly, everyone agrees on its poor aesthetic qualities, but it's still in our lives for strange emotional reasons or for the price we pay for it. Look in the closet, there are a few pieces that fit into this category.
7. Anchors to negative memories. Although they may have a practical function and an acceptable aesthetic, we have some objects among our belongings that evoke negative experiences, that make us remember every day things we would like to leave behind. Move through life by taking out of your routine those items that do not bring you happy thoughts.

Relationships

Minimalism is a holistic concept, a minimal life has to do not only with material possessions, but also with social relations. In the rethinking that we have to do of a good life we will possibly find that we need more time shared with others. There are numerous studies that have proven that happy people have many friends and fluid relationships.

Some people are more developed than others; it is not only a question of education. Dozens of people pass

through our lives every day, among them we will find a few interesting, friendly, cordial and empathetic people with whom we like to spend as much time as possible and, on the other hand, simple, unpleasant, closed, selfish and negative people whom we try to avoid as much as possible (sometimes you may discover that you are the toxic person in some relationship). Relationship circles will be family, work, academic, friendship or leisure circles, and it is up to us to make them a source of happiness.

Cultivating relationships with smart and deep people will take us to a higher level, enriching our own existence, filling it with knowledge, balance and affection. For this reason, although it may sound a bit crude, we must raise the quality of our social circles as much as we can. In some cases we will have to dispense with some toxic people in our lives (it will be difficult if they are part of the family), other times we will have to avoid deepening low performance relationships (they take more effort than benefit) and in others we will have to look for the way to establish new relationships. The key to achieving the goal will be to think in terms of win-win, it is necessary for both parties in a relationship to benefit in the long term for the relationship to endure. Don't forget that there is a maximum number of people that we can relate to and that is defined by our cognitive abilities, this figure is around 150 people and is called the Dunbar number. According to this professor of anthropology, after studying social groups from the Neolithic period to the offices of today, beyond this number social cohesion weakens and loses effectiveness.

Habits

We are aware that we have accumulated bad habits over the years. To change them for good ones is a

titanic task, but one that brings enormous benefits. There is a widespread myth that you need to do one thing at least twenty-one days to establish a habit. This is not the case with me. I have tried many times and the result is nothing when it comes to positive habits. In the few cases in which I manage to overcome the three weeks of constancy, there is always some "good reason" to abandon what I have achieved. What has worked for me is the long term, maintaining the direction, allowing the rudder to move smoothly.

There are hundreds of books on personal development that can help you change your habits, I'll take a study from BJ Fogg's Stanford University that outlines three steps:

1. Be specific. Define in detail the behaviors that lead to the objective.
2. Keep it simple. Seek the strategy through simple actions to achieve the objective. Change small habits. When you know how to create small habits you can change your life forever. It is very easy to do small things, easy to get motivated. Dividing a big task into smaller ones allows you to overcome huge challenges.
3. Activate behavior. Trigger is the word. It is about linking the actions to be performed with something that reminds them, with something that is already part of our routine. After... (established habit) I will do... (new habit). We have to turn into a routine the actions that bring us closer to the objective.

This could be a wish list that I'd like to turn into habits:

- Go slowly. Both in doing and in thinking. Taking my time.
- Doing fewer things, and being more conscious while doing them.
- Eat better. Simplify the foods, the processes, and the way I eat them.
- Walk and live actively. Take care of myself. Physical exercise provides us with much of the chemistry our brains need to be healthy.
- Get rid of technology. Not forgetting which is the means and which is the end.
- Have fun and laugh every day. Without those endorphins I'm nothing.
- Be grateful for what I have. I probably secrete endorphins too.
- Being optimistic and thinking I can handle anything. The pygmalion effect is very powerful.
- Learn every day. Don't forget that, among other things, we are what we know.
- Persevere and be patient. The road to success is often laborious.
- Tell the truth and be real. Cultivate kindness.
- Be assertive, especially when it comes to valuing our time. Maintain your posture. Especially the mental one.
- Contribute to the community, help others. Everything you give, always comes back.
- Have a purpose and work for it. Keep it in mind.

- Meditate, relax, breathe, sleep more, spend time alone.
- Think big. Accept responsibility and challenge.
- Enjoy nature... it's in our nature. Helping nature.
- Practice acceptance. Flow at one's own pace, without resistance.
- To be creative. To innovate. To experiment. Explore new paths.
- Cultivate friendship and get away from toxic people. Make eye contact.
- Leave excuses aside, everyone has one... Complaining doesn't help much either :-(
- Seeing less news and getting carried away by random searches on the net. Less information and more training.
- Keep my spaces tidy, functional and minimal.
- Writing. This activity I think I have already managed to make a habit of it.
- Listening to more music. There are so many benefits in this activity that it should be mandatory.
- Be proactive. Create my own opportunities, not wait. Make commitments.
- Look at things differently. Familiar eyes are often quite limited.
- Being happy here and now seems to be the most practical option, there may be no tomorrow.

8. The Zen path

Zen philosophy has been defined over the centuries, with the contributions of many masters. In general, it is useful to face many situations in personal relationships thanks to its principles (honesty, kindness, compassion, forgiveness...), but also some of these principles will be very suitable to approach us towards the minimum:

1. Free yourself from attachments to fully enjoy life.

People are attached to many things, living and inert, material and immaterial: people, belongings, career, dreams and hopes, image, the past... Such behavior is harmful and only brings suffering to life by making us more vulnerable, weak and dependent.

We have been caught in a mental trap and we seek happiness and freedom on the outside, when both reside within us. Discovering this truth opens the way to enlightenment.

The logic against attachment comes from the fact that nothing is permanent, everything ends, and if we have that attachment we will suffer loss. The way to live without attachment is not to live without anything or anyone around, it would be to appreciate what you have, be grateful for it, enjoy it and not wait any longer. That will be the way to live a full life.

2. Don't fight the stream, flow with it.

In a mythical television commercial Bruce Lee appeared saying the phrase: "Be water my friend". That is a basic principle of the individual in the face of

the enormous forces of society. Don't resist, the more adaptable you are, the less resistance you have to change, the easier it will be for you to stay away from the pressure of the enormous consumerist machine.

3. Accepting and learning to let go brings peace and freedom.

Learning to let go and letting go are basic premises, not only in Zen philosophy, but in all those inclined to a full life, binding yourself to something limits you, chains you, doesn't let you grow, doesn't give you space to live new and better experiences. Take the experience for your learning, but let go of what hurts you, what is unnecessary, what resents you, the thoughts that burden you. Accept and let go.

It is essential to concentrate on the present, to stop living in the past or worrying about what will happen in the future. We have no control over what happened and little can be done for the future if we do not work fully in the present. The present is the only important thing, it is the only time we can live in freedom.

4. Nothing is permanent.

The path of Zen encourages us to accept that everything in life is perishable. Nothing lasts forever so it is very likely that, at some point, we will experience a loss. There is nothing we can do about it and negative feelings are a waste of time, very unproductive.

While I am writing we are in the midst of the 2020 pandemic. Everything is paralyzed, people are afraid of contagion, of being infected, but most of all they seem to be afraid of dying. They're stopping living in the present, paralyzed by the possibility of dying. As

far as we know, dying is a certainty, if we don't accept that we will be in a permanent state of anxiety, paralyzed and unable to live.

The acceptance of impermanence will help us to appreciate more everything we have, especially people. It will also help us to be aware of the freedom we enjoy in the present moment. It will also help us to relativize and put into perspective what is happening to us and our enormous potential to develop our potential.

If we manage to become fully aware of what life means we will be able to live it, otherwise we will waste it. We need a state of mind of full consciousness, where we can take action without fear of failure.

By realizing that we will not live forever and that we have little control over life, we can focus on the present, on what we have, on who we are.

5. Live simply.

It is not easy to know how to achieve true happiness but everything points to the fact that this can be the direction. We are not talking about reaching the simplicity of a Buddhist monk, with a few material things and a life devoted to prayer or caring for others... But there is a long way to go to simplify the possessions, relationships and desires that occupy our life.

Getting rid of unnecessary things, toxic relationships and impossible desires makes us free. Independence makes us strong. Wanting little makes us rich.

6. Everything is perfect just the way it is.

"When you realize how perfect everything is you will tilt your head back and laugh at the sky. - Buddha
We live in a rat race to accumulate objects, experiences, people... looking for the perfection that always escapes, without realizing that everything is perfect, just the way it is. If something is not perfect it is because we have created an image of perfection in our mind and we try to achieve that image, but that perfection only exists in our imagination, it is not real.

If we manage to understand that our ideas are not reality and we accept things as they are, we will stop looking for the impossible and we will be able to be happy without changing anything.

9. Path to Freedom

I don't expect anything. I fear nothing.
I am free.

- *Nikos Kazantzakis*

Freedom is one of the highest aspirations of our civilization and I think that our path to the minimum brings us closer to it than any other mental process can. Getting rid of attachments to things and people, getting rid of the fear of losing them is the key to personal freedom and does not depend on the intentions of others, on laws, on systems... it is something that can only be achieved from the inside. We live in our body, not in our house, not in our things, not in a geographical space or in a state built by a social agreement.

We have given our freedom to the state, to big business and to others, allowing them to manipulate our destinies in the most crude way. Luckily, it is not difficult to take control again: stop accepting their lies and overcome the conditioning that the system has tried to brand you.

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