THE SPACE BETWEEN US

Reflections on Presence, Connection, and What Happens in the Silence of Life as a Couple

dr. Marcello de Souza

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"What distinguishes those who build from those who erodeis not perfect presence.It is the awareness of one's own absence."

— Marcello de Souzaa

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INTRODUCTION

Before We Begin — An Honest Word

This book was not written to comfort.

It was written to name.

There is a difference between the two that is rarely spoken aloud: comfort, when offered too soon, closes the space where understanding might have happened. Naming, by contrast, opens. Naming is saying this exists, this has weight, this deserves to be looked at directly — even when looking directly hurts more than looking away.

What you hold in your hands is the result of a deliberate choice: the choice not to treat life as a couple as a problem with a known solution. Because it is not. Relational life is something far more alive, more unpredictable, and more dignified than any manual could address — and the deepest respect one can offer to those who live it is not to pretend it is simple when it is not.

These five texts were born in sequence, but each can be read alone. Together, they form something that only became fully visible when the last was written: not a series about what is wrong in relationships, but a cartography of the inner territory of two people who love each other and still cannot, at certain crucial moments, reach each other.

The first text begins where almost no one has the courage to begin: not in the fight, not in the betrayal, but in the silence that precedes everything — in the invisible mechanism by which two people build, together and without realizing it, their own distance. The second asks about the quality of presence: do you share space with someone, or do you truly inhabit someone? The third names a form of loneliness that almost no one has words for — that of someone who is inside the relationship and yet inhabits alone the most alive part of themselves. The fourth examines the mechanism by which accumulated history can hijack the present of those who try to rebuild the bond. The fifth inhabits the only place where any true decision can be born — the territory between the end and the new beginning, that dense and necessary space that the modern world does everything to prevent from being lived.

There is no arc here from problem to solution. There is an arc from surface to depth — from the silent mechanism of destruction to the hardest question a human being can ask themselves within a relationship: what do I, truly, want?
Some people will read this book and recognize what they are living right now. Others will recognize what they have lived and could not yet name. Others still will read and recognize the other — the partner, the former partner, someone they loved and could not meet in the way they needed.

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All of these recognitions are valid. All of them are a starting point for something.

One last thing before we begin.

This book will not tell you what to do. It will not tell you whether to stay or go, to try again or recognize that what existed between you is over. Not because those decisions do not matter — they are, perhaps, the most important a person can make. But because no honest text can make for you what only you can make. What a text can do — the most a text can do — is create the space where the right question finds the right silence to finally be answered.

If that happens at any point in the reading, the book has done what it set out to do.

Read slowly. Some pages will ask that of you.

— Marcello de Souza

CHAPTER 1

YOU DIDN'T DESTROY WITH WHAT YOU SAID.
YOU DESTROYED WITH WHAT YOU CHOSE NOT TO FEEL.

Think about the last time you said something that deeply hurt someone you love. It wasn't just any ordinary day. There was something before that moment — a silent accumulation, a tension without a name, a distance growing so slowly that neither of you could measure it. The cruel word didn't come from nowhere. It came from a place you never wanted to look at.

The debate around verbal abuse in relationships is misplaced. Not because the subject isn't urgent — it is, deeply so. But because almost every conversation about it starts at the wrong moment: it starts with the words spoken. And by starting with the words, we've already lost what matters most.

The wounding word is only the surface. What lies beneath it — that is the question no one has the courage to investigate.

The Crime Begins Before the Crime Scene
There is a very comfortable illusion that relationships collapse at the moment of explosion. In the fight that went too far. In the insult that cannot be undone. In the door slammed hard enough to shake what remained of the structure between two people who once chose each other.

This illusion is seductive because it frees us from a far more uncomfortable responsibility: looking at what happens before. At the apparently neutral daily life where nothing explodes, nothing screams, nothing bleeds — and, precisely for that reason, nothing is noticed.

It is in that silent territory that everything begins.
There is a fundamental difference between a relationship that ended in a fight and a relationship that ended much earlier, except nobody was honest enough to say so. Most couples who separate didn't actually separate on the day of the confrontation. They had already been separated for months, perhaps years — separated in that way of looking away when the other enters the room, in that silence that is not peace but absence, in that habit of answering without listening, of smiling without being present, of touching without feeling.

The fight was merely the death certificate. The body had already grown cold.

Affective Anesthesia: How Two Bodies Become Strangers Without Realizing It
There is a process I call affective anesthesia — and it is, by far, the most dangerous phenomenon inside a long relationship. More than fights. More than betrayals. More than incompatibilities that were never resolved.

Affective anesthesia happens when a human being learns, within the relationship itself, that feeling is dangerous. That opening up results in unreciprocated vulnerability. That genuine intimacy was received so poorly so many times — with indifference, with irony, with distraction — that the organism, in a gesture of self-preservation, begins to shut down. Not as a conscious choice. As survival.

Think about how this shows up in daily life. You share something that matters to you — a small achievement, an old fear, a dream that seems silly but is yours — and the other person is looking at their phone. Or responds with a "hm" while typing. Or changes the subject without even realizing there was a subject. This is not malice.

Most of the time, it is simply distraction. But the impact is the same: a message received by the other's emotional system saying, without words, that what you brought wasn't valuable enough to interrupt the scrolling of a screen.

Once, fine. Twice, a distraction. Fifty times over two years? The organism learns. And stops bringing.

This is how two beings who loved each other intensely begin to coexist like apartment mates with a shared history. The routine continues. The dinners continue. The bed continues. What has disappeared has no form, no easy name. It is a quality of presence. It is the fact that neither of them feels, upon entering the same room, that the air changes.

What Really Precedes the Wounding Word

Let's return to the moment of explosion. Because it matters — just not for the reason we think.

When someone says something cruel to the person they love, that word rarely came from nowhere. Before it, there is an accumulation of small unspoken things that were compressing. There is the frustration of needing and not being seen. There is the exhaustion of trying to connect and finding glass. There is, often, a pain that found no adequate language and, without language, became pressure. And pressure, eventually, finds an exit.

This is not an excuse for what was said. It is an archaeology of what was lived.

There is a radical difference between understanding and justifying. Understanding where verbal cruelty comes from — the mechanisms that anticipate it, the internal state that produces it — is an act of affective intelligence. Justifying it is emotional cowardice.

The problem is that relationship culture tends to collapse these two things, and so we commit two simultaneous errors: we punish the explosion without investigating what fueled it, and we ignore what fueled it because we are too busy with the explosion.

Before continuing, a necessary warning.

The human being who is genuinely emotionally flooded — overwhelmed, feeling invisible, exhausted from not being seen — does not explode because they are cruel. They explode because something inside them still wants to be heard. In that specific case, the cruelty is a distorted form of calling out. A failed attempt at connection.

But there is a boundary that must be named clearly — because ignoring it would be irresponsible. There is a radical difference between the person who explodes because they don't know how to contain what they feel and the person who explodes because they have learned that exploding works. The first is dysregulated. The second is in control — and uses the appearance of dysregulation as a tool. The person acting in this second way is not flooded: they are calculating. They are not asking for connection: they are exercising dominance. This distinction is not only psychological — it is ethical. Confusing the two is, often, what keeps someone trapped in a relationship that has already become a field of violence, convinced that the problem is communication when the problem, in truth, is power.

This does not make the calling-out acceptable. It makes the work deeper than simply "learning to communicate better." And, in certain cases, it makes the only healthy exit not the repair of the bond, but the leaving of it.

The Silence Nobody Taught Us to Read

There is a type of verbal abuse that most relationship manuals fail to name adequately: the abuse of strategic silence. Not the silence that comes from reflection, from conscious restraint, from the choice not to speak when speaking would be worse. I am talking about silence as a weapon. Silence as punishment. The silence that says "you don't even deserve my anger — you deserve my indifference."

This silence does not shout. It does not insult. It does not threaten. And that is precisely why it goes unrecognized as violence. But anyone who has been on the other side of it knows that the feeling is one of disappearance. Of being erased from someone's existence while still occupying the same physical space. Few affective experiences are as disorienting as this one: existing in front of someone who has chosen not to see you.

Punishing silence is a form of control. It works because it activates in human beings one of the most primitive fears that exist: the fear of being abandoned, of not belonging, of being irrelevant to someone who matters. And when that fear is activated, the person being silenced will frequently do anything to break the silence — including yielding on issues where they shouldn't, apologizing for things they didn't do, diminishing themselves to fit into a space that was deliberately narrowed.

This is power. And power exercised emotionally inside a relationship that calls itself love is a contradiction that deserves to be named without euphemisms.

The Criticism That Disguises Itself as Care

There is another form of verbal violence that is, perhaps, the most sophisticated of all — because it presents itself with the face of love. It is the constant criticism wrapped in concern.

The comment that begins with “I’m saying this because I care” and ends with an evaluation that diminishes. The unsolicited advice that is, in truth, a verdict. The correction that departs from the implicit assumption that the other is always slightly beneath what they should be.

Imagine an everyday scene: you prepare dinner — with care, with intention, with presence. And the first thing you hear is “it’s good, but last time it was more seasoned.” That “but” is a knife. Small. But a knife.

What this kind of communication does, repeated over months and years, is establish an emotional hierarchy inside the relationship. One person becomes, implicitly and constantly, the evaluator — and the other, the evaluated. And the evaluated, over time, stops taking risks. Stops showing up. Learns that every genuine expression will be met with a grade, and begins presenting only what they already know will pass the evaluation.

When this happens, intimacy — that zone where human beings appear as they truly are, without rehearsal, without defense — simply ceases to exist. What remains in its place is a performance. Two beings playing a safe version of themselves, before a partner who has become, whether unwittingly or with full awareness, an audience that applauds with standards.

What Lies Beneath: The Question That Changes Everything
If the wounding word is a symptom, the relevant question is not “how do I stop speaking this way.” The relevant question is: “what am I feeling that I cannot put into form?”

This is, at once, the simplest and the most difficult question a human being can ask themselves inside a relationship. Simple because any child understands the logic.

Difficult because it demands a capacity that most of us were never taught to develop: that of sitting with one's own discomfort without immediately needing to externalize it.

We didn't learn to feel. We learned to react. We are culturally trained to act in the face of emotion — to solve, fix, avoid, attack, flee — because standing still before something that hurts is perceived as weakness. And so, when emotion arrives, it becomes behavior before it becomes consciousness.

The cruel word is, most of the time, an emotion that never passed through consciousness. That went from the internal state directly to speech, without stopping at any intermediary point where it might have been recognized, named, assessed, transformed.

The work of transforming communication in a relationship does not begin with communication. It begins with each person's capacity to perceive what is happening inside themselves before they open their mouth.

The Relationship as a Field of Development — or of Destruction

Every intimate relationship is, by nature, a field of activation. The other accesses us in layers that no other context reaches. Knows our scars, our shames, our oldest patterns. And for that reason holds a singular power: the power to heal us or to reaffirm the damage we already carried before we found each other.

A relationship that becomes a field of communicational destruction rarely begins that way. It begins with two people who desperately wanted to be seen and who, at some point, learned they would not be — not in the deepest way, not in the way that truly mattered. And so each one began building protective strategies that, paradoxically, became the very barriers to what they most wanted.

He stopped bringing vulnerability because she always had a ready solution — and ready solutions make vulnerability feel misplaced. She stopped asking because he rarely actually stopped to listen — and asking without being heard is more painful than not asking. He began using irony because he no longer knew how to say he was afraid. She began criticizing because it was the only way she had found to participate — because when she tried to engage differently, he ignored her.

Two beings who began wanting the same thing — to be seen, loved, understood — and who build, together, the perfect system to prevent exactly that. This is the most common and least discussed paradox of long relationships.

What It Really Means to Speak With Love
Speaking with love is not speaking softly. It is not always finding the right words. It is not never getting irritated or never losing elegance in the heat of a difficult conversation.

Speaking with love is speaking with presence. It is truly being inside the conversation — not planning what you will say while the other is still talking, not processing and judging in parallel, not with half your attention somewhere else. It is being there with your body, with your gaze, with the genuine intention to understand — not to win, not to convince, not to defend.

Speaking with love also means acknowledging when you have been wrong — not with the kind of apology that is more a piece of ego defense than genuine accountability. The authentic "I'm sorry, I was wrong" does not come accompanied by "but you also..." It comes alone. Complete. Without clauses.

And speaking with love — perhaps this is the rarest part — is having the courage to say what is really happening, before it becomes pressure, before it becomes explosion, before it becomes the words that will echo for weeks in the memory of whoever heard them.

"I feel distant from you and I don't know how to get closer" is one of the most difficult sentences to say inside a relationship. And perhaps the most important.

Love Is Not Protected by Beautiful Words. It Is Protected by Real Consciousness.
There is a persistent belief that relationships that last are those where people "communicate well." As though there were a technique, a set of strategies, a correct grammar that, once learned, would solve the problem.

Technique helps. But technique without consciousness is like placing a bandage over a wound that hasn't been cleaned yet. It maintains the appearance of something cared for while continuing to infect underneath.

What protects a long-lasting love is not the absence of conflict. It is the quality of presence with which two people face conflict — and, more than that, the quality of presence with which they inhabit ordinary days, those where nothing explodes, nothing shouts, nothing demands urgent resolution. It is in those days that love is built or emptied.

Each time you choose to look into the other's eyes instead of at the screen. Each time you stop what you are doing to truly listen. Each time you say what you feel before that feeling transforms into something that hurts. Each time you acknowledge that you were wrong without needing the other's error to be greater so you can feel at peace. Each of those moments is a brick.

But here we must be honest about a risk. The idea of total presence — always available, always with your eyes in the right place, always able to stop everything — can become, for someone living under overload, just one more demand. One more thing they are failing at. And that is not the intention. Real life has sick children, impossible deadlines, sleepless nights and days when exhaustion is greater than any good intention. That is not a failure of love. It is the human condition.

What differentiates those who build from those who erode is not perfect presence. It is the consciousness of one's own absence. It is the capacity to perceive — before accumulation turns into distance — that you are not managing to be present, and having enough honesty to say that to the other:

“I’m here, but not fully. I need a moment to return.” That sentence, said in time, is worth more than hours of forced presence where the body is there but the mind is not. The other doesn’t need a performance of attention. They need you — and sometimes “you” includes your limits, named clearly.

And the question that remains, after all of this, is not “can I stop saying things that hurt?” The question is another, more honest, more demanding:

Am I willing to truly feel what is happening inside me — before that thing finds the wrong way out?

That willingness is not a gift. It is a choice. And it is, without exaggeration, the difference between a relationship that survives time and a relationship that is consumed by it.

You don’t need to be perfect. You need to be present. And present, here, means: being conscious enough to know what you carry — before placing that weight on the shoulders of someone you say you love.

CHAPTER 2

DO YOU LIVE WITH SOMEONE OR DO YOU INHABIT SOMEONE?

The silent difference between coexisting and truly meeting in a relationship

Think for a moment. Not about what you would say if someone asked how your relationship is going. Think about what happens in that exact moment when you and your partner are in the same space, breathing the same air, occupying the same room — and yet you feel alone.

It is not the loneliness of abandonment. It is something more unsettling: the loneliness of someone who is accompanied.

This feeling has a name, though it is rarely spoken aloud. It is called coexistence. And it is, perhaps, the most sophisticated form of distance a couple can build — because it disguises itself as stability, as routine, as comfort, as security. Because it comes with WiFi and paid bills and children and travel plans. Because it looks like love, but is in fact the skeleton of love: the structure without the warmth.

Coexisting is sharing space. Inhabiting someone is sharing the interior.

The question I propose here is not easy, and it was not meant to be. It is one of those questions that, once it truly lands, never leaves: do you live with someone — or do you inhabit someone?

What It Means to Inhabit Another Person
Inhabiting has nothing to do with the length of a relationship, the number of conversations, or the frequency of affection. Couples who have been together for decades can be profoundly strangers to each other. And there are young relationships, still at their beginning, where two beings recognize each other in a way most people never experience.

Inhabiting someone is a quality of presence. It is when the other is not merely a reference in your life, but a living territory you keep exploring — with genuine curiosity, with care that does not age, with a listening that is not waiting for its turn to speak.

Inhabiting is when your vulnerability finds welcome, not management. When you do not need to edit who you are to be accepted. When the silence between you is not uncomfortable — it too is inhabited.

There is a radical difference between being tolerated and being received. Between being convenient and being desired. Between being part of someone's routine and being part of someone's inner world. Most relationships slip quietly from the second condition to the first — and this slide happens so slowly that neither person notices.

Relationships do not die when love ends. They die when attention to the other transforms into management of the other.

The Trap of Affective Efficiency
We live in a culture that optimizes everything. Time, work, the body, goals. And without our realizing it, this logic contaminates life as a couple as well. We begin to manage the relationship as though it were a project:

weekly meetings disguised as dinner, travel goals disguised as shared dreams, performance reports disguised as conversations about how we are doing.

Affective efficiency is when you resolve what the other feels before even listening to the end. When you already know what they are going to say and, because of that, do not pay attention to what they are actually saying. When love stops being an experience and becomes a well-managed responsibility.

There is no villain in this story. There are two exhausted human beings, overwhelmed by the external world, who come home and simply have no more energy for what real intimacy requires: presence. Integral presence. The kind that is not holding a phone, or thinking about tomorrow's email, or on autopilot repeating gestures of love without feeling love.

The relationship continues. The connection is gone.

What Really Separates Two Beings Who Live Together
It is not the big fight. Not the betrayal. Not the problem that appears and divides. The most common separation between two people who love each other happens in invisible micro-moments: in the instant you chose your phone over the conversation. On the day you stopped asking how they were really doing. On the night you touched each other out of habit, without desire. In the moment you stopped being curious about the other's inner universe.

Each of these moments, in isolation, seems insignificant. Accumulated over months and years, they build a wall so subtle that neither person knows exactly when it was erected.

And then, one day, both realize they have become life partners without being soul companions. That they share the bed, the expenses, the plans — but no longer share what happens inside. That they have learned to live with the distance without ever having chosen it.

The greatest risk in a relationship is not conflict. It is the progressive domestication of intimacy.

Domesticating intimacy is making it predictable, too safe, without edges, without surprise. It is when you already know exactly what the other will want, think, feel — and that predictability, which seemed like comfort, is in fact the sign that you stopped looking at them as someone who can still surprise you.

Human beings grow, change, transform. The being you met ten years ago is not the same person today. If you are still treating them as if they were — you are not in a relationship with them. You are in a relationship with a memory.

The Intimacy No One Teaches

We learn to communicate to solve problems. We do not learn to communicate to reveal ourselves. This distinction is brutal and almost never discussed.

There are conversations that organize life — about bills, children, commitments, decisions. And there are conversations that construct the couple's inner life. It is not the volume of words that matters, but what they carry. A simple question like 'what is passing through you right now?' can open a universe that weeks of conversations about routine could not touch.

Real intimacy is not about knowing the facts of the other's life. It is about knowing the flavor of the other's inner experiences — what truly frightens them, what still fills them with wonder, where life still hurts, where it still pulses with hope. It is about being the person for whom the other does not need to perform anything.

This demands a courage that few admit is difficult: the courage to be seen. Not the self that functions well, that resolves, that sustains, that pleases. The self that doubts, that fears, that does not know, that sometimes gets lost. Vulnerability is not weakness — it is the only real path to depth.

And here lies one of the most painful ironies of relationships: the more we care about what the other will think, the less we show ourselves. The less we show ourselves, the more we become strangers within the home. The more strangers we become, the more distance grows. The more distance grows, the harder it is to return.

Intimacy is not a destination. It is a daily practice of choosing to be seen — and choosing to see.

What Distinguishes a Relationship That Transforms

There are relationships that pass through life as scenery. And there are relationships that build who you are.

The difference is not in the absence of conflict — it is in what happens inside the conflict. In a relationship that transforms, the argument is not about who wins. It is about what is trying to emerge between the two. There is an awareness that the other is not the enemy — they are the most honest mirror you will ever have in life.

In a relationship that transforms, there is space for both to grow without one needing to shrink for the other to fit. The autonomy of each does not threaten the union — it nourishes it. Each has a vivid and nutritive inner world that they bring back to the other, enriching what is shared.

In a relationship that transforms, boredom is treated as a signal — not of an ending, but of an invitation. An invitation to discover what has not yet been explored in the other, in the bond, in oneself. Sameness is faced with curiosity, not resignation.

And above all: in a relationship that transforms, presence is the greatest proof of love. Not gifts. Not grand gestures. Not declarations on social media. Presence — the kind that says to the other, without words: 'I am here. Whole. For you. Now.'

The Moment When Everything Can Change

There is a moment — and it comes for almost everyone — when you look to the other side of the bed, or the table, or the room, and think: 'When did we become this?' There is no accusation in that question. There is astonishment. The astonishment of someone who realizes they allowed something to slip away without noticing they were supposed to hold it.

That moment comes with two possibilities. The first is silence: turning to the other side, breathing deeply, and letting life continue as it is, because changing seems harder than continuing. The second is courage: looking at that astonishment and recognizing it as the most honest call a relationship can make.

It is not too late when two beings realize they have drifted apart. It is too late when they decide it is not worth trying to find each other again.

And finding each other again is not about going back to the beginning — it is discovering that they can build something deeper than what they had before. Mature love is not the love that was never shaken. It is the love that was — and consciously chose to rebuild itself.

Relationships that last are not those that never needed effort. They are those that were chosen — every day — even when choosing was difficult.

A Question to Carry With You

If your partner could describe how they feel when they are with you — not what they think of you, but how they feel — what would they say?

Seen? Heard? Free? Safe? Desired? Interesting?

Or would they describe something that hurts more to name: invisible, managed, tolerated, predictable, lonely within the company?

This question is not meant to be answered here. It is meant to be lived. To be taken into the space between the two of you — that space which, depending on what you place in it, can be the coldest or the warmest place in the world.

Because a relationship is not what you build in the grand moments. It is what happens in the silence of a Tuesday night, when there is nothing special going on and yet both of you choose to be — truly — there for each other.

That is what distinguishes living with someone from inhabiting someone.

And now that you have read this far, something has changed. Perhaps small. Perhaps large. But something has moved. And when something moves within us, we are never quite the same again.

What you do with that — that is the only question that truly matters.

CHAPTER 3
WHEN ONLY ONE WANTS TO BE FOUND

The hardest loneliness to name: inhabiting depth alone inside a relationship of two

There is a scene that very few people describe out loud, but that many would recognise immediately if they saw it portrayed: you try to open a conversation that goes beyond the everyday, beyond the bills and the children and the plans for the week — and the other person changes the subject. Not with cruelty. With ease. Like someone who did not notice there was an invitation to something deeper.

You notice. You always notice. And for a fraction of a second — which can last years of accumulation — you feel something you do not quite know how to name. It is not anger. It is not disappointment. It is something quieter and heavier: the perception that you are ready for an encounter that the other does not recognise as possible.

This is the loneliness that no one talks about. Not the loneliness of abandonment, nor of betrayal, nor of physical absence. It is the loneliness of someone who is present, committed, inside the relationship — and who nevertheless inhabits alone the most alive part of themselves.

Before this text moves forward, something needs to be said clearly: this is not a text about culprits. There is no deep one and shallow one here, no evolved and limited. What exists is something far more complex and far less comfortable than an easy judgment — and it is precisely that territory that deserves to be traversed.

The hardest loneliness is not that of someone who is alone. It is that of someone who is accompanied and not found.

The Asymmetry That No One Chose

Every person carries a history with their own interiority. There are those who were taught, from an early age, to examine themselves — whether through the pain that forced introspection, the family that made the emotional world visible, or a temperament that naturally gravitates inward. And there are those for whom the interior has always been an uncomfortable, even threatening territory — and who learned, also for legitimate reasons, to live on the surface with competence and even with joy.

Neither of these trajectories is a conscious choice. No one decides to be shallow or deep. What exists is a formation — a set of experiences, bonds and learnings that shape each person's capacity to tolerate, explore and share their own inner world.

And when two people with very different trajectories in this regard meet and fall in love — and this happens far more often than we imagine — the asymmetry is formed. Not as a defect of the relationship. As a structural given within it.

The problem is not the difference itself. It is what happens when that difference is not recognised, named and treated with honesty. When the one who wants depth begins to interpret the other's surface as disinterest. When the one who prefers the surface begins to interpret the invitation to depth as criticism, as pressure, as a sign that they are never enough.

And both, from that point on, begin to hurt each other without understanding exactly why.

Two loves can be genuine and still be incompatible in the ways they need to be lived. That does not make either of them false — it makes the situation more honest and more difficult at the same time.

What Happens to the One Who Waits for the Encounter
The one who wants depth inside an asymmetric relationship tends to go through a cycle that repeats itself with variations, but always retains the same emotional architecture.

First, the attempt. The opening of a conversation, a gesture of intimacy, a question that goes beyond the surface. A vulnerability offered as a gift, in the hope that the other will receive it and respond with their own.

Second, the non-encounter. Which can appear in various forms: the change of subject, the functional response to an emotional invitation, humour as a detour, the silence that is not contemplative but evasive. The other does not withdraw with ill will — they withdraw because they do not know how to do otherwise, or because they did not notice there was an invitation.

Third, the withdrawal. The one who tried returns to themselves, carrying what they brought to the surface — now with an additional weight: that of having exposed themselves without being received. And gradually learns that certain territories of their own being need to be guarded. That vulnerability has a high cost here.

Fourth, the adaptation. Over time, the person who wants depth begins to reorganise. They learn not to try certain conversations. Not to expect certain kinds of presence. To seek elsewhere — in friends, therapy, writing, spirituality — what the relationship does not offer. And this works, up to a point.

The point at which it stops working is when adaptation becomes resignation. When the withdrawal ceases to be a strategy and becomes an identity. When the person begins to believe that what they need simply does not exist — or that it does not deserve to exist for them.

When someone learns not to attempt the encounter, it is not because they gave up on the other. It is because they learned, painfully, that trying carries a cost that is no longer sustainable.

What Happens to the One Who Does Not Know They Are on the Surface

This is where the text needs the courage to enter still less explored territory: the point of view of the one who, in the asymmetry, is at the surface pole.

This person, in most cases, does not know they are on the surface. They live the relationship as sufficient, as good, as real. They do not notice the invitations they did not receive. They do not feel the withdrawals that happened. For them, things are fine — and this perception is legitimate within their frame of reference.

What they feel, on the other hand, is something they often cannot articulate: a diffuse pressure, a sense that they are never quite enough for the other. A subtle atmosphere of dissatisfaction they cannot locate. And because they cannot locate it, they interpret it as demand. As excessive intensity. As a problem of the other, not as a blind spot of their own.

This does not make them insensitive. It makes them human within their constituted limitations — which, like all human limitations, can only be transformed when they are first recognised. And recognising a blind spot paradoxically requires someone from outside to illuminate it with enough care not to trigger immediate defensiveness.

That is one of the most delicate tasks that exists within a relationship: showing the other what they cannot see in themselves, without that becoming accusation, victimisation or war.

You cannot demand from someone what they genuinely do not know they are failing to give. But you also cannot pretend the absence does not exist — because pretending carries a cost that, eventually, the entire relationship pays.

The Summons That Cannot Be a Demand

The one who wants depth inside an asymmetric relationship frequently faces one of the most exhausting dilemmas that exists: how to invite the other into presence without the invitation becoming pressure? How to show what is missing without creating shame? How to express one's own need without turning it into an accusation?

The honest answer is that there is no formula. What exists is a fundamental distinction that needs to be clear before any attempt: inviting is not demanding. Showing is not reproaching. Needing is not punishing.

The summons to depth can only reach the other if it comes from a place of genuine openness — not accumulated frustration. If it comes as an offer, not a judgment. If it comes with patience for the other's timing, which may be different — and legitimate in its difference.

This is difficult. It requires the one who is hungry for depth to be able, before inviting, to regulate their own internal state. For the conversation not to happen after ten accumulated withdrawals, when the voice already carries the weight of everything that was not said. For it to be possible to speak of what is needed without making the other responsible for the accumulated suffering — even if they contributed to it.

And it also requires honesty about one's own limits: there are people who can expand their capacity for intimacy when they find the right environment. There are others for whom the surface is not a temporary limitation, but a relatively stable way of being. Recognising the difference — what is possible openness and what is a constitutive barrier — is not giving up. It is seeing clearly before deciding.

You can invite someone into a territory they do not yet know. You cannot compel them to want to explore it.

Is There a Limit to This Waiting?

This is the question no one wants to ask out loud inside a relationship. And it is precisely for that reason that it needs to be asked here.

There is a point at which continuing to wait for the encounter — without the encounter arriving — ceases to be patience and becomes dissolution of oneself. There is a point at which the adaptation becomes so deep that the person who wanted depth begins to unlearn that they wanted it. Where the silence about their own needs becomes the language of the relationship. Where they become, within the home, an edited and impoverished version of themselves.

And when this happens, the relationship has not only lost depth. It has lost one of its two beings.

There is an ethical responsibility — rarely discussed in the right terms — on the part of the partner on the surface to at least try to understand what is being asked. Not necessarily to reach the same depth — that may be genuinely impossible — but to recognise that there is a real need in the other, and that ignoring it indefinitely has consequences for the bond.

And there is, equally, a responsibility on the part of the one who waits for the encounter not to transform that waiting into silent martyrdom — which slowly corrodes from within what could still be saved from without. At some point, what is not said in words needs to be said. Not as an ultimatum, not as an accusation. As truth — which is the only raw material of any real encounter.

Holding in silence what is essential is not protecting the relationship. It is slow self-extinction within it.

What Can Be Built — And What Cannot

Not every asymmetry is insurmountable. There are relationships where the difference in capacity for intimacy was the very engine of growth for both: one learned to go deeper within themselves from the other's invitation; the other learned to tolerate the surface as a legitimate breathing space, not as failure.

For this to happen, certain conditions need to exist — and their absence is not a moral failing of anyone, but a real given that determines the possibilities of the bond.

The first condition is recognition. The partner on the surface needs to be capable of recognising, even if incompletely, that there is a dimension of the other they do not yet know how to reach. Without this minimum recognition, there is no starting point. Whoever does not see the blind spot cannot begin to work on it.

The second condition is willingness. Recognising the blind spot is necessary, but not sufficient. There needs to be some degree of desire to expand — not out of obligation, not to save the relationship, but because there is genuine curiosity about what lies on the other side of this internal frontier. Without willingness, any attempt at closeness becomes performance and exhausts both.

The third condition is time — not as a deadline, but as space. Expanding the capacity for intimacy does not happen in one conversation. It is a slow, non-linear process that includes retreats, misunderstandings, moments of closeness followed by distances. For this process to be possible, the one who waits for the encounter needs to be able to sustain the waiting without transforming it into constant pressure.

When these three conditions are absent — when there is no recognition, no willingness, and no space for the process — the honest question that needs to be asked is not 'how do I change the other', but 'what do I do with what is real?'

And this question has no universal answer. It has an answer per person, per life, per moment. Some answers include staying and reorganising expectations. Others include staying and seeking in other bonds what this one does not offer. Still others — and these are the hardest to admit and the most honest — include recognising that the incompatibility of depth is, in this case, structural. That both can love each other genuinely and still not be, in this specific dimension, what the other needs.

Loving someone does not guarantee that you are compatible in the ways you need to be loved. And recognising this is not defeat — it is the most honest way to respect yourself and the other.

The Dignity of Being Who You Are — Inside or Outside the Encounter

There is something that no relationship should cost: the integrity of who you are.

The one who wants depth and does not find it in the other does not need to become less deep so that the relationship survives. Compressing one's own inner world to fit into the other's surface is one of the highest prices anyone can pay — and the most silent. Because it does not bleed visibly. Because it looks like love. Because it calls itself adaptation and maturity, when it is, in reality, a slow form of disappearance.

The question worth asking is not 'how do I become smaller so that this works?' It is 'is there space, in this relationship, for me to be whole?'

And if the answer is no — not now, not in this form, not with what exists today — then the second question is: what is being done with that? Is it being talked about? Is it being buried? Is it being faced with the courage it deserves?

Because the real encounter — when it happens — does not require anyone to become smaller. It requires both to become more. More present, more honest, more courageous in their own vulnerability. And that, when it is reciprocal, even if asymmetric in rhythm, is one of the rarest and most beautiful phenomena that human life offers.

But when it is not reciprocal, the dignity of the one who waits for the encounter does not lie in waiting forever. It lies in continuing to be who they are — completely, without apology — inside or outside that specific relationship.

You do not need to shrink to be loved. If you do, it is worth asking whether what exists there is really love — or a managed version of love that only survives when you become smaller.

One Last Thing — For Both Sides
If you recognised yourself in the one who wants depth and does not find it: your need is legitimate. It is not excess, it is not excessive intensity, it is not a burden you should learn to dispense with. It is part of who you are. And it deserves a real place — not apologetic, not silenced — inside any relationship you choose to inhabit.

If you recognised yourself in the one on the surface without knowing it: that is also not a character failing. It is a starting point. The question is not whether you are capable of loving — it is whether you are willing to look at what you do not yet see in yourself. That willingness, when genuine, is already the beginning of an encounter.

And for both: the relationship worth having is not the one that never had this asymmetry. It is the one that found in it not the end of the conversation — but the beginning of the most important one that two beings can have.

The conversation about what each one truly needs to be whole. About what each one can give without losing themselves. About where the two meet — and where the two honestly need to recognise they have not yet arrived.

This conversation, when it truly happens, has no losers.

It has, at the very least, two beings who finally saw each other.

CHAPTER 4
WHEN HISTORY SPEAKS LOUDER THAN THE VOICE

What happens when two people want to find each other — and can no longer hear one another without the past answering in place of the present

Imagine the following scene. Two people who love each other, sitting in the same space, finally trying to have the conversation that hasn't happened in years. One of them speaks carefully. They chose their words. They breathed deeply before beginning. There is no accusation in the tone — there is, genuinely, an attempt at closeness.

The other listens. Or tries to listen. But something happens between the voice that speaks and the ear that receives: an unsolicited, automatic translation, which transforms what was said into something that wasn't. The words arrive, but they arrive loaded — not by what they carry today, but by what they represent within a long history of silences, withdrawals, moments when the same channel was used to wound, to disappoint, to fall short.

And so what was an invitation becomes a demand. What was openness becomes pressure. What was an attempt at encounter becomes, in the perception of the one who receives it, another round of the same old conflict that neither of them knows how to resolve anymore.

No one is lying in this scene. No one is acting in bad faith. Both are, in their own way, trying. And yet they cannot reach each other.

This is not a communication problem. It is something deeper, older, and more difficult to solve than any dialogue technique could handle: it is the weight of history that no longer fits inside today's words.

The silence accumulated over years does not disappear when someone finally speaks. It transforms into a filter — and begins to translate everything that arrives into its own language.

What Silence Does With Time

There is a comforting illusion about silence within relationships: that it preserves. That not saying something avoids conflict, protects the other, maintains peace. That things left unsaid are suspended somewhere neutral, waiting for the right moment to exist.

That is not how it works.

What is not said does not disappear. It deposits. Layer upon layer, each non-conversation, each silent withdrawal, each need swallowed out of fear of conflict or disbelief in the possibility of being heard — all of this forms a sediment that neither person sees clearly, but both feel constantly.

This sediment changes the quality of listening. Not abruptly, but progressively and almost imperceptibly. A couple that has lived through years of unsaid things develops, without realizing it, a parallel grammar for interpreting what the other does and says. A grammar built not from the other's actual intentions, but from a history of experiences with them. And this grammar, once established, operates automatically — before reason can even intervene.

This is why the same sentence, spoken by the same partner, can have radically different meanings depending on the moment in the relationship when it is spoken. In the beginning, "we need to talk" is intimacy. Years later, within a history of unresolved conflicts, the same phrase activates an alert system. Not because the person changed their intention. Because the channel through which they speak has changed in nature.

The silence accumulated over years does not disappear when someone finally speaks. It transforms into a filter — and begins to translate everything that arrives into its own language.

The Archaeology of What Lies Beneath

To understand what happens to couples at this stage, we need clarity about what exactly has accumulated. Because it is not only resentment — although resentment is there. It is something more structural.

The first stratum is made of unnamed needs. Things each person needed and never asked for — because they were afraid to ask, because they thought the other should perceive it alone, because they tried to ask once and weren't heard and decided never to try again. This stratum is the oldest and the most invisible. No one speaks of it because, often, they no longer even know it exists.

The second stratum is made of solidified interpretations. Each event in the relationship was interpreted — and these interpretations, repeated internally for long enough, became facts. "He never prioritizes me." "She is never satisfied." "For him, work always comes first." "For her, nothing I do is enough." These phrases began as impressions. With time, they became truths — and began to function as lenses through which all future behavior of the other is read.

The third stratum is made of failed attempts. Every time someone tried to change something and couldn't. Every conversation that began with hope and ended with more distance than there was before. Every gesture of closeness that was misinterpreted. Every moment when one of them opened up and was, in some way, disappointed. This stratum is the most active — because it is the one that determines whether someone will try again or conclude that trying is futile.

These three strata, together, form what we might call the archaeology of the relationship. And the problem is not that it exists — every relationship with history has its own. The problem is when it is not recognized. When both people navigate today's conversation without knowing they are walking on top of it.

Two people do not converse only with the words they are saying now. They converse with everything they said and did not say before. And when this history is not recognized, it governs the conversation without anyone having invited it.

Why Goodwill Is Not Enough

This is the part of the text that is most uncomfortable — and which, precisely for that reason, needs to be said carefully and without condescension.

There is a widely held belief that communication problems within a relationship are solved with sufficient goodwill. With better techniques. With more patience. With the decision to "do things differently this time." And this belief, though well-intentioned, can be cruelly misleading in relationships where the channel has already been eroded by years of accumulated history.

Not because goodwill doesn't matter. It matters enormously — it is a necessary condition for any rebuilding process. The problem is when it is treated as a sufficient condition.

Because the filter that history creates does not respond to the intention of the one who speaks. It responds to the pattern it recognizes. And when the pattern is sufficiently entrenched, even a genuinely different approach can be read as "more of the same" — because the system that interprets it is still operating with the old grammar.

Imagine that for years, every time one of them tried to talk about their needs, the conversation ended in conflict. The other learned, neurally, that this type of conversation leads to conflict. It is not a conscious decision. It is embodied learning — so deep that it operates before consciousness can even intervene. So when the person tries again — even with a different tone, even with genuine intention not to repeat the pattern — the other's system is already on alert before the first sentence finishes.

This is not a lack of love. It is history functioning as an immune system — identifying as threat what was a threat before, without yet being able to distinguish that this time it might be different.

Changing intention is the first step. But intention alone does not rewrite what the other's body has already learned to expect from you.

What It Means to Rebuild a Corroded Channel

Rebuilding is not returning. There is no going back to the point before the accumulated history — and trying to force it is one of the most common and most draining mistakes a couple can make.

That "let's start from scratch" that seems liberating in the decision and proves impossible in practice, because both are still the same people who lived through everything they lived through.

Rebuilding is constructing something that did not yet exist. A different channel — not cleaner, but more honest. A channel that acknowledges history instead of trying to erase it. That makes space for the sediment to be named before trying to pass over it.

And that begins not with a great conversation about everything left unresolved. It begins with something much simpler and much more difficult: the recognition, by both, that the channel is compromised. That it is not only the content of conversations that needs to change — it is the structure through which those conversations happen.

This recognition, when genuine, is already an extraordinary act of courage. Because it requires both to admit, at the same time, that they contributed to the current state of the channel — each in their own way, with their withdrawals and their silences and their solidified interpretations. Without that admission becoming a new round of blame.

It is possible to say: "I know that what I'm about to say will reach you loaded with history. I know you will hear not only my words of today, but the weight of everything that has been between us. I want you to know that I am aware of this — and that I am genuinely trying to speak from the present, even knowing the past will be in the room with us."

This sentence — or any honest variation of it — does not resolve anything on its own. But it creates something that must exist before any rebuilding: it names the elephant. It makes visible what was operating invisibly. And when something invisible is named, it loses part of its automatic power over the conversation.

One does not rebuild a corroded listening channel by ignoring the history that corroded it. One rebuilds it by passing through it — with enough honesty to name it and enough courage not to become its hostage.

When Two People Need a Third

There is a specific moment — and recognizing it is, in itself, an act of relational maturity — when the channel cannot be rebuilt by the two people alone. Not because love is insufficient, not because will is lacking, but because the history that corroded the channel was built by both within a dynamic that only exists between the two of them.

And dynamics that exist between two people rarely manage to be transformed by the same two people — because every attempt at transformation happens within the same dynamic that one wishes to transform. It is like trying to fix the floor while standing on it.

A third — whether a couples therapist, or another mental health professional capable of this work — is not there to arbitrate who is right. They are there to do something much more specific: to function as a temporarily neutral channel. A space where what is said does not arrive to the other already pre-translated by the old grammar. Where there is external witness to the intention of the one who speaks, which can help the one who listens to receive the message without the historical filter completely distorting it.

This is not weakness. It is precisely the opposite. It is the recognition that the problem is real enough to deserve a resource to match. That what was built over years of silence and non-encounter cannot be undone in a few well-intentioned conversations — and that insisting on trying alone, when the channel is already in this state, frequently produces more sediment, not less.

There are couples who arrive at this space and discover that what separated them was, in large part, a layer of poorly digested history — and that, with the channel temporarily sustained by a third, they manage to find each other in a way they never had before. There are others who arrive and discover that the incompatibility is deeper than the history — and even so the process was worthwhile, because it allowed both to leave with clarity rather than with more accumulated weight.

Neither of these outcomes is failure. Failure would be continuing to repeat the same dynamic for more years, hoping the channel will fix itself.

Asking for help to rebuild what two people built together is not admitting defeat. It is recognizing that some work requires more than love and intention — it requires competence and witness.

What Each Person Can Do — Alone, First

Before the rebuilding of the channel between the two can begin — with or without a third — there is work that each person can and must do within themselves. Work that does not depend on the other, that cannot be delegated to the relationship, and which is, often, what determines whether any external attempt will have ground to stand on.

The first movement is honest inventory. Not of the other's mistakes — that inventory is already done, detailed, and frequently updated. The inventory of oneself: at what moments did I choose silence when I should have spoken? In what situations did I interpret as intention what was perhaps limitation? Where did I contribute to the channel reaching this state? Not as self-mutilation — as lucidity.

The second movement is the separation between past and present. Learning to perceive, in real time, when it is history answering in place of the person you are today. When the irritation you feel is not about what the other did now, but about what they did two years ago that was never processed. When the distrust you feel is not about today's attitude, but about a pattern you learned to expect. This distinction — between what is current and what is archive — does not eliminate the archive. But it creates the possibility of responding to the present without being completely governed by the past.

The third movement is the most difficult and the rarest: the willingness to be surprised. The openness, however small, to the possibility that the other might be different from what history taught you to expect. Not naivety — clarity. The clarity that keeping the historical filter completely closed guarantees that nothing new can enter. And if nothing new can enter, rebuilding has nowhere to begin.

You do not need to erase history to begin building something new. You only need to create, within yourself, a space where the present can exist without being immediately swallowed by the past.

The Question This Text Cannot Answer For You

We have reached the most honest — and most uncomfortable — point of everything said here.

There are couples for whom the channel can be rebuilt. Where the history, however heavy, has not erased the fundamental will to find each other. Where there still exists, beneath everything, something that recognizes the other as someone worth the effort — not out of habit, not out of fear of change, not out of convenience, but out of a choice that, even difficult, is still genuine.

And there are couples for whom the most honest question is not "how do we rebuild the channel?" — but "what, in fact, are we trying to preserve?" If the answer is the structure — the house, the routine, the children, the image — the channel can be rebuilt functionally, but never fully. Because a listening channel that truly works needs something to listen to that is worth hearing — and that requires both to still want, deep down, to hear each other.

This distinction — between wanting to rebuild the channel and wanting to preserve the structure — is the most important one a couple in crisis can make. And it is also the most avoided, because the honest answer may require decisions that neither is ready to make.

But here is the paradox: avoiding the question does not avoid the answer. The answer already exists — in the body of each person, in the quality of the silence between the two, in the texture of the embraces that still happen or that have stopped happening. What is lacking, in most cases, is not the answer. It is the courage to hear it.

The most difficult question within a relationship is not "what is wrong between us?" It is "do we still truly want to fix it?"

A Diptych That Became a Triptych — And What That Means
This is the third text of a series that began with a simple question and became progressively more honest, more dense, and more courageous.

The first asked: do you live with someone or do you inhabit someone? And brought the distinction between coexistence and genuine presence.

The second asked: what happens when only one of you wants to find the other? And brought asymmetrical solitude — that of the one who is ready for encounter and inhabits that readiness alone.

This third went beyond both: what happens when both already want to find each other, but the history they built together has come to speak louder than either of them can speak today?

What these three texts share is not an answer. It is a refusal: the refusal to treat life as a couple as a problem with a known solution, applicable in steps, guaranteed if executed correctly. Relational life does not work that way. It works with history, with sediment, with structural misunderstandings, with corroded channels, and with the attempt, always imperfect and always necessary, to find each other anyway.

What these texts offer — the only honest thing to offer — is a different way of looking. At oneself, at the other, at the space between the two that, depending on what is placed in it, can be the place of the deepest isolation or the rarest encounter.

You are reading this. Something brought you here. And whatever it was — curiosity, recognition, pain, hope — that movement is already a gesture toward lucidity.

What you do with it, from here, is the only question that matters. And it is the only one that no text can answer in your place.

CHAPTER 5
THE TERRITORY BETWEEN THE END AND THE BEGINNING

On what remains when you can no longer pretend everything is fine — and still don't know what comes next

You have arrived here.

Not to this text — to this place. The place where the four previous texts are no longer sufficient. Not because they are incomplete. Because life, at this moment, is more question than answer.

You already know the difference between living and inhabiting. You have recognized, at some point in the reading or in memory, the loneliness of being the only one who wants depth. You have seen how accumulated history can transform an invitation into a demand — even when the intention is pure, even when love is still there, even when no one is acting in bad faith.

And now?

Now there is a different silence. Not the silence of flight — the kind filled with work, with screens, with anything that prevents the question from finding its own weight. This is another silence: that of someone who has looked at all of this and still does not know what to do. Not because courage is lacking. Because knowing what to do is not the same as knowing what one wants.

And knowing what you want — truly, deeply, without abstractions, without the filter of what would be more sensible or more generous or less painful — is perhaps the loneliest and most legitimate place a human being can inhabit.

This territory has owners. You are one of them now.

What This Place Is — And Why Nobody Speaks of It

In every culture that has developed rites of passage, there exists a recognition that between one state and another there is an intermediate territory. A time that is neither what was nor what will come. A space where the old identity no longer fully sustains, and the new one has not yet been formed.

This space is not empty. It is dense. Full of questions that have no answers yet, emotions that have no names yet, clarity that is still forming and that any haste can abort before its time.

The problem is that the world offers no space for this state to be inhabited with dignity. The world asks: are you together or apart? Will you try or won't you? Have you made a decision? And the implicit pressure in these questions — the pressure to have a position, to communicate clarity, to not burden the other with your own uncertainty — is enough to push most people to close the liminal territory before they have crossed it.

The result is predictable. Decisions are made from discomfort, not consciousness. People return together out of fear of separation, or separate from exhaustion before truly trying. And months later — sometimes years — the same question that was never answered in the territory reappears, heavier, with more history on top of it.

Staying in the threshold is not weakness. It is, paradoxically, the only act that prevents the most important decision in relational life from being made from the wrong side of oneself.

Most decisions made in haste within a relationship are not decisions. They are flights wearing the name of decision.

What People Do to Avoid Being Here

There is an almost universal repertoire of strategies for avoiding the liminal territory. Not because people are cowards — but because this space is genuinely unbearable for those who were never taught to tolerate uncertainty as a legitimate condition, rather than a problem to be solved.

The first strategy is the premature decision. Choosing — to stay or to leave — before either choice is true. Not because clarity arrived, but because the absence of clarity is too painful to sustain. And so the threshold is closed without having been crossed.

The second is anesthesia. The plunge into excessive work, into distractions, into anything that fills the silence where the question lives. This works — until the anesthesia requires ever-larger doses to manage a reality that, meanwhile, has been growing in the shadow.

The third — and this is the most sophisticated, and therefore the hardest to recognize — is intense relational activity. The couple who, faced with the threshold, begins doing things together with a frequency they never had before. Trips, projects, therapy, long conversations, promises of change. All genuine in intention. All functioning, at the same time, as a way of not standing still in the silence where the real question lives.

None of these strategies is wrong in its intention. All of them are too human to be judged. The problem is not in them — it is in what remains underneath while they operate: the question that was never asked. The silence that was never inhabited. The territory that was never crossed with enough presence to reveal what it had to reveal.

Fleeing the threshold does not eliminate it. It postpones. And what is postponed always collects, at the least expected moment, the interest of unlived time.

The Difference Between Waiting and Remaining

Waiting is passive. It is placing your own life on hold while expecting something external to produce the clarity that seems impossible to find from within. Waiting is outsourcing your own crossing.

Remaining is something else entirely. Remaining in the threshold is the active choice to inhabit this territory with attention — not as someone waiting for it to pass, but as someone who recognizes that something in it needs to be lived in order to be understood.

Remaining means waking up in the morning and noticing what you feel before constructing any narrative about what you should feel. It means paying attention to the moments when something between the two of you still pulses — and to the moments when it no longer does. It means being honest about what is being sustained by love and what is being sustained by fear. About what is a real bond and what is a structure that neither of you wants to be the first to dismantle.

It means, above all, resisting the pressure to turn uncertainty into certainty before its time. Because premature certainties, in this territory, are almost always well-intentioned lies the system produces to protect itself from the pain of not knowing.

There is a specific wisdom that only the threshold can teach. It is not available in any other territory — and it is only accessible to those who have the courage to remain in the time it requires to emerge.

Two Silences That Inhabit This Territory

Within the threshold there is a distinction that needs to be made — because it determines everything about the quality of what comes after.

There is the silence that protects. The one that holds within it something that has not yet found form, that is still in the process of constituting itself, that needs more time in the dark before being brought to light without distorting. This silence is active — there is something alive in it. Whoever carries it knows, even without being able to name it, that they are holding something real.

And there is the silence that buries. The one that holds nothing to reveal later — that merely avoids. That is not protection of what is being born, but refusal of what should have been said long ago. This silence accumulates. Deposits. And over time becomes so heavy that no one can speak underneath it.

The difference between the two is not in volume — both are equally quiet. It is in the texture of whoever carries them. The first holds within it a creative tension, a sense that something is forming. The second holds within it a particular exhaustion — that of someone who has held for so long they can no longer remember what they were holding, or why.

Recognizing which of the two silences you are in is one of the most important questions anyone can ask themselves in this territory. And it is a question no one can answer in your place.

What lives inside your silence? Something not yet born — or something already dead? This distinction, when honestly answered, orients more than any decision made from exhaustion.

Some Crossings Lead to an Encounter. Others, to a Necessary Goodbye.

There is no way to know in advance what lies on the other side of the liminal territory. That is the most difficult — and most honest — thing this text can offer.

Some crossings lead to a new encounter with the same person. A reconnection that is not a return to what was — it is the construction of something that never existed between the two, more conscious, more chosen, more real precisely because it came after the crisis and not before it.

Other crossings lead to a necessary goodbye. Not as defeat — as recognition. The recognition that the love that exists between the two does not have the form that a continuous relationship requires. That two people can genuinely love each other and still not be, in this specific dimension and at this specific moment, what the other needs.

Most people want to know the outcome before entering the territory. But the territory does not work that way. It demands that you enter without knowing — and discover, while walking, what awaits on the other side. And what guarantees that the outcome will have real substance is not the choice itself — it is the quality of the presence maintained during the crossing.

You do not need to decide today. You only need to not lie to yourself about what you are feeling while you do not decide. That care for your own truth — that simple and brutally difficult gesture — is already an act of integrity greater than any decision made from haste, fear, or exhaustion of not knowing.

The threshold does not guarantee the outcome. It guarantees that whatever outcome comes from it will be more true — and more yours — than any decision made before its time.

What These Four Texts Did — And What They Did Not Do

We have arrived at the end. Not of a process — of a set of texts that tried to do something that most books about relationships avoid: to look at life as a couple without offering comfort where what the situation calls for is courage.

The first text began where almost no one has the courage to begin: not in the fight, not in the betrayal, but in the silence that precedes everything — in the invisible mechanism by which two people build, together and without realizing it, their own distance.

The second asked whether you live with someone or inhabit someone — and brought the distinction between the coexistence that looks like love and the presence that truly is.
The third named the loneliness of those who want depth and do not find it in the other — and said, without evasion, that this need is legitimate and deserves a real place.

The fourth described the mechanism by which two people who still want each other can no longer reach each other — and had the honesty to say that good will, at that stage, is not enough.

This fifth text brought no solution to any of the previous ones. It brought a name for the territory where any true solution will have to be gestated — and the suggestion that this territory deserves to be inhabited with presence, not crossed in haste.

What these five texts did not do is as important as what they did: they offered no formulas, promised no results, did not transform the complexity of the human into something more palatable than it is. Because treating relational life seriously requires, above all else, the refusal to simplify it.

And now, after all of this, there is a question. One single question. Not rhetorical. Not with an expected answer. Not answerable with words.

And now, after all of this, there is a question. A single one. Not rhetorical. Without an expected answer. Not answerable with words.

Now that you know the difference between residing and inhabiting,

recognized the loneliness of wanting depth alone,
understood how history can speak louder than any voice,
and inhabited the territory between the end and the beginning —

the question is not what to do.

The question is:

tonight, in this silence, in this body that read until here —

what do you truly want?

Not what you should want.
Not what would be more sensible.
Not what will hurt less.
Not what the other needs you to want.

What you want.

And if you don't know yet —
are you willing to find out,
without haste, without fleeing,
without asking the other or time to resolve it for you?

This answer has no deadline.
It has, only, the weight of everything you are.

WHAT REMAINS

There was a table between the two of you.

Not made of wood — made of time. Years stacked like dishes no one had the courage either to wash or to break.

You learned to walk past it without looking. Learned to smile from one side while, on the other, something ancient waited quietly to finally be called by its name.

There is a kind of loneliness that never appears in statistics. One that does not cry for help out loud. One that does not even understand what it has lost until the day it realizes it spent years inside a house without ever truly entering it.

No one is to blame for this kind of loss. It is the price of what was never said while there was still room for it to be heard.

There was a voice inside you that tried once, twice, ten times — and what answered it was not cruelty, but something almost worse: absence of recognition.

Like screaming inside a dream and realizing the other person is not dreaming the same dream.

You learned to silence that voice. You called it maturity. In truth, it was the first time you disappeared inside someone you loved.

There is a territory that exists between ending and beginning again.

It has no name on maps. No signs along the roads. Only the weight of what is still unknown and the strange texture of silence when it stops being escape and starts becoming a question.

Those who cross this place in haste arrive on the other side carrying the same ghosts repackaged in new addresses.

Those who remain — even when it hurts, even when it seems to lead nowhere — eventually find, at the bottom of not knowing, something that a lifetime of escape could never have given them:

themselves.

And maybe that is it. Maybe that is all.

At the end of every story about two people, what remains is always the story of one — the only place that can ever truly be inhabited completely:

you.

Not the version of you that functioned well for someone else. Not the version that shrank to fit. Not the version that smiled at the right moment and stayed silent at the wrong one out of fear of taking up too much space in the very space that was already yours.

The you who kept reading until here. The you who recognized, somewhere in these paragraphs, something you had never managed to say out loud. The you who still does not know exactly what you want, but is no longer willing to pretend that you do.

That version of you deserves a relationship that does not require your disappearance in order to survive.

Deserves to be found — not managed. Not tolerated. Not conveniently loved.

Found.

There was a table between the two of you.

Maybe it is still there. Maybe it is not.

What matters is not the table.

What matters is whether somewhere inside yourself you still have the courage to ask what, in truth, you want sitting on the other side of it.

And if the answer comes — even small, even frightening, even without any guarantees —

trust it.

It is the only thing truly yours that no accumulated story has yet managed to silence completely.

— MARCELLO DE SOUZA

FOR THOSE WHO WANT TO GO BEYOND THE READING
The titles below are not a self-help list. Each work, in its own way, helps build the intellectual and clinical foundation behind what you have read in this book.

On attachment, presence, and the structure of love
John Bowlby. Attachment and Loss (3 vols.). São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 1984–1993.
Sue Johnson. Hold Me Tight: Seven Conversations for a Lifetime of Love. New York: Little, Brown, 2008.
Erich Fromm. The Art of Loving. São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 2000.

On communication, silence, and what remains unspoken
John Gottman; Nan Silver. The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work. New York: Harmony Books, 1999.
Paul Watzlawick; Janet Beavin; Don Jackson. Pragmatics of Human Communication. São Paulo: Cultrix, 1967.
Peter A. Levine; Ann Frederick. Waking the Tiger: Healing Trauma. Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 1997.

On identity, individuation, and the self within relationships
Carl Gustav Jung. The Development of Personality. Petrópolis: Vozes, 1986.
Donald Winnicott. Playing and Reality. Rio de Janeiro: Imago, 1975.
Martin Heidegger. Being and Time. Petrópolis: Vozes, 2012.

On communication, silence, and what remains unspoken
William Bridges. Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes. Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2004.
James Hollis. The Middle Passage: From Misery to Meaning in Midlife. Toronto: Inner City Books, 1993.
Arnold van Gennep. The Rites of Passage. Petrópolis: Vozes, 2011.

On the body, relational trauma, and embodied memory
Antonio Damasio. Descartes' Error. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2012.
Bessel van der Kolk. The Body Keeps the Score. São Paulo: Sextante, 2020.

This bibliography is not a roadmap. It is a territory to explore at the pace your life requires. Each of these books was chosen because it offers something rare: not easy answers, but instruments for asking better questions. You can purchase them at special prices here:

About the Author

Marcello de Souza began where few would expect to find a thinker of human development: leading teams and complex projects in the world of IT and Telecom. He was good at what he did. He mastered the logic of exact sciences, understood systems, delivered results. And it was precisely there — inside technically competent teams that still could not find each other — that the question which would define his entire trajectory began to take shape.

It was not a crisis. It was a perception that could not be ignored: efficiency without humanism is incomplete. Systems function. People need something more — and that something more has no protocol, no metric, no solution in the form of one more well-designed tool. It lives in what happens between people, before any technical decision, before any well-structured process.

The transition to the field of human development was not a career change. It was the inevitable consequence of a restlessness that systems could never answer. More than 28 years later — with a doctorate in Social Psychology, five postgraduate degrees, international certifications, and the creation of the DCC and DCCO methodologies, which integrate neuroscience, social and behavioral psychology, philosophy and psychoanalysis — Marcello still carries the same founding question, now with name and method: why do intelligent, well-intentioned and technically competent people still fail to find each other?

The answer he has built over these decades — with leaders, teams, organizations and individuals in real transformation processes in Brazil and abroad — is what runs through every text in this ebook. Not as theory. As accumulated experience from someone who has spent a lifetime observing what happens in the space between people — before words, beyond techniques, this side of any easy promise.

Anti self-help. Anti formula. In favor of what is real, deep and lasting – because it is the only development the Between recognizes as true.

Author of The Secret of Coaching and The Map Is Not the Territory, the Territory Is You, Marcello publishes regularly at marcellodesouza.com.br, where human development is treated with the density it demands — and the language it deserves.

The Intelligence of the Between is, to date, the most precise expression of what he understands by real transformation: not what is learned. What one becomes.

DR. MARCELLO DE SOUZA

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