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## Mobile Brain/Body Imaging of Social, Affective, and Creative Agency



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Affective expression, perception, and communication – including aesthetic and artistic perception – gives a sense of value and meaning to our life, as well as organizing our behavior. Our extensive brain subsystem supporting affective perception, awareness, and behavior has evolved in parallel with brain systems supporting physical perception and awareness of our environment and our behavioral interactions with it. Our affective perception and communication systems may largely operate outside our focus of explicit attention. Yet their functioning is crucial to making everyday decisions and interacting with others. In particular, our capacities for feeling and expressing empathy and compassion are essential to our development and maintenance of social relationships – within family, community, and society.

I believe the evolutionary basis of our aesthetic perception and appreciation, and thus all human artistic activities, has arisen from our basic need to continually discern *what others around us are feeling*. We have many personal, social, and culturally promoted reasons to 'hide our feelings' from one another. Yet emotional state and its behavioral expression are our best clues to the intent and future actions of others, and thus are our best guide in choosing how to interact with them. Our affective perception system is always 'on,' always attempting to interpret our experience in terms of *human feeling character*. Thus, as perceived through the lens of our affective perception, a bird's flight may appear to us 'exhilarating,' a sudden car honk 'indignant,' the flowing lines of a garment 'seductive,' an orchestral horn flourish 'triumphant,' etc. It is our seemingly 'invisible' but 'felt' brain system supporting affective perception of the feelings of others that makes possible and supports human artistic perception, communication, enjoyment, and activity.

How to perform brain/body imaging of authentic affective and artistic experience and expression? A most difficult and far too often ignored or undervalued task here is to design and execute experimental protocols that capture periods, even brief, in which authentic affective experience, expression, and communication *dominate* a participant's experience. Empathic psychotherapists, nurses, teachers, and parents know much about how to develop sufficient trust to enable others to attend empathically and to express authentic feelings in their company. A useful observation is that hypnotized subjects tend to have unusually strong and ready access to affective experience. Effective protocols to record MoBI data in which brain and body movement dynamics supporting affective perception and communication dominate may thus benefit from using guided imagery methods that approach self-hypnosis. Using such methods can allow and encourage participants to experience and express deep, authentic feeling during brain/body imaging experiments. The same difficulties apply to experiments involving artistic experience and expression. The ability to induce intense affective experience in others through music or dance performance, graphic design - that is, to exercise *affective agency* - is rare, and all societies celebrate the relatively few artists who achieve this most effectively. Capturing MoBI data during such authentic artistic expression and experience is not a matter of luck; it is a goal that can only be achieved through careful design of suitable protocols and a deliberate, personal approach.