

# A Self-Reported Positive Affective Regime

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## Context

The Minimal Z-Reduction Task (M-ZRT) is a behavioral paradigm designed to temporarily reduce the coupling between perception, prediction, and action selection. Instead of optimizing performance or suppressing cognition, it introduces perturbations that interrupt the progressive accumulation of next action pressure while allowing normal behavior to continue. According to the M-ZRT framework, these perturbations increase the probability of entering the ease regime, a permissive control configuration associated with access to high-intensity positive affect (joy), without requiring prolonged training or explicit relaxation techniques.

## The state at seven months post-transition

The state appears to manifest in two primary modes. The first, which I refer to as the "being moved" or "Merry Christmas" mode, is characterized by emotional warmth. The second, the "energetic" mode, is characterized by heightened vitality and activation. In both cases, intense chest-centered pleasure remains the dominant experiential feature. Transitions between these modes occur in a relatively unpredictable manner. Evaluative environments tend to weaken the state, whereas low-stakes stimuli, such as cartoons or simple children's music, often strengthen it. Recovery following disruption may occur within minutes to several hours.

<b>State-Reducing</b>	<b>State-Facilitating</b>
Goal pursuit	Perceptual exploration
Evaluation	Non-evaluative engagement
Planning	Openness to experience
Optimization attempts	Absurd content

## **Mode “being moved”**

This mode resembles a near-sadness state. It does not feel sad in the ordinary sense, as the emotional trajectory appears to stop just before becoming negative. In this mode, music can become emotionally overwhelming, particularly lower-toned material such as children's songs, light-themed but slightly melancholic older songs, or emotionally simple melodies. Lower-tone visual environments, including Christmas decorations and jewel-like imagery, also appear to intensify the state.

Phenomenologically, the experience is often accompanied by thoughts such as: "It is interesting," or "It is fabulous."

Subjectively, this mode is consistently moving because it closely resembles a type of emotional experience commonly associated with childhood. It is experienced as aesthetically beautiful, emotionally intense, and deeply moving, while remaining distinctly non-sad.

What does it compare to? Subjectively, I would say that it bears some resemblance to the effects of alcohol. However, alcohol's effects vary substantially across individuals.

## **Mode “Energetic”**

Chest-centered pleasure in this mode is amplified by higher-energy music, highly salient imagery, and bright visual stimuli. Sensory experiences, including odors and sounds, appear noticeably enhanced. The overall experience can be described as a combination of euphoria and calmness. It is euphoric in the sense that intense chest-centered pleasure is present, yet it remains unusually quiet and tranquil rather than agitated.

Images or videos depicting strong bodily confidence appear to increase the intensity of the thoracic pleasure state. In addition, stimuli containing the prediction-error characteristics often associated with older cartoons, such as exaggerated timing, improbable events, or unexpected perceptual transitions (eg; simple movie-cuts), are associated with increases in intensity.

What does it compare to? Subjectively, it bears some resemblance to the early experiential phase of tramadol before tolerance develops, although without the sedative component. As noted previously, only imperfect analogies can be used to describe the state phenomenologically. The principal difference is that the state feels remarkably clean and coherent, with emotional responses remaining tied to salient and unexpected features of the environment rather than becoming diffuse.

**What do I think when it happens (subjective experience):** "This is intense chest-centered pleasure. At times it feels 'full bandwidth,' a subjective impression that the experience is operating at unusually high intensity and richness. It is strongly modulated by simple visual stimuli. The experience is highly resistant to boredom and remains engaging even during prolonged exposure. For this reason, it constitutes the central and most distinctive feature of the state.

## **Golden tint (visual)**

Within the "being moved" mode, scenes often appear to acquire a subtle warm golden tint, contributing to a richer and more aesthetically significant perceptual quality. The

intensity of this effect is variable and can range from barely noticeable to highly pronounced. This phenomenon has only been observed within the "being moved" mode and not within the "energetic" mode.



The energetic mode is characterized by a subtle increase in vividness, brightness, and impact.



Illustration of the ease regime "being moved" mode at maximal subjective intensity. The characteristic warm golden tint is variable in magnitude across episodes. In addition, white elements are frequently associated with a snow-like perceptual texture. This aspect is not represented in the image.

**What do I think when it happens (subjective experience):** "Yes, this is joy." The feeling serves primarily as an indicator that the state has emerged. Although highly pleasant, it does not produce a strong sense of wanting, seeking, or reward.

### **Jewels raining**

One particularly unusual feature is the spontaneous appearance of jewel-related imagery. During some episodes, it becomes possible to effortlessly imagine emeralds,

rubies, gemstones, or jewel-like objects flowing through the visual field. The experience is natural, mildly pleasant, and requires little or no intentional effort.

Similar to the warm golden tint, it primarily functions as an indicator that the state is present rather than as a major source of pleasure.

Interestingly, the imagery appears constrained in its spatial dynamics. The jewels are typically experienced as flowing in a single direction, resembling rainfall or a downward stream. Voluntary modifications of the pattern appear limited.

**What do I think when it happens (subjective experience):** "I like that," and "Yes, the state is here." Although the phenomenon is striking and somewhat unusual, it is not among the most important experiential features of the state itself.

## **The joy feeling**

This feature is distinct from ordinary contentment, happiness, satisfaction, or pleasure. Instead, it is experienced as an immediate and unambiguous feeling of joy. The recognition appears instantaneous and does not require interpretation or reflection. The experience is simply identified as "joy."

During these episodes, it becomes particularly easy and tempting to imagine smiling faces, whereas other forms of imagery appear less salient or less natural. The feeling is highly distinctive and difficult to describe.

This "true joy" feeling is relatively rare compared to other features of the state. Episodes typically last minutes rather than hours. However, the state may be prolonged indefinitely by sustained exposure to childlike content, such as cartoons, children's images, or children's music.

**What do I think when it happens (subjective experience):** "Yes, this is obviously joy." Almost immediately, this is followed by the thought, "I am not able to communicate it," and then, "Wow, that's amazing."

The experience often leaves a lingering sense of astonishment. A recurring impression is: "This is joy. I can't believe it. This feels like a gift."

## **Stable imagination**

Stable imagination frequently appears following openness exercises. The main effect is the ability to imagine things for extended periods with unusual vividness, whether as internally generated scenes or as additions to the surrounding environment.

## **Moderate entity feeling**

Sometimes, the state carries a subtle sense of presence. It feels less like something I am actively producing and more like something that has arrived on its own. Although slightly uncanny, the sensation is generally reassuring. **What do I think when it happens (subjective experience):** "Joy is competent. I do not need to do anything".

## **Spontaneous internal selection**

Stored songs, melodies, or video fragments sometimes come to mind spontaneously. The experience is not one of deliberate selection, but rather of being "called" toward a

particular item. The selected material often feels unusually appropriate to the current state and frequently increases its intensity.

## **The hippocampal-like completion feeling**

As already explained, some properties of the state are difficult to communicate. The following is probably the most difficult. This is nowhere near nostalgia. Nostalgia often carries a sense of loss and remains relatively controllable. Here, the state is intense, not controllable, and completely lacks the feeling of loss.

What is striking is that when I look at a tiny object resembling childhood objects, the exact same feeling returns immediately, often with very high intensity. It concerns images of treasure, gold, intense light, saturated colors, gems, and shiny objects: It is not experienced as a vague autobiographical memory, but as the sudden reappearance of a fully familiar perceptual texture. The sensation feels exact, immediate, and involuntary.

Different objects, colors, and odors appear capable of triggering distinct familiar textures of experience. For example, while walking through a shopping mall, multiple objects and odors may spontaneously trigger distinct familiar textures within seconds, often unexpectedly, because the process does not feel voluntarily controlled. The recognition emerges on its own.

Colors can also become unusually intense and almost consumable, as if I were 'eating a candy', again with a strong sense of familiarity. Importantly, the experience is not: 'I remember this.' It is closer to: 'Oh damn, this is it.' The state feels like direct re-access to a specific mode of experience rather than recollection about the past.

## **Paradoxical Effects**

A paradoxical effect was repeatedly observed. Attempts to suppress the state, for example when an important task required immediate attention, did not reliably reduce its intensity. In some cases, such attempts appeared to be followed by a temporary increase in intensity. The reasons for this effect remain unclear.

Migraine episodes were also consistently associated with stronger state intensity. This association was sufficiently noticeable to be repeatedly observed, although its significance remains uncertain. It is possible that migraine-related changes in sensory processing, attention, or other large-scale neural dynamics may influence access to the state, but the present observations do not allow firm conclusions.

## **Conclusion**

The present report should not be interpreted as definitive evidence for the existence of a distinct affective regime. Its primary limitation is methodological: the observations are based on a single self-report, without external validation, independent measurements, replication, control conditions, or objective temporal tracking. As such, alternative interpretations, including idiosyncratic altered-state phenomena, remain possible.

However, the consistency of the phenomenology, the apparent reproducibility of some features across sessions, and the reported emergence of the transition during a brief and structured procedure may justify cautious experimental investigation. At minimum, the present observations suggest that unusually intense and distinctive affective configurations may exist that are difficult to capture within standard evaluative or laboratory contexts.

The aim of this paper is therefore not to conclude that the proposed "ease regime" has been demonstrated, but rather to document a coherent experiential pattern that may motivate future controlled research on evaluative processes, positive affect, and the conditions under which unusual affective states emerge. Whether the observations reflect a distinct affective regime, a particular configuration of known psychological processes, or an alternative phenomenon altogether remains an open empirical question.

**Reference:**

Morin, F. (2026). A Regime Theory of Joy: The Ease Regime as a Permissive Control Configuration. *SSRN*, <https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.6711318>