

Emotion Hero (2016)

What does it mean to feel 62% joy, and 15% surprised? Over the last years digital emotion analysis is booming: multimillion dollar investments are made in the technologies of which is claimed that they give companies an objective view in their consumers' feelings. In my video-game-artwork Emotion Hero I investigate this claim and question the premise of the technology.

Emotion Hero is a two-part artwork. On the one hand is a video-game that is freely downloadable for everybody with an Android device [1]. Inspired by Guitar Hero, the user scores points by following given cues. It provides detailed feedback on the mechanics of the face (eg. *"You showed on 10% Joy when you had to show 100%, smile 99.32% more."*), revealing that rather than providing new insights in the player's mental state, the labelling process merely reconstitutes a stereotypical perspective on emotions.

The second part is a projection that shows the aggregated scores of the game. In order to substantiate their discourse, companies in facial expression measurement employ a huge amount of data collection and processing. By putting the results in a fixed grid I draw a parallel with historical practices that, through extensive measurement and administration, also aimed to delineate something which is conceptually undelineated: think of Duchenne de Boulogne, Lombroso, and above all of Charcot, who at the end of the 19th century instituted an enormous apparatus which merely succeeded in capturing a pre-existing stereotype of hysteria –a concept that was seemingly delineated in common language, however for scientific measurement turned out to be too vaguely described. I would argue that this is similar to how concepts such as 'anger' or 'contempt' are used in emotion sensing technologies. Leading to a focus on the mechanics of the face, rather than it being an expression of an inner sensation. It puts the focus on representation rather than feeling.

Emotion Hero is an invitation to open up the box of expression analysis to reveal the assumptions that underlie this technology.



[1]: https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.rubenvandeven.emotion_hero

Emotion Hero is produced as part of the Summer Sessions Network for Talent Development in a co-production of Arquivo 237 and V2_ Lab for the Unstable Media, with support of the Creative Industries Fund NL.

Presented at:

- Arquivo 237 / Bairro das Artes, September 2016, Lisbon
- State Festival, November 2016, Berlin
- Digital <Dis>Orders, November 2016, Frankfurt

