

Smile, Please

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Abstract

Smile, Please is an interactive installation created in response to the prevalence of emotion AI and societal coercion of emotions.

Introduction

Several events informed the perspective of this work in thinking about emotion AI. The huge global deposit of emotion in database form collected by companies such as Affectiva and Beyond Verbal (Nesta 2018). The impact of psychological warfare in technology as revealed by the Facebook and Cambridge Analytica scandal. China's social credit system. Paul Ekman's work with US intelligence agencies and major tech companies (Heaven 2020).



Fig. 1. *Smile, Please* Installation Close-up, 2019, Winnie Yoe, Custom Electronics. Copyright Winnie Yoe.

The installation features a smile evaluation system that “trains” users to become a citizen of “the preferred society,” where they are guaranteed better future prospects. The only entry requirement is that they smile well enough. The system uses a hacked Polaroid camera to tell users if their smile is “good” enough while also using a TENS unit to shock the person if their smile was not “good” enough. After each engagement, participants are given a copy of *The Manual of Smile*

Etiquette, a guidebook with exercises to improve their smiles.

Through an extreme approach, dark humor, and by creating visceral discomfort, with a mechanism that refers to Pavlov's classical conditioning and the Milgram experiment, *Smile, Please* hopes to shock the audience into thinking about the implications and ownership of our emotions in the current societal and technological landscape.



Fig. 2. *Smile, Please* at IMPAKT 2019: *Speculative Interface*, 2019, Winnie Yoe, Custom Electronics. Copyright IMPAKT Festival.

Process

The *Smile, Please* machine is primarily created using a TENS unit, a MyoWare muscle sensor and electrode pads, a Polaroid Camera (the first iteration uses a thermal printer, which is replaced by a hacked Polaroid camera in the second iteration), an LCD display, and an Arduino.

Several playtests were conducted before testing with other volunteers and exhibited in public. Early playtests demonstrated the necessity to create a strong narrative in order to translate an effective message to the audience and to situate them into the fictional world (Benedetto 2017). To achieve that, a dystopian

narrative is crafted using graphic design, film languages and theatrical devices.

Interaction

When a viewer approaches the installation, they are asked if they want to learn more about the smile evaluation and training system. Performers in lab coats inform them that if they failed the smile test, the system will generate a light electric shock to their face to remind them to smile better. If the viewer is open to the idea, performers will ask them to sign a waiver and proceed to attach the electrodes and sensors. Then, the performers asked users to press the push button whenever they are ready and hit the emergency button whenever they feel uncomfortable. There are three possible outcomes: “Nice Smile, You’re One of Us”, “Almost There, Smile Harder”, and “How Terrible, Fail.” In the latter two instances, the TENS unit generate a shock to the user.

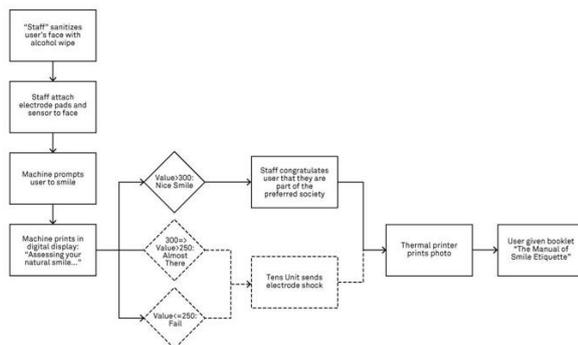


Fig. 3. *Smile, Please* User Journey Diagram, 2019, Winnie Yoe, Custom Electronics. Copyright Winnie Yoe.

Implication

Smile, Please builds upon previous work related to face analysis created by artists and researchers as an effort to continue probing what a future increasingly driven by AI will look like (McDonald, 2020). The goal of the project is to open up avenues to this discourse through art-based research, and in this case, through exploring the potential of such conversations through an embodied, visceral, gamified interactive experience.

Exhibition and Documentation

Smile, Please was exhibited at the International Symposium on Electronic Art (ISEA) and IMPAKT 2019: Speculative Interface. It was

initially conceptualized with Chenshan Gao, and has been performed with Gao and JoJo Lau. Trailer of the project can be found at: <https://vimeo.com/306745527>.

References

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Biography

Winnie Yoe is a Hong Kong-born, New York-based artist, designer, and educator who creates interactive stories and digital tools to communicate complex information around issues of social justice. Her work has been exhibited at the ISEA (KR), IMPAKT Festival (NL), CultureHub (US), and Tai Kwun Contemporary (HK) among others. She has taught as an adjunct professor at New York University’s Integrated Digital Media Program (IDM) and has spoken at various conferences including the Processing Community Day in New York. She is a graduate of New York University’s Interactive Telecommunications Program (ITP) and Dartmouth College.