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REAL FEELINGS

Emotion and Technology – An International Group Show

House of Electronic Arts Basel (HeK) | Freilager-Platz 9 | 4142 Münchenstein/Basel

August 27 – November 15, 2020

Press Tour | Wednesday August 26, 2020 11am

Opening | Wednesday August 26, 2020, from 7pm



Lauren Lee McCarthy & Kyle McDonald, *Vibe Check*, 2020

Emotions are at the core of human experience. Love it or hate it, they influence every aspect of our lives and shape our social behaviour. In the 21st century, technology has begun engaging with emotions like it has never done before. Works by 20 artists are presented in the show, ranging from artificial intelligence, interactive installations, robotics and biometrics to gaming, video installations, virtual reality and photography. They explore how technologies are collating, assessing or triggering our emotions in multiple ways and directions. These technologies are even creating new feelings, some of which we haven't yet found the words to describe them with. Several works will be newly produced in the context of the exhibition and can be seen for the first time.

In the 21st century, emotions have increasingly come into focus – how they can be manipulated and controlled by technology, because they influence our society and our lives. Today major technology companies try to manipulate the way we behave by triggering our emotions everyday through smart phones, laptops and personal devices. Researchers at the MIT media lab have developed a machine learning system that 'reads' facial expressions to determine human

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emotions. At the same time, young children are being trained to recognise emotions in other human beings – because their ability to do so is failing in the digital age. The barriers between human and machine, emotion and technology seem to be breaking down. Our heartbeat, perspiration, speech, or body language are checked by smart watches or fitness trackers, webcams and facial- and body-recognition systems. In the 21st century we are seeing the rise of investigations into emotional technology, which stands for measuring biometric data in order to detect and respond to our emotions, which is then used as data input for various digital applications. Advances in machine learning have enabled emotion recognition with AI. Our world is flooded with digital technology and these devices have literally become extensions of ourselves: humanlike robots are used in healthcare, sex robots are compensating the shortcomings of human relationships, smart devices are listening to our conversations and are taking care of our needs – we are communicating more with our technology than with other humans.

As the emotional intelligence gap between of humans and machines grows narrower – do we actually know how we really feel? Who is in control of our emotions now? Is technology beginning to influence how we feel? These difficult questions and more are raised in the course of the exhibition as visitors encounter diverse works which challenge, provoke, and explore how technology is representing, influencing and changing our emotions.

Catalogue and Program

A comprehensive catalogue will be published to accompany the exhibition, documenting the works in the exhibition and featuring current scientific and artistic contributions. It includes a contribution on robots and emotions by renowned neuroscientist Antonio Damasio, a text on surveillance capitalism by the author Ariane Koek, and an essay by British artist Cécile B. Evans. An extensive programme of events and educational activities is also planned, including a colloquium in collaboration with **TA SWISS, the Foundation for Technology Assessment**, on the subject of “Social Robots“ on October 21, 2020 and the performance **Cyberia by Maria Guta & Adrian Ganea** - a dancing interaction between a human dancer and a virtual avatar on **November 13 and 14, 2020**.

Artists: Antoine Catala, Stine Deja & Marie Munk, Heather Dewey-Hagborg, Justine Emard, Cécile B. Evans, Ed Fornieles, Maria Guta & Adrian Ganea, Esther Hunziker, Seokyung Kim, Clément Lambelet, Lorem, Lauren Lee McCarthy & Kyle McDonald, Simone C. Niquille, Dani Ploeger, Lucy McRae, Shinseungback Kimyonghun, Maija Tammi, Troika, Coralie Vogelaar, Liam Young

Curators: Sabine Himmelsbach, Ariane Koek und Angélique Spaninks

Exhibited works:

French artist **Antoine Catala's** installation *Everything is Okay: Season 2* (2018) alludes to the increasing smartness of our homes. The installation consists of several kinetic objects: a plastic bag, a T-shirt and two socks. All of them have a smiley kind of face and they are breathing, some of them even singing. They all share the title "I am here for you" and there is a wall piece that assures us not to worry ("Don't Worry"). The objects refer to the technological interaction we have with many smart objects today.

Danish artists **Stine Deja & Marie Munk's** installation *Synthetic Seduction* (2018) contains what appears to be a newly born robot in an operating theatre. In the video *Foreigner* by Stine Deja we watch a robot that sings the song "I wanna know what love is" by the rock/pop band Foreigner. The video is shown in conjunction with the sculpture *Skin-to-Skin* by Marie Munk, that reflects our need for touch. An organ-shaped sculpture with a skin-coloured surface is soft and inviting to sit on.

French artist **Justine Emard's** video installation *Co(AI)xistence* (2017) addresses questions of co-existence and co-habitation of humans and machines. In her poetic work, the robot Alter, developed by the Ishiguro Lab in Japan, reacts to the movements and verbal contact of a dancer. There is no common language yet, but tiny points of tactile encounters and forms of contact. It is through touch and encounter they appear to create an emotional bond.

The connection between emotion and things is the subject of *How happy a Thing can be* (2014) by British artist **Cécile B. Evans**. The video piece concentrates on three humble everyday objects – a screwdriver, comb and a pair of scissors. The work explores the physical reality of their emotional lives in which they yearn for something more and push themselves to the limits and by inference relates to ourselves too.

The destabilising effects of technology on human emotions are explored in British artist **Ed Fornieles'** video piece *Test Studies* (2017). The work has two split screens. One shows a player, who has been invited by Fornieles to participate in a role-play game simulating extreme scenarios, talking about these virtual experiences and the feelings they evoked, which to the players often felt more real than emotions they experienced in the real. The other screen shows Sims acting out the different trauma the actors are each talking about.

Romanian artist **Maria Guta's** video *Commercial Break* (2019) invites us to explore the happiness of changing personas. Her fictional work is set in a future where we can change identities like we pick destinations for quick weekend holidays. In her work, presented in the exhibition for the first time, she poses the question of whether these choices at our fingertips, will this make us happier?

In the video *T3511* (2019) by American artist **Heather Dewey-Hagborg** a bio-hacker becomes obsessed with finding the donor of the saliva she purchased online. Her hunt to track him down becomes like a (stalking) love story, and the piece whilst based on science fact is a design fiction in which the artist calls into question the rise of technologies which now commodify and sell human fluids, DNA, and other biological information.

In the video and sound piece *Streamers* (2018) Swiss artist **Esther Hunziker** borrows the 'feelings' expressed from the nonstop stream of filmed confessions online on global networks and gives the language new bodies. She calls her hybrid beings 'specimens,' so-called scientific paradigms, which she conserves and presents as 'foreign' objects, which look like stones or rocks on the screen.

The limits of AI and emotional recognition software are indicated by Swiss artist **Clément Lambelet's** photo series *Happiness is the only true emotion* (2019). Currently the only emotion which has the highest accuracy rate at being recognised using AI is happiness. AI may be heralded as magical and potentially being able to solve the world's problems, but as these artists show it is still rudimentary and depends on what information is given to it.

AI's learning abilities are put to use in Italian artist **Lozem's** *Adversarial Feelings* (2019) in which he utilises AI, in particular the deep learning method known as generative adversarial networks (GANs) to generate faces which are filled with emotions which challenge definition. The results are again presented in a book, the content of which was also created and designed by an AI.

Vibe Check (2020) by American artists **Lauren Lee McCarthy & Kyle McDonald**, which has been commissioned for the exhibition, consists of a series of screens on which you see people portrayed in the exhibition to whom certain emotions are attributed. While walking into the exhibit visitors encounter cameras that film them as well as people around them. These cameras analyse the emotional responses of the bystanders and attribute these to the visitor in question, thus underlining how our emotional states are influenced by many aspects. At the end of the parcours the visitor's end up at the same screens as they saw in the beginning, but now they experience their own image with the emotions they triggered in others while walking around the exhibition.

Also commissioned for the context of the exhibition is the work *Solitary Survival Raft* (2020) by British-born **Lucy McRae**. She builds machines that gently squeeze the body and hold it tight. In the global pandemic brought about by Covid-19, the touch-deficit of our mediated society has changed into a fear of a future without human touch. *Solitary Survival Raft* addresses these issues by creating an inflatable, responsive, breathing sculpture which invites the viewer to crawl into it for safety and be embraced by its structure.

A new commission by the Swiss artist **Simone C. Niquille**, *Elephant Juice* (2020), explores how artificial emotional intelligence is used for hiring. Set in a bathroom, the work follows a character preparing for an upcoming automated job interview. The work reflects on these developments, but makes us aware of the limits of objectivity of these automated systems and their categorisation of deeply personal and delicate matters of emotions. The title of the commission points out that all is not quite as it seems. Elephant Juice is the word, which Siri comes up with when the words 'I love you' are spoken to it.

Dutch artist **Dani Ploeger's** installation *The Grass Smells So Sweet* (2018) concentrates on the relationship of the body to emotions. The work begins with a computer screen which shows extracts gathered from the web of people describing near death experiences. The second part of the installation is a VR experience. Without giving it away, the piece

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demonstrates in the most simple way, how the human body feels an emotion, and how different it is to experience emotion through physical sensation from merely observing or reading a text.

In *The Trace of Sorrow* (2018) the Korean born **Seokyung Kim** trained an AI to write a book of poetry by enabling it to process 800 works of romantic literature. In her interactive installation *Encyclopedia of Emotion* she invites the audience to write emotional texts. These texts are then used by a computer to 'speak' with humans, by creating it's own 'poetry' with it.

The interactive installation *Mind* (2019) by Korean duo **Shinseungback Kimyonghun** comprises of drums filled with tiny metal balls, which change and create ocean sounds based on the appearance of the audience. A camera in the centre of the room is tracking the faces of visitors and a facial recognition software is interpreting the emotion, which are then translated as movements of the metal balls and the sounds they create. The artists created a new version of their installation for the exhibition.

Looking towards the scientific achievements of robotics is the Finnish artist **Maija Tammi** with *One of Them Is a Human* (2017). Four photos show humanoid robots developed by Hiroshi Ishiguro, one of them Erica, the Japanese android who was declared the most realistic female human robot of 2016. In her work Tammi addresses the eroding boundaries between humans and machines that will force us to reconsider what it is to be human.

In the video *Terminal Beach* (2020) by British based artistic trio **Troika**, that has its world premiere at the exhibition, an industrial Kuka robot covered in fur, chops down the last tree in a desolate landscape with an axe. The fur accentuates its movements and makes the violent action of the robot seem comical and alluring. It is uncanny – a liminal piece which is discomfoting yet compelling at the same time.

In her work *Facial Action Coding System* (2018) Dutch artist **Coralie Vogelaar** is showing the Action Units, the temporal segments our facial expressions are divided into by emotion recognition software to deducting them into certain percentages of six basic emotions: happy, sad, angry, surprised, scared and disgusted. The print shows the face of an actress that trained to control her 44 facial muscles to display a diversity of emotions. In her newly produced piece *Infinite Posture Dataset* (2020) she focuses on the detection and interpretation of emotionally loaded body language. For this she has a dancer move on a life size screen that is endlessly rocking back and forth – like the gadget that cheats the step counter on your smartphone.

In *Renderlands* (2017) Australian artist **Liam Young** takes us into the world of render farms: companies that produce computer-generated images. Most of these are based in India, and this digital film creates an entirely new world as it drifts between real footage and the animated, rendered landscapes based on reality. We follow one of the workers of the render farm who falls in love with the virtual model that he builds and who prefers to spend his free time in the perfect virtual world rather than in the grim reality he finds himself in.

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The exhibition is created in partnership with



From 26.03.-06.06.2021 is exhibition will be shown at MU Hybrid Art House, Eindhoven, The Netherlands.

The HeK is subsidised by the Christoph Merian Foundation, the Swiss Federal Ministry of Culture, the Canton of Basel-Landschaft and the Canton of Basel-Stadt.

The exhibition and the accompanying programme are generously supported by the Stanley Thomas Johnson Foundation, TA-SWISS, Rapp AG, Pro Helvetia, Sulger-Stiftung, Mondriaan Foundation, and the Walter Senft / Gustav, Annetta Grisard Foundation.

Programme of Events and Educational Activities

A comprehensive programme of events and educational activities accompanies the exhibition. There will be regular guided tours in German, English and French. Every Sunday during the exhibition, there will be a free tour (in German) at 15:00h. Curator tours will be offered on 28.08.2020 and 08.10.2020 (Sabine Himmelsbach) at 18:00 each time. Further activities will be announced. An extensive programme of digital education will also be conceived for the exhibition.

21.10.2020, 18:30: Colloquium Social Robots

In collaboration with TA-SWISS, the Foundation for Technology Assessment, a colloquium will take place on the subject of „Social Robots“ on 21. October 2020. This event is being held in the context of a current study by TA-SWISS that deals with the opportunities and risks of social robots that simulate empathy and generate emotions. It focuses on the new challenges of the relationship between man and machine. The results of the study will be available in early 2021. With Prof. Dr. Oliver Bendel, Prof. Dr. Hartmut Schulze, Prof. Dr. Maria Schubert and artist Simone C. Niquille.

13./14.11.2020, 19:00: Performance *Cyberia* by Maria Guta & Adrian Ganea

In the performance *Cyberia* (2019) the two Romanian artists are staging a pax de deux of a human dancer and her reflections as a virtual avatar. Together they are progressing through various scenarios and landscapes, ending in a moment of intimate interaction – the desire to meet.

Information:

Opening hours: Wed-Sun, 12:00-18:00

Public tours: Every Sunday at 3:00 pm in German

For more information: www.hek.ch

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About HeK (House of Electronic Arts Basel)

HeK (House of Electronic Arts Basel) is Switzerland's national competence centre, that deals with contemporary art exploring and configuring new technologies and media and reflect on them. With its interdisciplinary alignment HeK allows insights into art productions of different genres in the examination of art, media and technology for a broad audience. In a varied programme of exhibitions, smaller and larger events, festival formats, performances and concerts, HeK dedicates itself to current social topics and questions as well as technological-aesthetic developments. In addition to the event and exhibition activities, HeK is engaged with the collection methodology and the preservation of digital art.

Press contact:

HeK (House of Electronic Arts Basel)
Elena Kuznik
elena.kuznik@hek.ch
+41/(0)61 331 58 41

Project communication

ARTPRESS – Ute Weingarten
Clara Tang
Danziger Str. 2 | Berlin 10435
+49 (0)30 48 49 63 50
tang.artpress@uteweingarten.de
www.artpress-uteweingarten.de