Using the Affect Grid
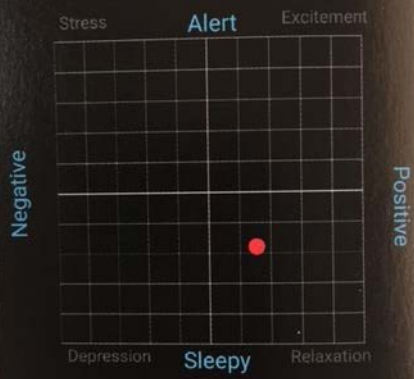
Feelings are complex. They come in all shades and degrees. The examples we have given are merely landmarks to help you understand the grid. When using this application, touch anywhere in the grid to indicate the share and intensity of feeling.
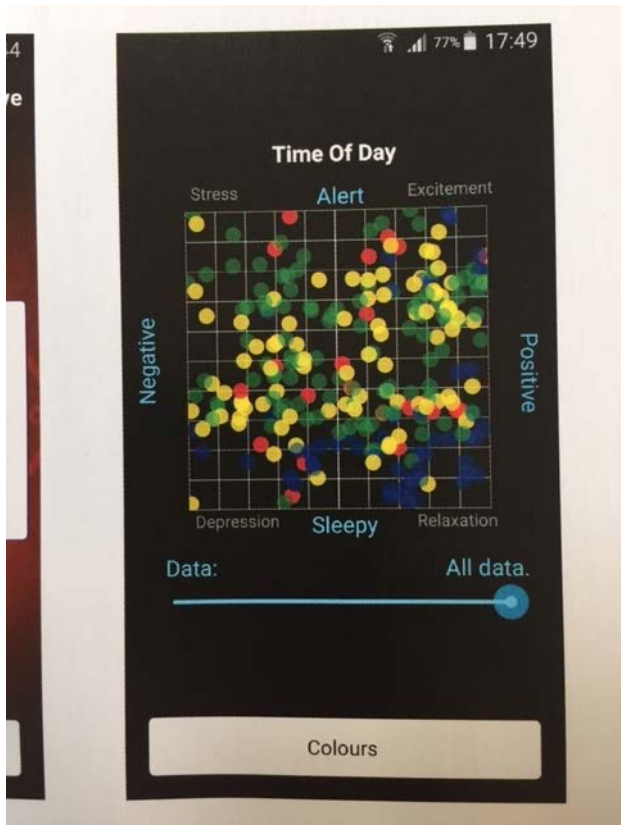
Next

In the last moments, to what extent have you felt:

Calm?   Very much

Jittery?   Slightly

Submit

QUANTIFIED SELF

Can you improve your emotional
well-being by using an app to perform
self-surveillance?

by Erdem Taşdelen

LF

THIS PAGE AND FOLLOWING:
Screenshots of the
Emotion Sense app,
as used in summer 2016
by Erdem Taşdelen

For the past three months, three times a day and at random intervals, my phone vibrates and these words appear on the screen: How do you feel? It's a reminder to engage with Emotion Sense, an app I use to report my mood and correlate it with data that is invisibly captured by my phone throughout the day—through its sensors, microphone and GPS receiver—in order to see how they relate.

Emotion Sense is of interest to adherents of Quantified Self, an international self-tracking movement whose name was proposed in 2007 in San Francisco by *Wired* magazine editors Gary Wolf and Kevin Kelly. The movement encourages individuals to incorporate technology into their daily lives so as to gather data about themselves with the hope of eventual self-improvement, using a range of tools in the form of smartphone apps or wearable-sensor devices that monitor physical activity, sleep, diet and more. Within this framework, participants are productive machines whose better, upgraded versions are always just around the corner. How else to interpret these words of Quantified Self enthusiast Bob Troia: "Personally, like, my goal is to basically be an optimal human being in every aspect of my life."

I find Emotion Sense to be a peculiar example of Quantified Self. It amounts to a practice of gathering self-reported information on one's moods and turning it into numeric data, essentially proposing to quantify the unquantifiable. It asks me to take a moment to make sense

of how I feel at a given time. Am I feeling negative right now? But just *how* negative am I feeling? Is it an active sort of negative (stress, rage) or a passive kind (lethargy, sadness)? Am I perhaps feeling more negative than I allow myself to acknowledge? And by whose standards am I describing this feeling as "negative"?

It's a strange task to assess one's feelings so diligently. I've been doing this as part of an art project in which I collaborate with a programmer and a poet to devise a system that automatically generates poems out of my interactions with the app, which I make screenprints of. One could say the poems are written by me, but not penned by me. They are expressions of my emotional states, which is what poetry is stereotypically thought to be, but they appear to be written by an emotive automaton, characterized by lines such as:

arrived aflame an awful dog annoyance
these boundaries inconvenience nouveau results nearby a dumpster

I want to turn Quantified Self in on itself. I want it to become productive in an entirely different sense—to make what has been translated into quantified data become, once again, murky and unfathomable. As I read these poems, I am aware of an inward-facing gaze, but one that makes the familiar strange. ■