

# AffectTracker: Real-time continuous rating of affective experience in immersive Virtual Reality.

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## Keywords

affective states, emotion, virtual reality, dynamics, moment-to-moment, continuous affect analysis

## Availability of data and materials

Data as well as videos depicting the Grid and Flubber feedback options, the experimental set-up as well as the custom-made stimuli used used in Study 2: Evaluation are available at <https://doi.org/10.17617/3.OPNSJA>

## Code availability

The tool (including manual) is available at <https://github.com/afourcade/AffectTracker>.

All code used for all analyses and plots are publicly available on GitHub at <https://github.com/afourcade/AffectiveVR>.

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**Conflict of interest**

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

**Ethics approval**

The research protocol was approved by the ethics committee of the Psychology Department at the Humboldt-University zu Berlin (2023-21) and by the University Bioethics Committee of the University of Turin (prot. number 0218914). All procedures contributing to this work comply with the ethical standards of the relevant national and institutional committees on human experimentation and with the Helsinki Declaration of 1975, as revised in 2008. Written informed consent was obtained from participants to participate in the study.

**Authors' contributions**

A. Fourcade: Conceptualization; Data curation; Formal analysis; Investigation; Methodology; Project administration; Software; Visualization; Writing – original draft; Writing – review & editing

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**Abstract**

Subjective experience is key to understanding affective states, characterized by valence and arousal. Traditional experiments using post-stimulus summary ratings do not resemble natural behavior. Fluctuations of affective states can be explored with dynamic stimuli, such as videos. Continuous ratings can capture moment-to-moment affective experience, however the rating or the feedback can be interfering.

We designed, empirically evaluated, and openly share AffectTracker, a tool to collect continuous ratings of two-dimensional affective experience (valence and arousal) during dynamic stimulation, such as 360-degree videos in immersive virtual reality. AffectTracker comprises three customizable feedback options: a simplified affect grid (Grid), an abstract pulsating variant (Flubber), and no visual feedback.

Two studies with healthy adults were conducted, each at two sites (Berlin, Germany, and Torino, Italy). In Study 1 (Selection:  $n=51$ ), both Grid and Flubber demonstrated high user experience and low interference in repeated 1-min 360-degree videos. Study 2 (Evaluation:  $n=83$ ) confirmed these findings for Flubber with a longer (23-min), more varied immersive experience, maintaining high user experience and low interference.

Continuous ratings collected with AffectTracker effectively captured valence and arousal variability. For shorter, less eventful stimuli, their correlation with post-stimulus summary ratings demonstrated the tool's validity; for longer, more eventful stimuli, it showed the tool's benefits of capturing additional variance.

Our findings suggest that AffectTracker provides a reliable, minimally interfering method to gather moment-to-moment affective experience also in immersive environments, offering new research opportunities to link affective states and physiological dynamics.

## **Introduction**

### ***What are affect and (subjective) affective experiences?***

Affective states, such as emotions, are adaptive responses to external stimuli, such as challenging situations or pleasant social interactions, or to self-generated mental states, such as memories. The most direct way to assess the affective state of humans is to ask them how they feel, that is, to have them report or rate their subjective affective experience (i.e., feelings; Damasio et al., 2000).

Affective states are an essential part of our experience of the world (James, 1884; James, 1890; Seth, 2013) and they are crucial for our physical and mental health (Gross and Muñoz, 1995). Dimensional approaches consider affective experience along the two axes of valence, ranging from negative (or displeasure) to positive (or pleasure), and arousal, ranging from low to high intensity or activation (Duffy, 1957; Kuppens et al., 2013; Russell, 1980; Russell and Barrett, 1999; Wundt and Judd, 1897). The rationale is that this latent space better captures the structure of affective states than individual, discrete emotion categories (Russell, 1980; Russell & Barrett, 1999), which have also been difficult to consistently associate with specific response patterns in the autonomic nervous system (Kragel and Labar, 2013; Kreibig, 2010; Siegel et al., 2018) or in distinct brain regions (Lindquist et al., 2012; but Saarimäki et al., 2016).

### ***How can affective experience be measured?***

Common ways to quantify the arousal and valence of a feeling state are through separate (e.g., 5-, 7- or 9-point) Likert-type scales with numbers or pictures (like the self-assessment manikin, SAM; Bradley & Lang, 1994) as labels, or continuous “visual analogue scales” (VAS; e.g., Kron et al., 2013). Both dimensions can also be combined in a two-dimensional (Cartesian) coordinate system (“affect grid”; Russell, 1989), which allows individuals to self-report their affective states by marking a point on a grid, where the perpendicular axes represent the continuum of valence (typically on the x-axis and ranging from “negative” to “positive”) and arousal (typically on the y-axis and ranging from “low” to “high”), with or without a visual aid (e.g., a 5x5-, 7x7-, 9x9-grid).

Assessing both dimensions simultaneously can be considered more comprehensive and nuanced because it (1) captures joint variance (e.g., arousal and valence sometimes show a U-shaped relationship in that more positive

or more negative valence is more intense and rated higher along the dimension of arousal; Kuppens et al., 2013; Yik et al., 2023); and (2) facilitates rapid and repeated ratings (Russell, 1989), which are essential to capture the dynamics of affective experience.

### *The dynamics of affective experience*

Psychophysiological experiments of affective states classically involve trial-based (i.e., discrete, sequential, repetitive) designs, such as passive viewing of affective pictures with individual post-stimulus summary ratings (e.g., with SAMs). Such tests create an artificial experience for participants and lack the complexity and context of real-life experiences: in daily life, events do not occur suddenly but are embedded in a continuous sequence, and natural human behavior unfolds over multiple timescales (Huk et al., 2018). It is becoming increasingly clear that humans are in constantly fluctuating states both physiologically (see “resting-state” literature; Fox & Raichle, 2007) and psychologically (e.g., “mind wandering”), which can be influenced by external stimuli. In this vein, humans can be seen as constantly in states of pleasant or unpleasant arousal (‘core affect’; Russell and Barrett, 1999; Lindquist, 2013) that temporally evolve in interactions with complex, dynamic environments. Advances in stimulation and analysis techniques have recently enabled experiments to study the physiological and psychological dynamics, such as the variability of affective response, for example, using movies (Westermann et al., 1996; Hasson et al., 2004; Saarimäki, 2020) or immersive virtual reality (iVR), in which participants are surrounded by interactive, dynamic, computer-generated environments that are often presented in stereoscopic head-mounted displays (HMDs; Riva et al., 2007; Chirico and Gaggioli, 2019).

In summary, the waxing and waning of affective experience to dynamic stimuli may be insufficiently captured by the typical one-time (“summary”) ratings when the stimulation (e.g., the movie or VR experience) is over. Continuous ratings can be assumed to capture the affective experience in a more fine-grained fashion, also because post-hoc (hindsight) ratings can be susceptible to distortions and biases (Kaplan et al., 2016; Levine and Safer, 2002).

One possibility is to replay an audiovisual recording of the experience during the post-hoc rating to aid recall (McCall et al., 2015; Hofmann et al., 2021) by minimizing biases related to the point of view (Berntsen and Rubin, 2006; Marcotti and St Jacques, 2018) or timescale (e.g., Fredrickson and Kahneman, 1993). As a replay

extends (in case of a 1-to-1 replay “doubles”) the duration of the experiment, we here aim to collect ratings *during* the experience, that is, in “real time” or “online”.

Continuous real-time ratings of affective experience have, for example, been collected for acoustic and visual stimuli: while listening to poems (Wagner et al., 2021) or music (Nagel et al., 2007; Vuoskoski et al., 2021; McClay et al., 2023), one-dimensional scales were used by moving the index finger (“liking”; Wagner et al., 2021) or using the computer keyboard or mouse (Vuoskoski et al., 2021; McClay et al., 2023) as well two-dimensional variants of the affect grid, such as a square (EMuJoy; Nagel et al., 2007) or a circle (Emotion Compass; McClay et al., 2023). While watching videos, one-dimensional scales were used, for example, to rate the degree of emotional arousal with the computer mouse or a USB dial (McCall et al., 2015; Hofmann, Klotzsche, Mariola et al., 2021) as well as two-dimensional variants of the affect grid, such as a square with SAMs displayed in the upper right corner of the (2D screen-based) video and rated with a joystick (CASE; Sharma et al., 2017), a square with emoticons, displayed below the video and rated with a touch-pad (AVDOS-VR; Gnacek et al., 2024), a square with emotion words displayed next to the video and rated with a joystick (DARMA; Girard et al., 2018), or a free-floating, colored one, rated with a joystick (Xue et al., 2020; Xue et al., 2021).

While real-time continuous ratings promise to effectively study affective dynamics, they may also influence the stimulus perception and the experience itself. For example, the rating (task, activity, feedback) may interfere with participants' experience, that is, demands of “dual-tasking” may occupy limited cognitive (e.g., attention-based) resources (as reported for working memory; Doherty et al., 2019). In addition, explicitly rating one's emotions may be a form of implicit emotion regulation just as putting feeling into words can attenuate emotional experiences (Lieberman et al., 2011). It is therefore essential to identify continuous rating methods that minimize potential interference with the subjective experience. From a technical angle, this can also be framed in the context of “user experience”, that is, the assessment of how effectively, efficiently, and satisfactorily a user can interact with a product or system to achieve specific goals (Jordan, 1998), in this case, the rating of affective experience. To maximize user experience and manage attention, design principles of peripheral feedback have been developed, which leverage the human ability to process information in the

periphery of attention. That is, peripheral feedback aims to provide users with important information without demanding their full attention or interrupting their primary tasks (Bakker et al., 2016).

Hence, the requirements for our rating tool were to (1) continuously collect both valence and arousal ratings during the experience (in “real-time”) and compare it with summary ratings, while (2) minimizing the rating’s interference on the experience itself.



## **Methods**

We designed a tool, the AffectTracker, to collect continuous or moment-to-moment ratings of two-dimensional affective experiences (valence and arousal) during dynamic stimuli, such as 360-degree videos, while minimizing the rating's impact on the experience itself. We opted for 360-degree videos—fixed-sequence audiovisual stimuli—over fully interactive content, such as games, to strike a balance between providing an immersive experience while keeping cognitive demands low. This approach allowed participants to remain hands-free and limited their degree of freedom, which was essential to ensuring high-quality data for future physiological recordings.

In Study 1 ("Selection"), we aimed to identify the AffectTracker feedback with the best compromise between validity for continuous measurement and interference with the experience, using brief 1-minute videos. Study 2 ("Evaluation") then tested the selected feedback during longer affective stimulation, extending to 23 minutes, to assess its performance over extended periods. The materials and procedures common to both studies are described below, while the specifics of each study are reported in dedicated sections. Both studies were conducted both at the Max Planck Institute (MPI) for Human Cognitive and Brain Sciences, Leipzig, Germany (BER) and at the Department of Clinical and Biological Science, University of Turin, Italy (TUR). The research protocol was approved by the local ethics committees.

### ***Common Materials***

#### ***Equipment***

All sessions in both sites took place in dedicated rooms for immersive Virtual Reality (iVR) experiments, with participants seated on swivel chairs. HTC Vive Pro headsets (HTC, Taiwan) with headphones were used. The iVR headset offers stereoscopy with two 1400 × 1600-pixel OLED displays (615 PPI), a 110° field-of-view, and a frame rate of 90 Hz. The iVR application was developed in Unity 2022.3.12 and therefore built as an executable that runs on a Windows 10 machine. The rating sampling is set at a frequency of 20 Hz, auto-saving the data every 30 seconds to disk. Experiments on the BER site were conducted in English, while those on the TUR site were conducted in Italian.

### *AffectTracker*

The AffectTracker has been developed with Unity 2022.3.12 under OpenXR ([kronos.org/openxr/](https://kronos.org/openxr/)). The tool is designed to work with the touchpad or joystick of a iVR controller of any iVR equipment supported by OpenXR and the type of real-time visual feedback they receive can be customized. We released the AffectTracker as a Unity prefab here: <https://github.com/afourcade/AffectTracker>.

To continuously rate the moment-to-moment affective state, users simultaneously indicate their arousal and valence experience using the input device of the iVR controller (e.g., in our studies: touchpad of the HTC Vive Pro), onto which an affect grid with horizontal (valence, range [-1 1]) and vertical (arousal, range [-1 1]) axis is mapped (see Figure 1).

The tool includes customization options with respect to:

- visual user feedback
- haptic vibrations (e.g., to remind users to rate continuously)
- adjustable sampling frequency

The AffectTracker offers several options for the visual feedback that can be switched on and off independently:

1. Grid: visualize the valence-arousal space with a simplified version of the affect grid, with four static quadrants, a moving dot/cursor and no text.
2. Flubber: visualize the valence-arousal space as a moving abstract shape, called Flubber, whose low-level visual features are mapped onto the valence-arousal space. The Flubber consists of three parts that can be toggled on and off independently: a base, an outline and a halo. The base is the central circular body with radiating projections, while the outline and halo have been designed to make the base stand out against any background. Many of the visual features, as well as their mapping onto the Cartesian (valence, arousal) and polar (distance, angle) coordinates of the affect grid, can be adjusted. The following table describes each customizable feature and indicates its default/recommended values:

*Table 1. Customizable low-visual features for the Flubber feedback. Each feature takes a minimum and a maximum value as inputs, corresponding to extrema of the mapped coordinates in the valence-arousal space.*

*Default values and possible range are described.*

<b>Feature</b>	<b>Min (default)</b>	<b>Max (default)</b>	<b>Range</b>	<b>Description</b>
Projection Smoothness	0	1	0-1	angular, edgy, pointy, sharp (value: 0) vs. rounded, smooth, soft (value: 1) projections
Projection Amplitude	0.2	0.4	0-1	amplitude or height of the projections from the main body of the Flubber
Color	0	1	0-1	position in a predefined color (Base of Flubber) gradient
Saturation	0	1	0-1	proportional color saturation value (note: can go higher than 1)
Oscillation Frequency	0.5	2.5	0-90	frequency in Hz of projection oscillations
Projection Time Synchronization	0.8	0	0-1	degree of temporal de-synchronization of all projections (higher values are less synchronized; 0 is perfectly synchronized)
Projection Amplitude Difference	0.8	0	0-1	degree of asymmetry in the amplitudes of all projections (0 is perfectly symmetrical)

Projection Time Synchronization and Projection Amplitude Difference jointly control the degree of regularity in the oscillations of the Flubber (e.g., from chaotic/irregular to regular).

Each feature needs a minimum and a maximum value as inputs, which correspond to extrema of the mapped coordinates. For example, when a feature is mapped to the x-axis, min corresponds to the left-most while max corresponds to the right-most side of the grid. Similarly, when mapped to the y-axis, min refers to the bottom and max to the top.

Both Grid and Flubber are abstract graphical representations that are language-independent (i.e., cross-culturally suitable): they do not require the participants to verbalize potentially complex or mixed emotions (Toet et al., 2018), which could help with minimizing interferences with subjective experience and brain activity (Lieberman et al., 2011).

The goal for Flubber was to design an abstract representation of the affect grid that is as universal and intuitive as possible in order to provide feedback without demanding the users' full attention and interfering with their experience (peripheral interaction; Bakker et al., 2016). For our studies, the Flubber was placed at the center-bottom of the visual field, which allows the feedback to be in the peripheral vision while minimizing blur caused by the lenses of the HTC Vive Pro. The affect grid's classical rating format can be challenging for participants to understand and heavily relies on prior instructions and training (Ekkekakis, 2013). A more intuitive and less cognitively demanding rating system, suitable for non-experts, could reduce the need for deliberate reasoning (Evans, 2010), which is crucial for repeated or even continuous ratings. Pinilla and colleagues (2021) highlight how visual properties like rounded lines and regular movements are consistently associated with positive valence, while angular shapes and erratic movements are tied to negative valence. Similarly, faster movements correspond to higher arousal, while slower ones denote lower arousal (e.g., Feng et al., 2014). The design of Flubber was informed by these findings and inspired by Emotion-prints (Cernea et al., 2015), a tool to visualize two-dimensional affective dimensions in the context of multi-touch systems, where valence was mapped to the line smoothness and arousal to the color and pulsation frequency of the contour of a touched area.

As there is accumulating evidence that valence and arousal are correlated (Yik et al., 2023; Kuppens et al., 2013), we added the option to map the features to the polar coordinates (distance and angle) instead of the x- and y-axes of the affect grid.

Of note, given its common use in other tools (e.g., McClay et al., 2023), we provide the option to have an affect-color mapping. We chose not to map the Flubber's color in our two studies, as color associations to specific emotions can differ between cultures (Hupka et al., 1997; Madden et al., 2000; Soriano & Valenzuela, 2009) and contexts (Lipson-Smith et al., 2020).

A video demonstrating the Grid and Flubber (with the visual-affect mapping used in our studies) feedback options can be found here: <https://doi.org/10.17617/3.OPNSJA>

### *Surveys*

In the Selection study, LimeSurvey (LimeSurvey GmbH, n.d.) was chosen for pre- and post-experimental digital surveys, while SoSci Survey (Leiner, 2021) was used in the Evaluation study. Before the experiment, in both Selection and Evaluation studies, the survey included demographic questions (age, gender), a question on prior iVR and gaming experiences and a shortened version of the Simulator Sickness Questionnaire (SSQ; Kennedy et al., 1993). In addition to these instruments, the Evaluation study's pre-experimental survey also included an additional demographic question (education), the Toronto Alexithymia Scale (TAS; Leising et al., 2009), and the Multidimensional Assessment of Interoceptive Awareness (MAIA; Mehling et al., 2018) to provide a more detailed and comprehensive characterization of the sample.

During the experiment, participants in both studies completed the System Usability Scale (SUS; Brooke, 1996, 2013) at the end of each experimental block to assess Usability, as well as the Kunin Scale (Kunin, 1998) to gauge user Satisfaction. Participants also rated the Distraction of the feedback by responding to the statement, "The feedback was distracting and/or disturbing," using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). Additionally, questions assessing the Emotional Representation of the feedback ("How much was the feedback representative of your inner emotions?") and Sense of Presence ("How strongly did you experience these videos/situations?" and "How much were you aware of the outside world?") were presented on a 7-point Likert scale.

After the experiment, participants in the Selection study indicated their preferred feedback with the question "Of the three feedback options you used, which did you like best?" and they were also invited to provide general comments on their experience. Similarly, in the Evaluation study, participants were asked to provide

their general impression through a post-experimental survey. This included an additional open-ended question, asking participants to reflect specifically on their experience with continuous rating. Both studies concluded with participants completing a final shortened version of the SSQ to assess any symptoms of simulator sickness.

### ***Common Procedures***

#### *Participants*

The sample size for both studies was determined to be at least 50 participants, chosen arbitrarily. Participants were recruited by providing a description of the project and listing its research objectives. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was collected in written form. Reimbursement was provided to participants at the BER site who were compensated with €12 per hour. The inclusion criteria were being at least 18 years old with normal or corrected-to-normal vision. The exclusion criteria included having suffered from, or currently suffering from, any psychiatric or neurological disorder, as well as having a dependency disorder or being engaged in substance abuse within the last 6 months. For the BER recruitment (through Castellum; Bengfort et al., 2022), proficiency in speaking and understanding English was required. For both Selection and Evaluation studies, participants were informed that some of the videos contained scenes depicting spiders, blood, snakes, dead corpses, or heights. Therefore, individuals with severe phobias or fears related to these stimuli were advised not to participate. Participants were also asked not to consume caffeine and nicotine within 3 hours before the experiment.

#### *Preprocessing*

All code used for all analyses and plots are publicly available on GitHub at <https://github.com/afourcade/AffectiveVR>. All data were preprocessed in Python (version 3.10) as follows: Continuous ratings (CRs) were (linearly) resampled to 20 Hz to ensure uniform sampling. As participants typically took a few seconds at the start of each trial to initiate and stabilize their ratings, the first five seconds of each trial were discarded. To obtain a singular representation of the CRs and facilitate comparison with the single rating (SR), CRs indices (CRi) were derived from the CRs. This involved computing various characteristics of the CRs distribution over time, including last rating, central tendencies such as mean, median,

and mode, dispersion tendencies including maximum (max), minimum (min), standard deviation (std), coefficient of variation (cv), and interquartile range (iqr), shape of the distribution such as skewness (skew) and kurtosis, and area under the curve (auc).

A Sense of Presence score was calculated from the two questions by reverse coding the second question and computing the mean of both questions. An Usability score was calculated from the SUS questionnaire by adapting the standard procedure to a shorter version of the survey and a different Likert scale. As there were 7 questions with responses within the 0-6 range, for each of the even numbered questions (positive), we subtracted 0 from the response; for each of the odd numbered questions (negative), we subtracted their value from 6. We added all the new values together and multiplied this score by  $100/(7*6) = 2.38$  in order to have a total score within the 0-100 range. iVR experience scores were derived by computing the mean of the two questions about iVR and gaming experience.

### ***Study 1: Selection.***

The Selection study aimed to design, refine and evaluate our CRs method and the different feedback options, suitable for use in a 360° iVR environment, by assessing their comparability with SR and evaluating Interference and User Experience characteristics, to identify the most effective feedback for the AffectTracker. To support this aim, we selected 60-second videos from YouTube, allowing for multiple repetitions of the experimental conditions (Table 2). These videos were specifically curated to elicit low affective variability (over time), featuring emotional-inducing content with minimal events, and were positioned within distinct affective quadrants of the arousal-valence space. This type of stimulus (i.e., inducing stable - constant over time - affective experiences) was chosen to carefully extend the classical approach of a short event-related stimulus associated with a SR, as an intermediate type of stimulus between static images and long eventful videos.

*Table 2. Detailed descriptions of the four 360° VR videos used in Study 1: Selection.*

Video label	Description	Purpose	Link
Animal puppies	A video showing animal puppies in natural settings. The animals remained still.	Low arousal - positive valence (LP). To create a pleasant and soothing emotional response.	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FMU0jd2IUks">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FMU0jd2IUks</a>
Abandoned power plant	An uneventful scene set in an abandoned power plant.	Low arousal - negative valence (LN). To inspire a somber and unsettling feeling, emphasizing the emptiness and stillness of the scene.	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jl7Etw0a7ro">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jl7Etw0a7ro</a>
Skydiving	A video depicting skydiving experience with a wingsuit.	High arousal - positive valence (HP). To produce an exhilarating and energizing emotional experience, heightening the sense of thrill.	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lrE6T1rct6g">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lrE6T1rct6g</a>
Haunted house	A video featuring a haunted house. The video included small jumpscare moments, producing feelings of tension and fear through a sinister atmosphere.	High arousal - negative valence (HN). To provoke fearful reactions, amplifying the sense of dread and suspense.	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g1WBh457UUM">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g1WBh457UUM</a>

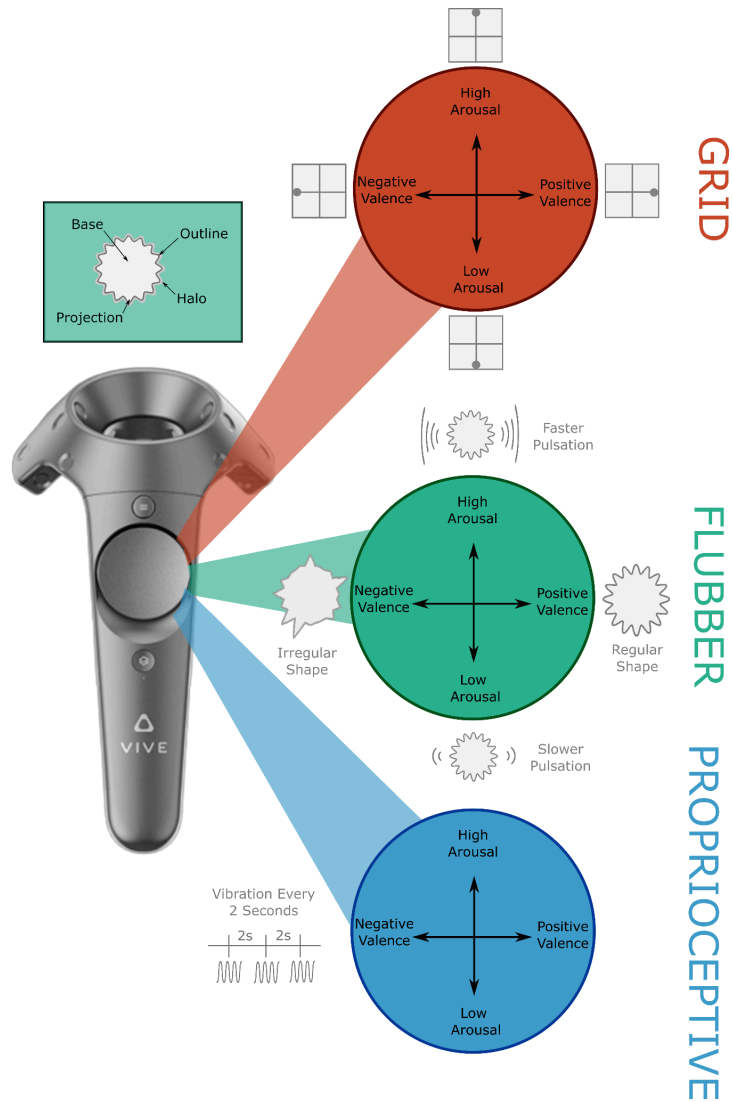
### *Feedback for Continuous Rating (CR)*

Participants rated their affective state continuously during the video presentation and with a SR after the video, using the touchpad on the iVR controller. The possible range for all ratings on both dimensions was [-1 1]. During the CR, the participant's thumb trajectory on the touchpad was recorded at a sampling frequency of 20 Hz. During the SR, the participants placed their thumb on the position corresponding to their subjective experience and validated their rating by pressing the trigger button on the iVR controller.

Three prototypes of feedback for CR were tested in a pilot study with 12 participants which was conducted to verify the feasibility of the Selection study and to refine the design and functionality of the different feedback options (see Supplementary Material S1 for a detailed description of the feedback development and the pilot



study). The Selection study included the refined feedback options derived from the insights gained in the pilot study (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Feedback options used in Study 1: Selection for CR of affective states: Grid, Flubber, and Proprioceptive. The Grid feedback displayed valence on the x-axis and arousal on the y-axis, with participants' ratings represented by a dot in the arousal-valence space. The Flubber feedback used a dynamic abstract shape that changed based on participants' affective ratings, mapping arousal and valence onto its form and oscillation. The Proprioceptive feedback relied on participants' proprioceptive input on the touchpad, with no visual feedback, but included periodic vibrations to prompt continuous rating.

When using the Grid feedback, participants encountered a simplified version of the affect grid, featuring valence on the x-axis (negative to positive) and arousal on the y-axis (low to high). A dot continuously represented their momentary rating in this valence-arousal space.

Conversely, the Flubber feedback presented participants with an abstract shape called Flubber, dynamically changing based on their affective ratings. Low-level visual properties were mapped onto the Cartesian coordinates in the grid. Thus, y coordinates corresponded to arousal, with projection's amplitude (set to defaults values: min: 0.2, max: 0.4) and oscillation frequency (set to defaults values: min: 0.5, max: 2.5) varying with arousal levels. Of note, the frequency of the oscillations was tailored to [0.5 2.5] Hz after experimenting during the pilot. Meanwhile, x coordinates represented valence, with projection's smoothness (set to defaults values: min: 0, max: 1), projection's time synchronization (set to defaults values: min: 0.8, max: 0) and projection's amplitude difference (set to defaults values: min: 0.8, max: 0) reflecting different valence levels. For example, placing their thumb on the lower left side (e.g., -1,-1 coordinate) of the touchpad would thus result in a slowly pulsating Flubber with irregular angular projections, representing the participant's experience of low arousal and negative valence. Similarly, placing their thumb on the top right side (e.g., 1,1 coordinate) of the touchpad would thus result in a quickly pulsating Flubber with regular smooth projections, representing the participant's experience of high arousal and positive valence.

Finally, with the Proprioceptive feedback, no visual feedback was given. Participants needed to rely solely on their thumb's proprioceptive awareness on the touchpad, indicating their position in the valence-arousal space. To ensure participants would not forget to continuously rate when no feedback was provided, the iVR controller vibrated periodically every two seconds (0.5 Hz frequency, independent of the ratings) as a reminder.

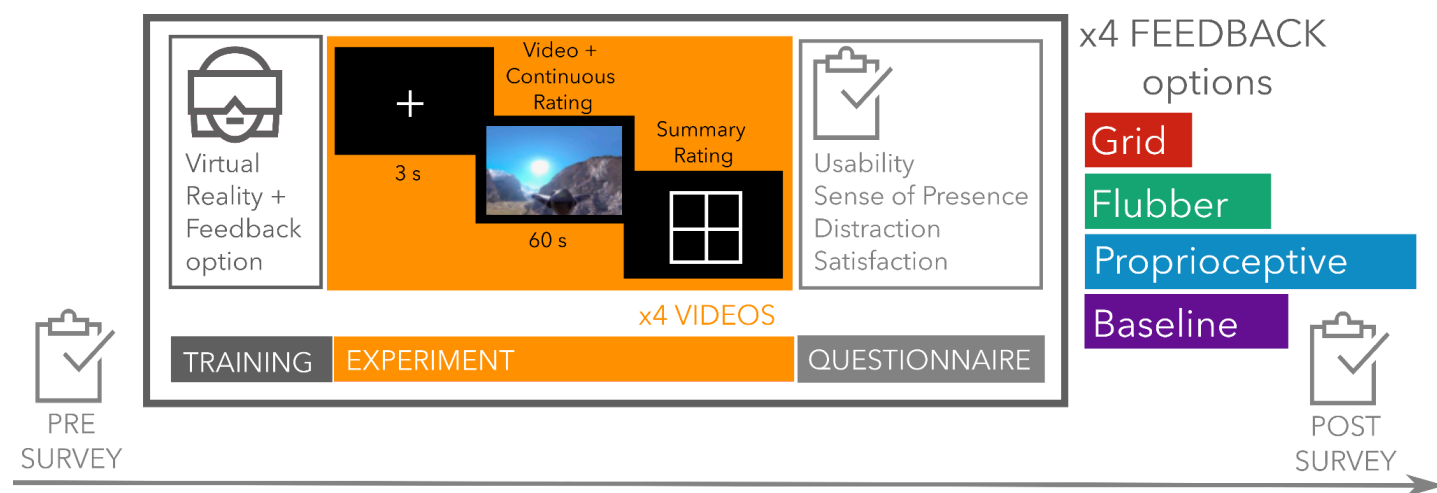
### *Study design*

The observational study employed a 4x4 within-subjects design with two factors with four levels each: feedback (Grid, Flubber, Proprioceptive and Baseline) and videos that could each elicit affective responses within a different quadrant of the valence-arousal space (high arousal - negative valence [HN], high arousal - positive valence [HP], low arousal - negative valence [LN], and low arousal - positive valence [LP]). A nested

randomization of the videos within blocks and blocks across subjects was performed, using custom Python scripts and the `numpy.random` package.

### *Experimental design and measured variables*

The experimental design is illustrated in Figure 2. The total duration of the experiment was approximately one hour (see Supplementary Material S2 for the detailed session script).



**Figure 2.** *Experimental design of Study 1: Selection. The experiment lasted approximately one hour and consisted of four blocks, each containing one of three continuous rating (CR) feedback conditions—Grid, Flubber, and Proprioceptive—or a Baseline condition without CR. Participants completed a training phase, where they interacted with 2D images from the International Affective Picture System (IAPS), followed by a trial phase with 360° iVR videos that elicited affective responses. CR and summary rating were collected in each trial. After each block, participants evaluated the User Experience and Interference through questionnaires about Distraction, Usability, Satisfaction, Emotional representation, and Sense of Presence.*

The experiment comprised three conditions in which participants continuously rated their affective experience using different feedback options: Grid, Flubber, and Proprioceptive. Additionally, a Baseline condition with no CR during the videos was included. The four conditions were presented in random order across four blocks of trials. Each block consisted of three phases: training, four trials in which CR and SR scores were collected, and a questionnaire session with in-iVR questions.

During the training, participants were shown four 2D pictures from the International Affective Picture System (IAPS; Bradley & Lang, 2007), each representing one quadrant of the valence-arousal space. These pictures were randomly presented for a maximum of 100 seconds each, allowing participants to self-pace, and were combined each time with a different feedback. After a welcome screen, participants familiarized with the iVR environment, followed by a brief introduction to the feedback or Baseline condition. A 3-second fixation cross preceded the picture presentation, during which participants could become accustomed to the feedback. The training concluded with a screen summarizing the instructions for reporting affective states for that specific block. For each block, 360° videos with 4K (4096x2160 pixels) resolution were used to elicit an affective response. The videos were edited to 60 seconds each and shown four times overall, once in each of the four blocks, in a randomized order. Each experimental block began with a 3-second fixation cross, followed by one of the videos combined with the feedback or Baseline condition, and concluded with a screen for SR.

Upon completion, a final screen appeared, signaling the end of the procedure and thanking the participants for their involvement.

### *Statistical analysis*

All data were analyzed using custom scripts in R (version 4.1.0). To examine associations between CRis and SR, Pearson correlations were computed between each CRi and the corresponding SR across all conditions (feedback and videos) and participants. To investigate the influence of the feedback options on these associations, correlation coefficients between each feedback were compared. Specifically, differences in Pearson's  $r$  for each pair of feedback were statistically tested using the *cocor* package in R (Diedenhofen & Musch, 2015), treating the correlations as two non-overlapping correlations based on dependent groups.

### Comparison between feedback options - Interference and User Experience

The differences in Interference between feedback options were examined both (1) directly, using the Distraction and Sense of Presence questionnaires, and (2) indirectly, investigating differences between SRs during CR rating (i.e., during each feedback condition [ $SR_{\text{feedback}}$ ]) and no rating (i.e., baseline [ $SR_{\text{baseline}}$ ]). The differences in User Experience were examined through the Usability, Satisfaction and Emotion Representation questionnaires. Differences in Distraction, Sense of Presence, Usability, Satisfaction, and Emotion

Representation scores were tested using a Type 3 ANOVA with the factor *feedback* (four levels: Grid, Flubber, Proprioceptive, Baseline), followed by post-hoc t-tests (with false discovery rate [FDR] correction) to explore specific differences within feedback. For each feedback, differences between  $SR_{\text{feedback}}$  and  $SR_{\text{baseline}}$  were assessed using paired t-tests.

Equivalence tests were conducted using the TOST (Two One-Sided Tests) approach (Lakens et al., 2018). For the questionnaire comparison, equivalence tests were conducted using a SESOI of 7 points for Usability scores on a 0-100 scale and 0.5 for the other scores. For the SR comparison, a SESOI of 0.125 points (raw effect size) on a scale ranging from -1 to 1 for arousal and valence was chosen.

### ***Study 2: Evaluation.***

The Evaluation study aimed to assess the selected feedback and compare CR to SR during a longer and more varied 360° iVR stimulus, while also re-evaluating User Experience and Interference factors.

Additionally, data of a subset of participants who performed the experiment in a standing position instead of being seated were collected in the Berlin site only, with the aim to perform a sub-analysis by exploring the effects of body posture on emotion ratings (Nair et al., 2015). Such effects may be subtle for self reports but more pronounced for cardiorespiratory signals (Widmaier et al., 2022), which we aimed to acquire in a later phase of the project.

To curate the ideal stimulus, we followed specific requirements: the videos needed to be 360-degree, have a resolution of 4K (4096x2160 pixels), be stereoscopic (top-bottom), and have a duration of around 20 minutes. Importantly, the videos had to offer high affective variability (over time) with dynamic storytelling, containing many events to contrast the more stable emotion-inducing or uneventful videos used in the Selection phase. The stimulus needed to cover multiple quadrants of the affect grid, avoiding restriction to just one. Additionally, no language or text should be present to prevent language barriers or emotional labeling. For the sake of immersion and continuity, the videos had to either be fully computer-generated or fully based on real-life captures, with no mixing of the two. As no single video met all these criteria, we created a continuous sequence

of videos as a compromise to best meet our requirements and provide the necessary immersive and affectively rich experience for the study (Table 3).

Table 3. Detailed descriptions of the four 360° VR videos used in Study 2: Evaluation.

Temporal sequence	Video label	Description	Purpose
0:00 - 1:30			
5:43 - 7:13	Scifi	Depicting the inside of a space	Served as a baseline; shown at the start and
13:43 - 15:13	(Video 1)	station, a still video with no events.	interspersed between other videos.
21:34 - 23:04			
1:30 - 5:43	Invasion! (Video 2)	Short animated film (Baobab Studios), where a rabbit encounters two aliens on an iced lake.	To provide a general emotional stimulus with moderate changes throughout.
7:13 - 13:43	Asteroids! (Video 3)	Short animated film (Baobab Studios), featuring two aliens navigating through a cloud of asteroids in a spaceship.	To deliver a dynamic emotional experience spanning a range of intensities and emotional tones.
15:13 - 21:34	Underwood (Video 4)	Guided walk through an underground bunker where strange biological experiments occurred. Based on the iVR environment <i>Underwood</i> (McCall et al., 2022).	To induce a sense of ambiguous threat, fear, or anxiety, consistent with previous research methodologies (McCall et al., 2016; Legrand & Allen, 2023).

Video 1 and Video 4 are custom-made and accessible at the link: <https://doi.org/10.17617/3.OPNSJA>. Video 2 is available at the link <https://youtu.be/SZ0fKW5PttM?si=G23Zm60xveVJUBWY>; Video 3 is available at the link <https://youtu.be/jEUnBEKEKCs?si=UInxqexWmyITI816>.

### Feedback for Continuous Rating (CR)

The feedback used in the Evaluation study and subject of the validation was the Flubber already described in the section related to feedback for CR of the Selection study (Figure 1). Similarly, the sampling frequency was set to 20 Hz and the possible range for all ratings on both dimensions was [-1 1]. To enhance the user

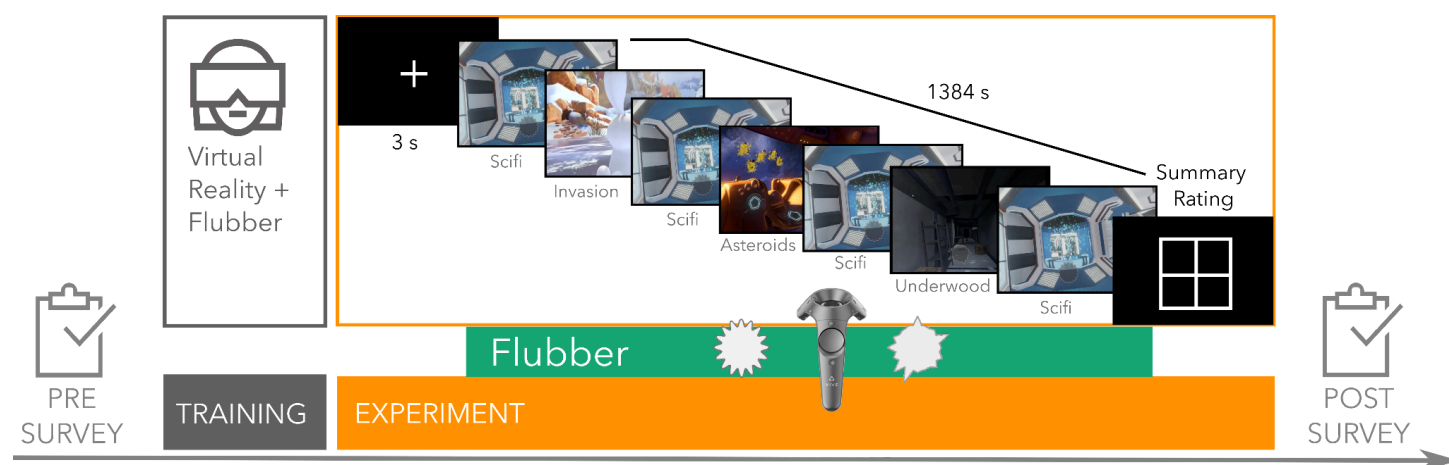
experience, some modifications were implemented. Notably, to ensure visibility across various backgrounds, we incorporated an outline and a halo.

### Study design

The observational study involved a continuous sequence of videos carefully selected to encompass the entire spectrum of the valence-arousal space (including high arousal - negative valence, high arousal - positive valence, low arousal - negative valence, and low arousal - positive valence). The sequence of videos was 1384 seconds long.

### Experimental design and measured variables

The experimental design is illustrated in Figure 3. The total duration of the experiment was approximately one hour (see Supplementary Material S3 for the detailed session script).



**Figure 3.** Experimental design of Study 2: Evaluation. The experiment lasted approximately one hour and included a training phase followed by a trial involving a 23-minute sequence of 360° stereoscopic videos. Participants continuously rated their affective experience using the Flubber feedback and provided a summary rating at the end of the video. Video 1 (Scifi), serving as a neutral baseline, was repeated between the emotionally evocative videos. Before and after the experiment, participants completed surveys, including the SSQ, MAIA, TAS, and questions on User Experience and Interference.

The in-iVR session comprised a training phase and a trial involving a 23-minutes video, during which participants continuously rated their affective experience using the Flubber feedback and provided a SR at the end of the video.

During the training phase, participants were shown the LP video from the Selection study combined with the Flubber, followed by the SR. The video presentation, allowing participants to become accustomed to the feedback, was preceded by a 3-second fixation cross. The training concluded with a screen summarizing the instructions for reporting affective states for the following trial session.

The experiment began with a 3-second fixation cross, followed by an uninterrupted sequence of videos where participants continuously rated their affective states visualized by the Flubber, and concluded with a screen for SR. Four 360° stereoscopic videos were used for the experiment. Table 3 shows the details of the selected videos. The videos were linked together by 2s fade-in and fade-out to create a continuous sequence. Video 1, chosen for its neutral content to serve as a baseline, was presented at the beginning and in between each of the three more emotionally engaging videos, making it the only video repeated four times. This baseline placement is intended to provide a consistent reference point, which could be especially valuable for future studies involving physiological measures, such as heart rate or skin conductance, to assess the physiological impact of emotional stimuli.

A video of an exemplary participant performing CR during an excerpt of the video sequence (*Scifi* and *Underwood* videos) is available here: <https://doi.org/10.17617/3.QPNSJA>.

### *Statistical analysis*

To analyze associations between the different CRis and SR, Pearson correlations were initially conducted between each CRi and the corresponding SR. Subsequently, to compare correlations between the CR mean and SR for the Flubber feedback between the Selection and Evaluation studies, the correlation coefficients from the two studies were subjected to Fischer r-to-z transformation. This allowed the statistical assessment of the difference between two independent correlation coefficients.

To compare the variability of the CRs between the Selection and Evaluation studies, the standard deviation (std) of the CRs for each participant, each video and each affective dimension was computed and entered into



ANOVAs with factor *video* (5 levels: Selection HN, Selection HP, Selection LN, Selection LP, Evaluation). Post-hoc t-tests (with Bonferroni correction) were then employed to explore specific differences between the videos.

To compare responses between the Selection and Evaluation phases, a Type 3 ANOVA with the factor *study* (two levels: Selection, Evaluation) was performed. Post-hoc t-tests were then employed to explore specific differences within studies.

## Results

### *Participants*

Table 4 shows the baseline characteristics of the participants for both studies. In Study 1: Selection 51 participants were included, while Study 2: Evaluation comprised 84 participants.

The subset of participants in a standing position in Study 2: Evaluation consisted of 21 subjects. Sub-analyses investigating differences in body posture are reported in the Supplements (see Table S8).

The results presented below are from analyses performed on the seated participants only (Study 1: Selection N = 51; Study 2: Evaluation N = 62).

*Table 4. Description of the samples for Study 1: Selection and Study 2: Evaluation.*

	<i>Study 1: Selection</i>		<i>Study 2: Evaluation</i>	
	Berlin (N = 29)	Torino (N = 22)	Berlin (N = 21+21)	Torino (N = 41)
	N (%) / mean (std)	N (%) / mean (std)	N (%) / mean (std)	N (%) / mean (std)
Age	25.8 (5.8)	30.0 (6.0)	28.2 (5.2)	31.4 (7.6)
Gender				
Male	15 (52%)	7 (32%)	21 (50%)	10 (24%)
Female	14 (48%)	15 (68%)	20 (48%)	31 (76%)
Non-binary	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (2%)	0 (0%)
Education				
Unknown	12 (41%)			
Middle school	3 (10%)	0 (0%)	2 (5%)	0 (0%)
High school	10 (35%)	7 (32%)	10 (24%)	8 (20%)
Bachelor	4 (14%)	3 (14%)	19 (45%)	5 (5%)
Master	0 (0%)	8 (36%)	9 (21%)	24 (59%)
Doctorate	0 (0%)	4 (18%)	2 (5%)	7 (17%)
VR experience score	1.98 (0.71)	1.98 (0.71)	1.93 (0.64)	1.8 (0.69)

Position				
Seated	29 (100%)	22 (100%)	21 (50%)	41 (100%)
Standing	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	21 (50%)	0 (0%)
MAIA				
Noticing	n/a	n/a	3.49 (0.76)	3.4 (0.75)
Not-Distracting	n/a	n/a	2.69 (0.9)	2.52 (0.63)
Not-Worrying	n/a	n/a	2.55 (0.48)	2.18 (0.55)
Attention Regulation	n/a	n/a	2.84 (0.85)	2.71 (0.79)
Emotional Awareness	n/a	n/a	3.46 (1.0)	3.45 (0.94)
Self-Regulation	n/a	n/a	2.93 (1.13)	2.64 (1.02)
Body Listening	n/a	n/a	2.66 (1.1)	2.82 (0.99)
Trust	n/a	n/a	3.44 (1.29)	3.2 (1.23)
TAS				
Difficulty Describing	n/a	n/a	11.9 (4.5)	11.66 (4.14)
Feelings				
Difficulty Identifying Feeling	n/a	n/a	16.55 (5.64)	14.83 (4.45)
Externally-Oriented Thinking	n/a	n/a	17.43 (4.04)	14.54 (4.15)
TAS total score	n/a	n/a	45.88 (10.34)	41.02 (9.63)

### ***Study 1: Selection***

#### *CR and SR*

CR mean (over timepoints) and SR are described in Table 5 and illustrated in Figure 4. There were no significant differences between test sites of both CR mean (valence:  $t(610) = 1.27, p = .204$ ; arousal:  $t(610) = -0.25, p = .802$ ) and SR (valence:  $t(814) = 1.30, p = .193$ ; arousal:  $t(814) = -0.92, p = .357$ ) for both affective dimensions. Of note, CR means and SRs for each video were consistent with the quadrants they were selected for. Mean CR time-series across participants are shown in Figure 7.

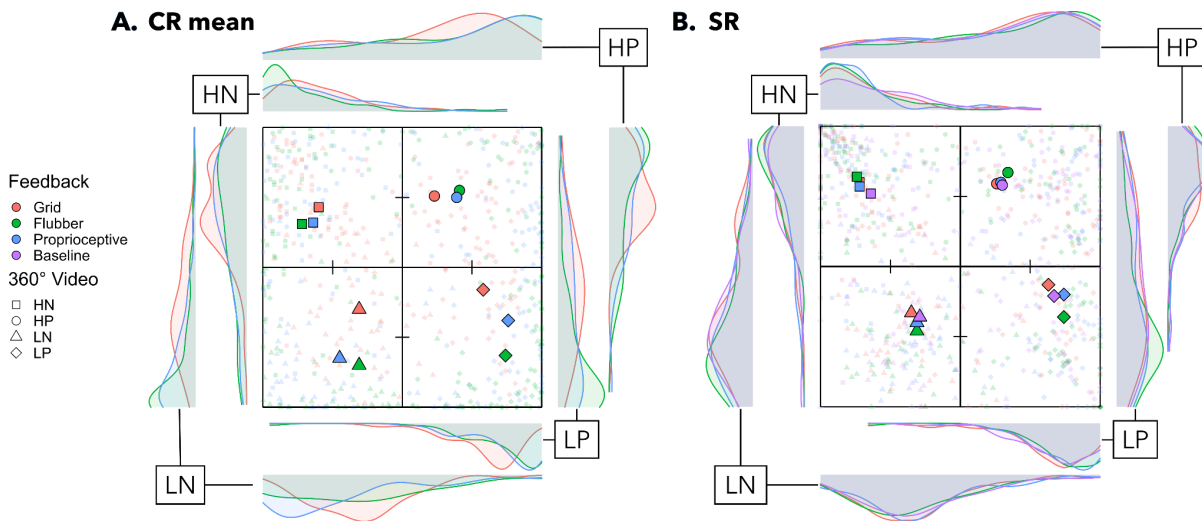
Table 5. Descriptive statistics of CR mean and SR for each feedback and each video in Study 1: Selection.

<i>Valence</i>	<i>CR mean</i>				<i>SR</i>			
	mean	std	min	max	mean	std	min	max
HN								
Baseline					-0.64	0.35	-1	0.58
Flubber	-0.72	0.35	-1	0.75	-0.74	0.28	-1	0.45
Grid	-0.6	0.28	-0.95	0.2	-0.72	0.29	-1	0.26
Proprioceptive	-0.64	0.31	-1	0.25	-0.72	0.32	-1	0.44
HP								
Baseline					0.3	0.58	-1	1
Flubber	0.41	0.61	-0.93	1	0.34	0.6	-0.93	1
Grid	0.23	0.53	-0.87	0.97	0.26	0.59	-1	1
Proprioceptive	0.39	0.63	-1	1	0.29	0.6	-1	1
LN								
Baseline					-0.29	0.42	-1	0.88
Flubber	-0.31	0.51	-1	1	-0.31	0.43	-1	1
Grid	-0.31	0.33	-0.92	0.77	-0.35	0.38	-1	0.94
Proprioceptive	-0.45	0.51	-0.99	1	-0.31	0.42	-1	1
LP								
Baseline					0.67	0.29	-0.34	1

Flubber	0.74	0.33	-0.95	1	0.74	0.29	-0.66	1
Grid	0.58	0.25	-0.2	0.98	0.63	0.34	-0.65	1
Proprioceptive	0.76	0.24	0.05	1	0.74	0.23	-0.04	1
<i>Arousal</i>					<i>CR mean</i>			
	mean	std	min	max	<i>SR</i>			
					mean	std	min	max
HN								
Baseline					0.52	0.45	-1	1
Flubber	0.31	0.55	-0.98	1	0.64	0.31	-0.54	1
Grid	0.43	0.32	-0.56	0.93	0.6	0.35	-0.28	1
Proprioceptive	0.33	0.48	-0.86	0.97	0.57	0.42	-0.62	1
HP								
Baseline					0.58	0.31	-0.48	1
Flubber	0.55	0.42	-0.43	1	0.67	0.26	-0.13	1
Grid	0.51	0.3	-0.65	0.99	0.59	0.31	-0.6	1
Proprioceptive	0.5	0.44	-0.89	1	0.6	0.31	-0.39	1
LN								
Baseline					-0.36	0.43	-1	0.91
Flubber	-0.7	0.45	-1	0.94	-0.46	0.42	-1	0.76
Grid	-0.3	0.41	-1	0.85	-0.33	0.45	-1	0.85
Proprioceptive	-0.65	0.41	-1	1	-0.4	0.44	-1	0.85

LP									
Baseline					-0.21	0.49	-1	0.79	
Flubber	-0.63	0.47	-1	0.9	-0.36	0.5	-1	0.96	
Grid	-0.16	0.46	-1	0.94	-0.13	0.52	-1	0.9	
Proprioceptive	-0.38	0.52	-1	0.89	-0.2	0.56	-1	0.87	

**Legend:** CR: continuous rating; SR: summary rating; HP: high arousal - positive valence; LN: low arousal - negative valence; LP: low arousal - positive valence.



**Figure 4.** Overview of the ratings in Study 1: Selection. *A.* Means across participants of the CR mean (over timepoints) for each feedback (color coded; Grid: red, Flubber: green, Proprioceptive: blue, Baseline: purple) and each video (shape coded). Density plots and individual dots are also shown for each feedback and each video. *B.* SRs for each feedback and each video. Density plots and individual dots are also shown for each feedback and each video. CR means and SRs were consistent with the quadrants the videos were selected for. HN: high arousal - negative valence; HP: high arousal - positive valence; LN: low arousal - negative valence; LP: low arousal - positive valence.

For each affective dimension (valence, arousal), we computed Pearson correlations between SR and each CRis across all feedback options, videos, and participants. CR mean was the most correlated to the SR (valence:  $r(\text{CR\_mean-SR}) = .926, p < .001$ ; arousal:  $r(\text{CR\_mean-SR}) = .873, p < .001$ , see Table 6). Therefore, for the following analyses comparing the different feedback options, the focus was on the CR mean. More details and other CRis can be found in the Supplementary Material.

### *Feedback comparison*

#### CR mean-SR correlation

The CR means were equivalent between Flubber and Proprioceptive (TOST approach, all  $p > .05$  for difference; all  $p < .025$  for equivalence, see Table S4 in Supplementary Material). There was a significant difference between Grid and the other two feedback options (i.e. Flubber and Proprioceptive) for the dimension of arousal (all  $t > 5.3$ ; all  $p < .001$ ; see Table S4 in Supplementary Material), but not for valence. Additional feedback comparison of CR std, skewness and kurtosis can be found in Table S4 in Supplementary material.

The SR for all feedback options and during Baseline were equivalent for both affective dimensions (TOST approach, all  $p > .05$  for difference, all  $p < .010$  for equivalence, see Table S5 in Supplementary Material).

Finally we compared the correlations between CR mean and SR for each feedback and affective dimension. For valence, there were no significant differences in CR mean-SR correlation between feedback options (all  $z < 1.5$ ; all  $p > .125$ , see Figure 5 and Table S6 in Supplementary Material). For arousal, the correlation for Grid was significantly higher than for the other two feedback options (all  $z > 2.2$ , all  $p < .025$ , see Figure 5 and Table S6 in Supplementary Material).

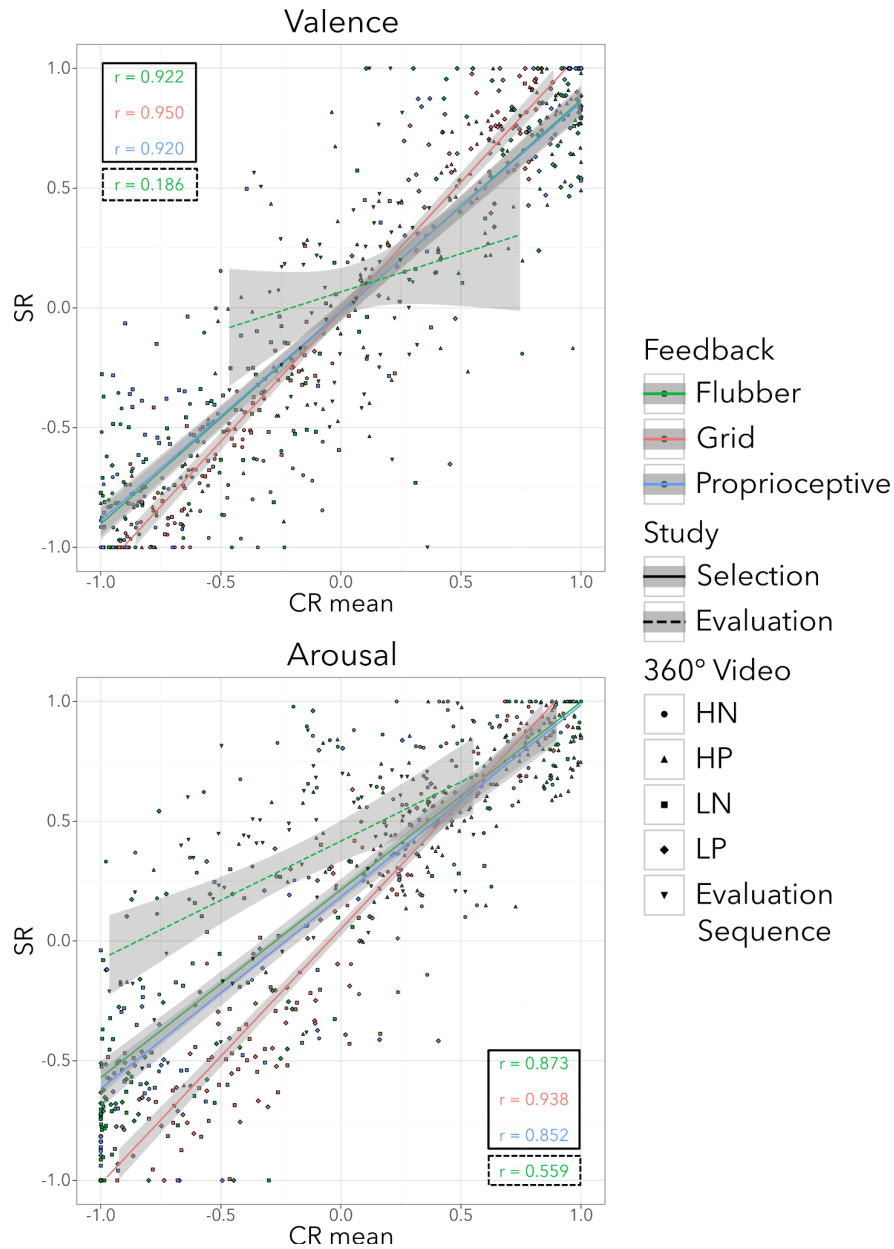
*Table 6. Pearson correlations between SR and each CR indices, across all feedback options, videos and participants, in Study1: Selection.*

Pearson $r(\text{CRi-SR})$	Valence		Arousal	
	$r$	$p$	$r$	$p$
cr_last	.903	< .001	.852	< .001

cr_mean	.926	< .001	.873	< .001
cr_median	.918	< .001	.865	< .001
cr_mode	.831	< .001	.721	< .001
cr_max	.726	< .001	.793	< .001
cr_min	.767	< .001	.609	< .001
cr_std	-.089	< .001	.227	< .001
cr_cv	-.009	.833	.091	.024
cr_range	-.147	< .001	.315	< .001
cr_iqr	-.051	.21	.154	< .001
cr_skew	-.539	< .001	-.471	< .001
cr_kurtosis	.019	.633	-.138	< .001
cr_auc	.922	< .001	.871	< .001

**Legend:** last: last rating; cv: coefficient of variation; iqr: interquartile range; skew: skewness; auc: area under the curve.





**Figure 5.** Correlation between continuous rating (CR) mean and summary rating (SR). A. Valence dimension. SR plotted against CR mean for each feedback (color coded; Grid: red, Flubber: green, Proprioceptive: blue) and each video (shape coded), both for the Selection and Evaluation studies. There were no significant differences in CR mean-SR correlation between feedback options (all  $z < 1.5$ ; all  $p > .125$ ), in the Selection study. B. Arousal dimension. The correlation for Grid was significantly higher than for the other two feedback options (all  $z > 2.2$ , all  $p < .025$ ), in the Selection study. HN: high arousal - negative valence; HP: high arousal - positive valence; LN: low arousal - negative valence; LP: low arousal - positive valence.

## Questionnaires

Scores to each questionnaire are described in Table 7 and illustrated in Figure 6.

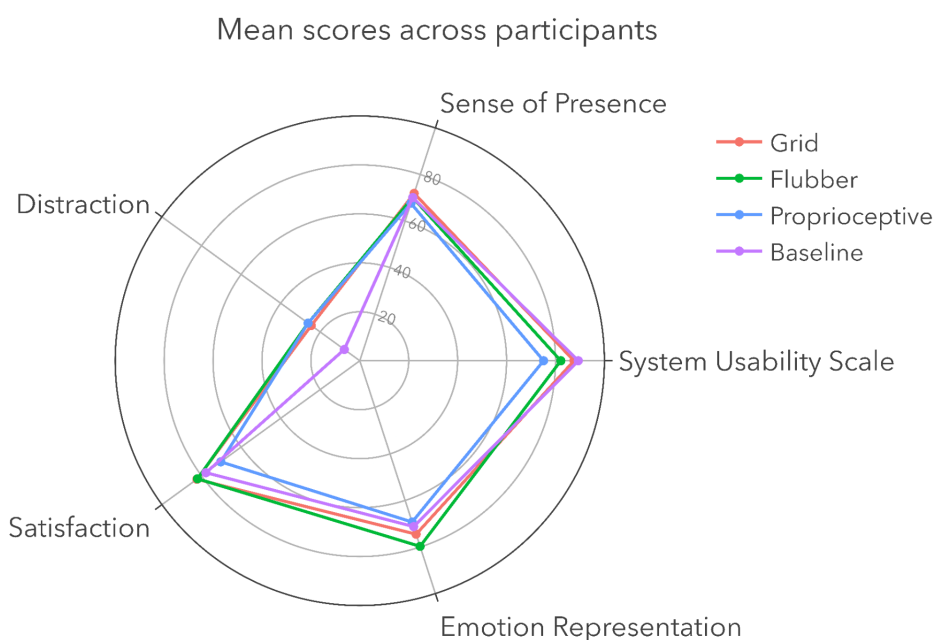
Table 7. Descriptive statistics of each questionnaire for each feedback in Study 1: Selection.

	Baseline				Flubber				Grid				Proprioceptive			
	max	mean	min	std	max	mean	min	std	max	mean	min	std	max	mean	min	std
Emotion Representation	6	4.27	1	1.47	6	4.78	2	0.99	6	4.47	1	1.27	6	4.16	1	1.3
Distraction	3	0.47	0	0.81	5	1.57	0	1.81	6	1.47	0	1.65	6	1.57	0	1.8
Sense of Presence	6	4.21	1	1.16	6	4.21	1	1.14	6	4.31	1	1.08	6	4.06	0.5	1.28
Satisfaction	6	4.67	2	1.14	6	4.92	1	1.23	6	4.94	2	1.05	6	4.22	0	1.55
System Usability Scale	99.96	89.32	52.36	11.23	99.96	82.18	33.32	15.76	99.96	87.59	49.98	10.83	99.96	75.13	42.84	16.05

Differences in Distraction, Sense of Presence, Usability, Satisfaction, and Emotion Representation scores were tested comparing participants' responses to the different questionnaires between the feedback options and including Baseline (i.e., no CR, only SR; see Figure 6 and Table S7 in Supplementary Material).

For the Distraction questionnaire, there was a significant effect of *feedback* ( $F(3) = 6.8, p < .001$ ), where no CR during videos (i.e., Baseline condition) was significantly less invasive than CR during videos (i.e., for all of the feedback options; all  $t > 4.0$ ; all  $p < .001$ ). Importantly, there were no significant differences between the feedback options (all  $t < 0.33$ ; all  $p > .992$ ). For Sense of Presence, there was no significant effect of *feedback* ( $F(3) = 1.23, p = .301$ ). The responses were equivalent for all feedback options as well as the Baseline condition (TOST approach, all  $p > .310$  for difference, all  $p < .020$  for equivalence). For Usability, there was a significant effect of *feedback* ( $F(3) = 17.9, p < .001$ ). The SUS scores were the highest for Grid and Baseline

(all  $|t| > 2.5$ , all  $p < .020$ ). The SUS score was also higher for Flubber than Proprioceptive ( $t(50) = 3.0$ ,  $p = .010$ ). For Emotion Representation, the score was significantly higher for Flubber than for Proprioceptive ( $t(50) = 3.6$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and equivalent between Grid, Proprioceptive and Baseline (TOST approach, all  $p > .090$  for difference, all  $p < .050$  for equivalence). For Satisfaction, there was a significant effect of *feedback* ( $F(3) = 4.87$ ,  $p = .003$ ). The scores were equivalent for Flubber and Grid (TOST approach,  $p = .920$  for difference, all  $p > .010$  for equivalence), while scores for Proprioceptive were lower than for Flubber and Grid (all  $t < 3.01$ , all  $p > .010$ ). Finally, Flubber was ranked first as preferred feedback (62% of participants) and Grid second (27% of participants). Figure 6 shows a radar plot illustrating the mean scores of questionnaires across participants for each feedback.



**Figure 6.** Questionnaires mean scores across participants for each feedback (color coded; Grid: red, Flubber: green, Proprioceptive: blue, Baseline: purple), in Study 1: Selection. Scores are normalized to 0-100 for visualization purposes. Distraction and Sense of Presence were part of the Interference assessment of the feedback options, while Usability, Satisfaction and Emotion Representation were part of the User Experience assessment.

**Study 2: Evaluation***Sample*

The characteristics of the sample that participated in the Evaluation study are illustrated in Table 4. Results of MAIA mean scores indicated that the participants generally had an overall good ability to recognize and understand bodily sensations related to emotions. TAS-20 scores are within the non-alexithymic range.

*CR and SR*

CR mean (over timepoints) and SR are described in Table 8. There was no significant effect of *test site* (valence:  $F(1) = 1.78, p = .187$ ; arousal:  $F(1) = 0.40, p = .528$ ) or *gender* (valence:  $F(2) = 1.87, p = .162$ ; arousal:  $F(2) = 1.24, p = .294$ ) on CR mean for both affective dimensions.

There was no significant effect of *test site* (valence:  $F(1) = 0.10, p = .755$ ; arousal:  $F(1) = 1.93, p = .169$ ) or *gender* (valence:  $F(2) = 0.91, p = .406$ ; arousal:  $F(2) = 0.18, p = .835$ ) on SR for both affective dimensions.

Table 8. Descriptive statistics of CR mean and SR for each test site and each body posture in Study 2:

*Evaluation.*

<i>Valence</i>	<i>CR mean</i>				<i>SR</i>			
	mean	std	min	max	mean	std	min	max
TOR								
seated	0.05	0.24	-0.36	0.75	0.09	0.42	-1	1
BER								
seated	0.05	0.21	-0.46	0.3	0.08	0.32	-0.42	1
standing	-0.04	0.21	-0.37	0.51	-0.02	0.33	-0.48	0.71
TOR+BER								
seated	0.05	0.23	-0.46	0.75	0.08	0.39	-1	1

<i>Arousal</i>	<i>CR mean</i>				<i>SR</i>			
	mean	std	min	max	mean	std	min	max
TOR								
seated	-0.09	0.4	-0.83	0.55	0.39	0.37	-0.53	0.99
BER								
seated	-0.38	0.38	-0.96	0.52	0.2	0.34	-0.42	0.7
standing	0.02	0.28	-0.79	0.47	0.33	0.3	-0.44	0.68
TOR+BER								
seated	-0.19	0.41	-0.96	0.55	0.33	0.37	-0.53	0.99

**Legend:** CR: continuous rating; SR: summary rating; TOR: Torino; BER: Berlin

Similar to the Selection study, Pearson correlations between SR and CRis were computed for each affective dimension (Table 9). We found that for valence the CR mean exhibited the highest correlation with the SR ( $r(\text{CR\_mean-SR}) = .186, p = .147$ ), while for arousal it was the CR std ( $r(\text{CR\_std-SR}) = .591, p < .001$ ).

*Table 9. Pearson correlations between SR and each CR indices in Study 2: Evaluation.*

Pearson $r(\text{CRi-SR})$	valence		arousal	
	$r$	$p$	$r$	$p$
cr_last	-.012	.928	.143	.266
cr_mean	.186	.147	.559	< .001
cr_median	.052	.688	.499	< .001
cr_mode	.182	.156	.398	.001

cr_max	NA	NA	.378	.002
cr_min	-.092	.476	NA	NA
cr_std	-.006	.961	.591	< .001
cr_cv	-.133	.303	.185	.149
cr_range	.092	.476	.378	.002
cr_iqr	-.069	.596	.493	< .001
cr_skew	-.113	.384	-.522	< .001
cr_kurtosis	.112	.388	-.400	.001
cr_auc	.175	.173	.549	< .001

**Legend:** last: last rating; cv: coefficient of variation; iqr: interquartile range; skew: skewness; auc: area under the curve.

### *Questionnaires*

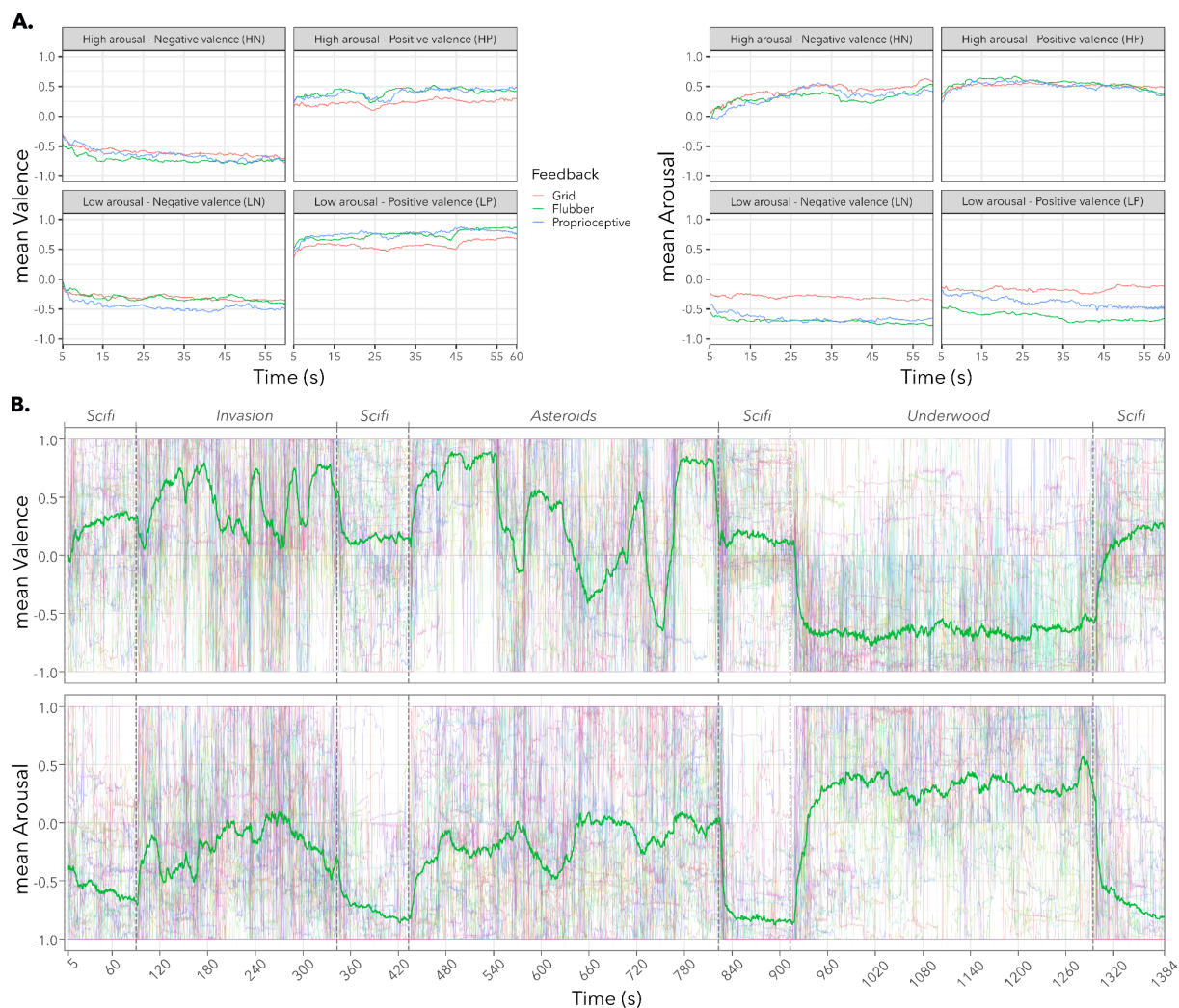
Scores to each questionnaire are described in Table 10.

*Table 10. Descriptive statistics of each questionnaire in Study 2: Evaluation.*

	mean	std	min	max
Emotion Representation	5.16	1	2.71	7
Distraction	2.48	1.47	1	7
Sense of Presence	4.93	1.24	1.43	7
Satisfaction	5.77	1	2	7
System Usability Scale	81.19	13.26	28.56	99.96

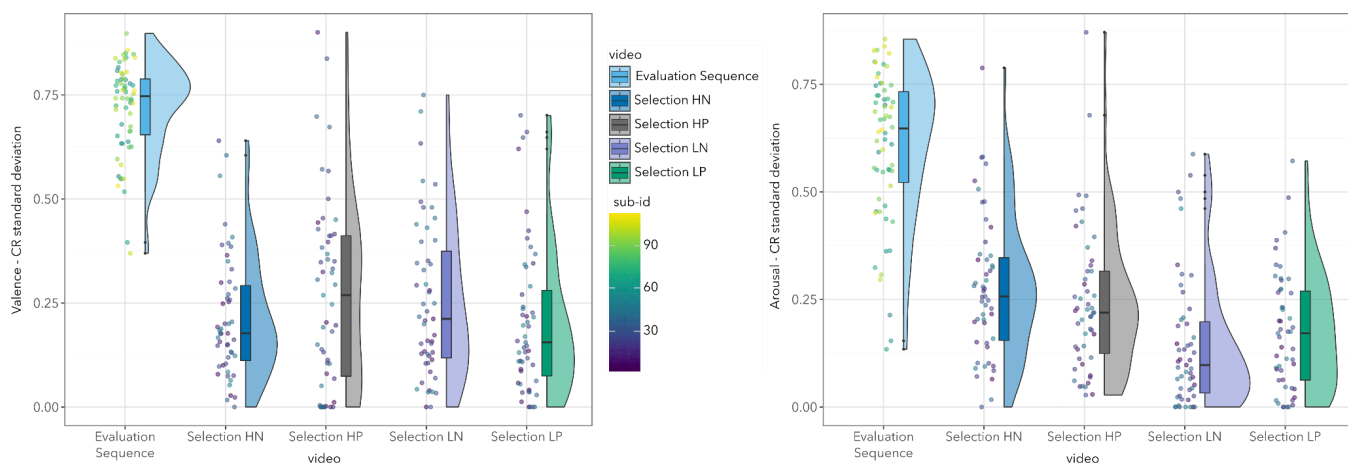
*Comparison Selection vs. Evaluation*CR variability

Figure 7 presents the time-series of the CR averaged across participants for both affective dimensions and both phases. As anticipated, there was minimal variability in the ratings during the Selection study, whereas higher variability was observed during the Evaluation study.



**Figure 7.** Comparison of time-series of continuous ratings (CRs, possible range for both affective dimensions:  $[-1 \ 1]$ ). *A. Study 1: Selection.* Average across participants for each feedback (color coded; Grid: red, Flubber: green, Proprioceptive: blue) and each video (shape coded), for valence (top) and arousal (bottom). CRs show low affective variability and are in line with the videos' quadrants. *B. Study 2: Evaluation, with Flubber only.* Average across participants for valence (top) and arousal (bottom). CRs show high affective variability over time. Colored lines: individual participants; green line: mean across participants.

To compare the variability of the CRs with the Flubber feedback between the two studies, ANOVAs (type 3) with factor *video* (five levels: Selection HN, Selection HP, Selection LN, Selection LP, Evaluation Sequence) were performed for CR std, for each affective dimension. There was a significant effect of *video* (valence:  $F(4) = 93.0, p < .001$ ; arousal:  $F(4) = 79.3, p < .001$ ) on CR std for both affective dimensions. Post-hoc t-tests revealed higher CR variability for Evaluation Sequence compared to the four Selection videos, for both affective dimensions (all  $|t| > 10.4, p < .001$ , see Figure 8 and Table S9 in Supplementary Material)



**Figure 8.** Comparison of variability of continuous ratings (CRs) between Stud1: Selection and Study 2: Evaluation. Standard deviation (std) of the CRs for each video in the two studies, for valence (left) and arousal (right). CRs during the Evaluation Sequence showed higher variability than during the four Selection videos (all  $|t| > 10.4, p < .001$ , see Supplementary Material). HN: high arousal - negative valence; HP: high arousal - positive valence; LN: low arousal - negative valence; LP: low arousal - positive valence.

### CR mean-SR correlation

The highest CRi-SR correlation for Flubber during Study 1: Selection (valence and arousal:  $r(\text{CR\_mean-SR})$ ) was significantly lower than the highest CRi-SR correlation during Study 2: Evaluation (valence:  $r(\text{CR\_mean-SR})$ , arousal:  $r(\text{CR\_std-SR})$ ), for both affective dimensions (valence:  $z = 9.5, p < .001$ ; arousal:  $z = 4.5, p < .001$ ).



## Questionnaires

To compare questionnaire responses to Flubber between the two studies, an ANOVA (type 3) with the factor *study* (two levels: Selection, Evaluation) was conducted. Subsequently, post-hoc t-tests were employed to explore specific differences within studies. Notably, there was no significant effect of *study* on the scores for Distraction, Sense of Presence, Usability, and Satisfaction (all  $F < 1.53$ , all  $p > .220$ , see Table S10 in Supplementary Material). For Emotion Representation, we found a significant effect of *study* ( $F(1) = 10.95, p < .001$ ), with higher responses for Study 1: Selection than for Study 2: Evaluation ( $t(107) = 3.31, p < .001$ ).

## Discussion

### *Summary of main findings*

The aim of this study was to develop and empirically evaluate the AffectTracker, a tool to collect continuous valence and emotional arousal ratings (Sabat et al., 2024) during a dynamic affective experience, simultaneously and with minimal interference (Bakker et al., 2016). It comprises three feedback options with adjustable features: a simplified affect grid (Grid; Russell, 1989), an abstract pulsating visual variant (Flubber), and a proprioceptive variant without visual feedback. We empirically evaluated the AffectTracker in two studies with 360-degree videos in iVR as stimuli and using the HTC Vive Pro controller's touchpad (Riva et al., 2007; Chirico & Gaggioli, 2019).

In Study 1 ("Selection"), the three feedback options were compared to each other as well as to a control condition without continuous ratings. Overall, we find that (1) CR in real-time capture variance of affective experience with (2) high user experience, while (3) minimally interfering with the experience itself. Based on the quantitative results and the qualitative assessment, Flubber was selected for Study 2 ("Evaluation"), which included a longer (23-min) and more variable iVR stimulus (stereoscopic 360° video). Overall, the results from Study 1 were confirmed in Study 2, indicating Flubber's applicability for both shorter and repeated as well as longer and more variable videos. Study 2 differed from Study 1 by (1) involving only one (Flubber) instead of four conditions (Grid, Flubber, Proprioceptive, Baseline) and by (2) stimulation with one longer experience with higher affective variability instead of four repeated videos with less affective variability. These differences in setup led to two notable differences in the results: first, participants in Study 2 rated the Flubber feedback lower in terms of how well it represented their "inner emotions". Second, the correlation between the SR and the CR mean was lower in Study 2, while the standard deviation emerged as the most correlated CR index. This suggests that CR could capture nuances of affective experience that a single SR may miss, particularly during extended and complex emotional stimuli.

AffectTracker provides flexibility by allowing researchers to choose between feedback options, depending on the specific needs of their study—whether a more engaging, dynamic representation (like the Flubber) or a more precise, structured visualization (as the Grid) is preferred. Its main contribution is to collect CR of

affective experience - compared to the more traditional SR - with minimal interference and high user experience.

### ***Comparing continuous and summary ratings***

Both the mean and the standard deviation of CRs were significantly correlated with the SR across participants. This suggests that participants integrate or implicitly consider both aspects of their affective experience, that is, the central tendency and the dispersion, when providing SRs rather than the peak or final moments (Fredrickson, 2000; Levine & Safer, 2002; Kaplan et al., 2016).

The correlation between CR and SR was more pronounced for emotional arousal than for valence. This may indicate that emotional arousal, being more dynamic, is easier for participants to track and summarize than valence, which may involve more complex, context-dependent appraisals. This observation can be better understood in light of theoretical and empirical insights into the interplay between arousal and valence. For instance, emotional arousal has been shown to modulate valence by enabling greater variability in valence during high-arousal states (Petrolini & Viola, 2020). This suggests that arousal not only enhances the salience of stimuli but also shapes how valence is experienced and reported. Such a dynamic is consistent with findings indicating that arousal facilitates attentional shifts and enhances visual processing of salient targets (Sutherland and Mather, 2018; Petrolini & Viola, 2020). Together, these insights underscore the distinct but interrelated roles of arousal and valence in shaping affective experiences, highlighting the importance of capturing both dimensions and considering their unique characteristics when interpreting CR data (Kuppens et al., 2013).

For the 1-min videos with low affective variability in Study 1, the mean of CRs were highly correlated to the SRs, indicating that CR with AffectTracker (irrespective of the feedback options) can effectively capture relatively stable affective experiences, that is, experiences that are rather constant over time and whose minimal variance can also be adequately indexed by single SRs.

As compared to Study 1, the correlation between the mean of CRs and SR was lower for the 23-min experience with high affective variability in Study 2, where the SR was more strongly associated with CR *dispersion* (i.e., std). This indicates that for longer and more complex stimuli, the average of CRs may become less representative of the overall experience, likely due to richer and more dynamic emotional fluctuations that are

difficult to integrate into a single rating. This finding underscores the importance of capturing affective fluctuations over time, that is, CRs during dynamic stimulation capture variance that SRs alone may miss.

Overall, our results support the value of using CRs as a complementary method to SR. While SR remains effective and practical for simpler, brief, and less variable stimuli, like static images, the AffectTracker can address the limitations of SR in capturing affective dynamics during complex, continuous, and immersive experiences. CR provides a richer and more granular understanding of how affective states evolve over time, especially in tasks that require ongoing engagement and feature varying emotional content. By integrating both CR and SR, researchers can obtain a more comprehensive picture of affective responses, tailored to the complexity of the stimuli being studied. Time-resolved ratings, for example of subjective experience, also enable the joint analyses with other time series, for example, collected with electrophysiological methods such as EEG or ECG.

### *Interference and User Experience*

One challenge of real-time CR is that it could interfere with the affective experience (Lieberman et al., 2011). One of our goals was therefore to assess the levels of Interference and User Experience of the AffectTracker. First, we leveraged the advantages of peripheral feedback (Bakker et al., 2016) by positioning the visual feedback at the center-bottom of the field of view. Our empirical assessment showed that in general, continuously rating with the AffectTracker was not interfering, irrespective of the feedback options. While the subjective ratings of Distraction were - expectedly - higher during CR than no ratings (i.e., baseline), the post-stimulation SRs as well as the Sense of Presence were equivalent when continuously rating compared to no rating, suggesting that the affective experience overall was not altered. This may have been facilitated by the excellent Usability of the Grid and Flubber (grade A, SUS score > 80.3; Sauro & Lewis, 2016). The Proprioceptive feedback had a significantly lower Usability and Satisfaction, suggesting that rating without feedback could be more difficult/demanding and that the Grid and Flubber feedback helped.

Overall our results suggest that the Grid and Flubber can be used interchangeably, depending on the study's or experimenter's priority and the target users. While the Grid offers a more classical, precise and structured visualization, the Flubber offers a more intuitive, engaging, and dynamic representation. The ratings on the

arousal (but not valence) dimension were significantly different for Grid than for Flubber (and Proprioceptive). On one hand, the ratings with Grid showed a stronger tendency towards the center (i.e., 0,0 coordinate) of the affect grid. While for valence, this center (middle of an unpleasant-to-pleasant gradient) represents a neutral state, this is less clear for the dimension of arousal (medium on a low-to-high gradient). Therefore, it could be that the arousal ratings may be biased by the visual representation of the grid. On the other hand, Flubber ratings showed a stronger tendency towards the extreme. As opposed to Grid, the limits of the ratings are not visualized for Flubber and may have been prone to ceiling effects. Additionally, Emotion Representation was rated higher for Flubber than for Grid. This difference could be attributed to the level of dynamicity between the two feedbacks. While Grid relies on the movement of a dot within a static grid to abstractly represent the transient affective state, Flubber dynamically changes as a whole. This dynamic behavior could lead to Flubber's affect-visual mapping being more intuitive and easier to interpret, particularly for "naive" participants who may lack prior experience or expertise.

### ***Comparing the AffectTracker to other tools***

The findings from both studies underscore the promise of the AffectTracker as an effective tool for capturing continuous, real-time affective experiences with minimal interference—marking a notable advancement beyond SR. Our design stands out from traditional affect-tracking concepts, such as Likert scales and self-assessment tools like the SAM (Bradley & Lang, 1994), as well as continuous models using 2D affect grids (Russell, 1989), by incorporating features already present in the technical (e.g., human-computer interaction) literature (McClay et al., 2023; Xue et al., 2021; Sharma et al., 2017). AffectTracker, particularly with the Flubber feedback, demonstrated a balance between intuitiveness, good user experience and minimal interference, effectively capturing the intricate dynamics of valence and arousal within iVR environments. Our results contribute to the growing body of research advocating for methods that seamlessly integrate into the user's experience, facilitating precise, real-time emotional assessments without interfering with the immersive nature of VR (Riva et al., 2007; Chirico and Gaggioli, 2019).

### ***Limitations and implications for future research***

Several limitations should be acknowledged in this study. First, one of the visual features of the Flubber feedback, oscillation frequency - used to map the arousal dimension, has a range within physiologically possible pulsation frequency (e.g., heart rate). While this could have added to the intuitiveness of the feedback, this could also act as a 'fake' biofeedback and the rating could influence heart rate, or vice-versa. This should be further examined, for example, by recording participants' heart activity during the ratings and investigating potential entrainment.

Second, while the AffectTracker tool and its Flubber visual feedback were validated using the touchpad of the HTC Vive Pro headset, the applicability to other input devices, such as joysticks, and compatibility with different VR headsets remain untested. Although technically feasible with various OpenXR-compatible VR equipment, further validation across different platforms is warranted to ensure broader applicability. Additionally, the interactivity of the stimulus was limited to head movement and full body rotation, restricting participants to passive viewing - as compared to more interactive games or tasks. This constraint may have influenced engagement levels and user experience perceptions. Furthermore, the generalizability of the findings may be limited by the relatively young and healthy participants included in the study. Future research could address these limitations by expanding validation to diverse input devices and age groups, thus enhancing the robustness and applicability of the AffectTracker.

The data collected in these studies offer a valuable opportunity to better explore the dynamics of affective states, with a particular focus on subjective experience. Future analyses could examine how fluctuations in CR correspond to specific salient events within the stimuli, investigating different features. Further, exploring the distance and angle between valence and arousal dimensions within the affective space could provide insights into their joint dynamics and potential cross-influences. Additionally, inter-individual differences in interoceptive and emotional awareness could be analyzed to determine whether these factors influence sensitivity to change-points or whether the Flubber feedback remains consistently effective across varying levels of awareness.

In the future, integrating the AffectTracker with physiological recordings could provide insights into the relationship between subjective experience and brain-body activities. This would enable the study of affective phenomena in healthy subjects and help identify discrepancies in psychopathological contexts, such as interoceptive challenges or difficulties in emotional regulation.

### ***Conclusion***

We developed and evaluated the AffectTracker, an open-source tool designed to continuously and simultaneously capture valence and arousal ratings in real-time. The AffectTracker offers flexibility, enabling researchers to select between visual feedback options that could suit their study context, whether a more engaging, dynamic representation - such as the Flubber - or a precise, structured visualization - such as the Grid.

The AffectTracker represents a novel approach to study affective dynamics with minimal interference, while effectively capturing the nuances of subjective affective experience. This tool broadens the scope for investigating the intersection of subjective experience and physiological processes within immersive environments, opening new avenues for research into real-time emotional and physiological interactions.

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## Supplementary Material

### **S1. Detailed Description of the development of different feedback options and Pilot Study.**

#### **Pilot description**

The primary goal of the pilot study was to develop different feedback options for Continuous Rating (CR) of Affective States (AS) in VR and explore their relationship with Summary Rating (SR). We aimed to test the feasibility in real-time continuous rating and the different feedback.

Twelve participants engaged in a 1-hour VR session, experiencing four blocks of trials: three with different feedback and one baseline condition without CR. They rated their affective state twice during each trial, using CR and SR. The different feedback included a Visual prototype with a simplified affect grid on top of the Flubber, a Tactile prototype with vibrations of the VR controller, and a Proprioceptive prototype, i.e., no feedback, with participants relying on thumb sensation.

Our findings revealed a preference for the Visual feedback. SR was strongly correlated with the mean CR. We found no significant differences in Distraction among the different feedback. However, there were notable distinctions between Visual, Tactile, Proprioceptive, and Baseline conditions.

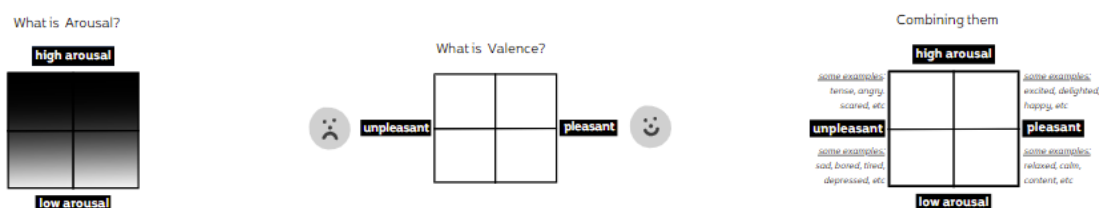
Despite the short stimuli with low affective variability, comparing CR to SR proved beneficial, aiding in avoiding order effects. Our next steps involve refining the prototypes based on participant feedback and conducting a comprehensive data collection. In response to participant suggestions, we integrated a vibration feature into the Proprioceptive feedback, to act as a reminder to rate. We removed the Tactile feedback because the valence and arousal mapping to vibrations revealed to be too coarse and crude, due to the technical limitations of the VR controller (fine control of the vibrations not possible). Finally, we separated the Grid and the Flubber into two distinct visual feedback, because participants reported using mostly the Grid and disregarding the Flubber.



## S2. Detailed Session Script for Study 1: Selection.

1. **Introduction.** The aim of the study is to measure emotions while watching 360 videos inside the VR. Participants' will continuously rate their affective states during the videos.
2. Pre-experiment digital survey.
3. What are affective states? Explanation of how valence and arousal work, giving some examples of affective states (showing the Arousal-Valence space illustration).
  - a. Arousal: from low arousal to high arousal; how intense is your feeling; y-axis of the affective grid.
  - b. Valence: from unpleasant to pleasant; x-axis of the affective grid.

### The Arousal-Valence Space



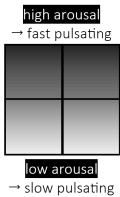
4. To help you rate your affective state in real time, we designed a rating method with 3 feedback options: a grid, a flubber and a proprioceptive feedback. There is also a baseline condition where there is no rating continuously (showing the VR controller and trackpad). The rating method involves using the trackpad as-if the affect grid is on it, and you will be using your finger to move around the trackpad to indicate your affective state.
5. The VR experience is organised in 4 sessions. Each session will begin with a training phase to familiarise with the rating method and the feedback. Then there is the 'real' experiment, where you will see 4 different videos, each of which is followed by a summary rating. A third phase involves you answering some questions about the feedback you have just tested. At the end of one session, another one will begin immediately, again starting with the training phase. Everything will be preceded by written step-by-step instructions, and we will be here every step of the way. You can stop the experiment at any time.
6. The controller you will use during the experiment will help you signal to us moment by moment what you are feeling as you watch the videos. Please refrain from commenting or speaking out loud but use your finger on the touchpad to indicate what you are experiencing.
7. VR setup and familiarisation with the system:
  - a. Now you enter a room, you will see that VR allows you to explore the space around you by turning your head.
  - b. Explanation of how the controller works (touchpad and trigger).
8. **Training.** To get used to the affect grid and the feedback. Here, look at pictures, explore the touchpad with your thumb and see how the feedback reacts, get familiar with it. Differently, during the experiment you'll have to do live rating/continuous rating and then a summary rating. Please take your time and get yourself used to the method and whenever you feel ready, you can skip to the next picture by pulling the trigger.
  - a. Grid feedback: You'll see the affect grid on the bottom of the screen. You will be using the trackpad to indicate your affective state.
  - b. Flubber feedback: You'll see a moving shape – we call it Flubber. The Flubber will change form and movement based on the position of your finger on the trackpad/grid.
  - c. Proprioceptive feedback: this time there's no visual feedback. You won't see any grid; you'll just have to move your finger on the trackpad on the controller. There will be a light but continuous vibration that will remind you to keep on rating.

- d. Baseline: in this session, you are going to simply watch the videos and describe your feelings with a single evaluation that you will be asked to give at the end of each video. To validate your answer, pull the trigger.
9. Post-experiment digital survey.

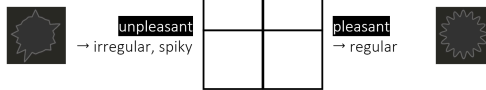
### S3. Detailed Session Script for Study 2: Evaluation.

1. **Introduction.** The purpose of the study is to measure emotions during the viewing of 360° videos within Virtual Reality. You will continuously assess your emotional states during a sequence of videos.
2. Pre-experiment survey.
3. What are emotional states? Explanation of arousal and valence, with some examples of emotional states (show the illustration of the Arousal-Valence Space).
  - a. Arousal: From low to high; how intense the feelings experienced are; the y-axis of the affective grid.
  - b. Valence: From left to right; how pleasant or unpleasant the feelings experienced are; the x-axis of the affective grid.

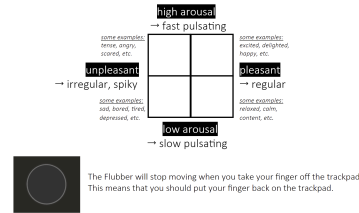
Arousal: Speed of the Flubber



Valence: Shape of the Flubber



Combination of Arousal and Valence



4. To help you assess your emotional state in real-time, we have designed a new rating method with some visual feedback: the flubber (show the VR controller and the trackpad). You will use the trackpad as if the AVS grid were drawn on it, moving your finger to indicate your emotional state.
5. The VR experience is organised in 2 phases:
  - a. A training phase to become familiar with the flubber.
  - b. The actual experiment, in which you will watch a series of videos and provide continuous ratings throughout. At the end of the video session, you will provide an overall evaluation.
6. You can stop the experiment at any time.
7. The controller you will use during the experiment will help you signal to us what you are experiencing while watching the videos. Please refrain from commenting or speaking aloud but use your finger on the touchpad to indicate what you are feeling.
8. VR setup and familiarisation with the system:
  - a. You are now in a room and can notice that VR allows you to explore the space by rotating your head.
  - b. Explanation of how the controller works (touchpad and trigger).
9. **Training.** While watching the video, explore the touchpad with your thumb to understand how the flubber reacts, gaining confidence. During the experiment, you will need to continuously and in real-time assess, immediately after the videos, provide a summary rating. Take the time you need to get used to the Flubber.
  - a. During the video: This moving shape is the Flubber. The Flubber changes shape and movement based on the position of your finger on the trackpad. As you can see, the speed of Flubber's movements changes based on the level of activation you are reporting. When the finger goes up, the speed increases (higher intensity), while when it goes down, it slows down (lower intensity). It can be noticed that the shape changes based on pleasantness. When the finger goes left, the shape becomes irregular with spikes (more unpleasant). When you go right, the shape becomes regular and more rounded (more pleasant).
  - b. When Summary Rating: The summary rating will appear at the end of the video. Place the dot in the space representing the emotional state you experienced during the video, and when you have decided, press the trigger.
10. Post-experiment survey.

#### S4. Comparison of continuous rating indices (CRi) between all feedback options in the Valence and Arousal dimensions, in Study 1: Selection.

Selection of CRi representing different statistical moments of the CR distribution over time: central tendency (mean), dispersion (std) and shape (skewness and kurtosis). Important significant p-values are followed by an asterisk and in bold.

CR mean	Grid vs. Flubber			Grid vs. Proprioceptive			Flubber vs. Proprioceptive		
	<i>t</i> -test	TOST Lower	TOST Upper	<i>t</i> -test	TOST Lower	TOST Upper	<i>t</i> -test	TOST Lower	TOST Upper
<b>Valence</b>									
t	-2.027	2.651	-6.705	-1.479	3.192	-6.15	0.496	4.744	-3.753
SE	0.027	0.027	0.027	0.027	0.027	0.027	0.029	0.029	0.029
df	203	203	203	203	203	203	203	203	203
p-value	.044*	<b>.004*</b>	< .001*	.141	<b>.001*</b>	< .001*	.621	< .001*	< .001*
FDR adjusted p-value	.132			.211			.621		
<b>Arousal</b>									
t	6.93	10.57	3.291	5.276	9.074	1.479	-2.096	1.974	-6.167
SE	0.034	0.034	0.034	0.033	0.033	0.033	0.031	0.031	0.031
df	203	203	203	203	203	203	203	203	203
p-value	< .001*	< .001*	0.999	< .001*	< .001*	0.930	0.037*	<b>0.025*</b>	< .001*
FDR adjusted p-value	< .001*			< .001*			<b>0.037*</b>		
CR std	Grid vs. Flubber			Grid vs. Proprioceptive			Flubber vs. Proprioceptive		
	<i>t</i> -test	TOST Lower	TOST Upper	<i>t</i> -test	TOST Lower	TOST Upper	<i>t</i> -test	TOST Lower	TOST Upper
<b>Valence</b>									
t	-3.543	5.506	-12.592	-5.131	3.298	-13.56	-1.725	6.218	-9.668
SE	0.014	0.014	0.014	0.015	0.015	0.015	0.016	0.016	0.016
df	203	203	203	203	203	203	203	203	203
p-value	< .001*	< .001*	< .001*	< .001*	<b>.001*</b>	< .001*	.086	< .001*	< .001*
FDR adjusted p-value	<b>.001*</b>			< .001*			.086		
<b>Arousal</b>									
t	-0.846	9.291	-10.983	-5.671	3.096	-14.438	-5.168	4.006	-14.341



t	-2.356	-2.336	-2.375	-1.65	-1.63	-1.669	0.453	0.467	0.44
SE	6.351	6.351	6.351	6.554	6.554	6.554	9.153	9.153	9.153
df	203	203	203	203	203	203	203	203	203
p-value	.019*	.990	.009*	.101	.948	.048*	.651	.321	.670
FDR adjusted p-value	.058			.151			.651		

### S5. Comparison of summary ratings (SR) for all feedback options and during Baseline in the Valence and Arousal dimensions, in Study 1: Selection.

The SR for all feedback options and during Baseline were equivalent for both affective dimensions (TOST approach, all  $p > .05$  for difference, all  $p < .010$  for equivalence). Important significant  $p$ -values are followed by an asterisk and in bold.

<b>Valence</b>	Grid vs Baseline			Flubber vs Baseline			Proprioceptive vs Baseline		
	<i>t test</i>	<i>TOST Lower</i>	<i>TOST Upper</i>	<i>t test</i>	<i>TOST Lower</i>	<i>TOST Upper</i>	<i>t test</i>	<i>TOST Lower</i>	<i>TOST Upper</i>
t	-2.4	3.29	-8.09	-0.05	5.83	-5.92	-0.53	5.11	-6.16
SE	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02
df	203	203	203	203	203	203	203	203	203
p-value	.022*	<b>&lt; .001*</b>	<b>&lt; .001*</b>	.960	<b>&lt; .001*</b>	<b>&lt; .001*</b>	.600	<b>&lt; .001*</b>	<b>&lt; .001*</b>
FDR adjusted p-value	.051			.960			.900		
<b>Arousal</b>	<i>t test</i>	<i>TOST Lower</i>	<i>TOST Upper</i>	<i>t test</i>	<i>TOST Lower</i>	<i>TOST Upper</i>	<i>t test</i>	<i>TOST Lower</i>	<i>TOST Upper</i>
t	1.55	5.62	-2.52	-0.37	4.18	-4.92	0.34	4.57	-3.88
SE	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03
df	203	203	203	203	203	203	203	203	203
p-value	.120	<b>&lt; .001*</b>	<b>0.010*</b>	.710	<b>&lt; .001*</b>	<b>&lt; .001*</b>	.730	<b>&lt; .001*</b>	<b>&lt; .001*</b>
FDR adjusted p-value	.370			.730			.730		

### S6. Comparison of CRi-SR Pearson correlations between all feedback options in the Valence and Arousal dimensions, in Study 1: Selection.

Selection of CRi representing different statistical moments of the CR distribution over time: central tendency (mean), dispersion (std) and shape (skewness and kurtosis). For valence, there were no significant differences in CR mean-SR correlation between feedback options (all  $z < 1.5$ ; all  $p > .125$ ). For arousal, the correlation for Grid was significantly higher than for the other two feedback options (all  $z > 2.2$ , all  $p < .025$ ). Important significant  $p$ -values are followed by an asterisk and in bold.

		Valence				Arousal			
	CRi	mean	std	skewness	kurtosis	mean	std	skewness	kurtosis
$r^{(CRi-SR)}$	Grid	0.95	0.062	-0.581	0.95	0.938	0.101	-0.507	-0.012
	Flubber	0.922	-0.114	-0.539	0.922	0.873	0.321	-0.528	-0.167
	Proprioceptive	0.92	-0.174	-0.565	0.92	0.852	0.243	-0.437	-0.156
	<b>Grid vs. Flubber</b>	$z = 1.459$ $p = .144$	$z = 0.975$ $p = .330$	$z = -0.326$ $p = .745$	$z = -0.848$ $p = .397$	<b><math>z = 2.237</math></b> <b><math>p = 0.025^*</math></b>	$z = -1.264$ $p = .206$	$z = 0.151$ $p = .880$	$z = 0.759$ $p = .448$
	<b>Grid vs. Proprioceptive</b>	$z = 1.534$ $p = .125$	$z = 1.248$ $p = .212$	$z = -0.124$ $p = .901$	$z = -0.267$ $p = 0.79$	<b><math>z = 2.679</math></b> <b><math>p = .007^*</math></b>	$z = -0.757$ $p = .449$	$z = -0.457$ $p = .648$	$z = 0.714$ $p = .475$
	<b>Flubber vs Proprioceptive</b>	$z = 0.083$ $p = .934$	$z = 0.352$ $p = .725$	$z = 0.208$ $p = .836$	$z = 0.594$ $p = .552$	$z = 0.527$ $p = .598$	$z = 0.489$ $p = .625$	$z = -0.607$ $p = .544$	$z = -0.052$ $p = .958$



**S7. Comparison of responses to questionnaires between all feedback options, and including Baseline, in Study 1: Selection.**

For the Distraction questionnaire, CR during videos (i.e., Baseline condition, only SR) was significantly less invasive than CR during videos (i.e., for all of the feedback; all  $t > 4.0$ ; all  $p < .001$ ). Importantly, there were no significant differences between the feedback options (all  $t < 0.33$ ; all  $p > .920$ ). For Sense of Presence, the responses were equivalent for all feedback options as well as the Baseline condition (TOST approach, all  $p > .310$  for difference, all  $p < .020$  for equivalence). For Usability, the SUS scores were the highest for Grid and Baseline (i.e., no CR, only SR; all  $|t| > 2.5$ , all  $p < .020$ ). The SUS score was also higher for Flubber than Proprioceptive ( $t(50) = 3.0$ ,  $p = .010$ ). For Satisfaction, the scores were equivalent for Flubber and Grid (TOST approach,  $p = .920$  for difference, all  $p < .010$  for equivalence). Scores for Proprioceptive were lower than for Flubber and Grid (all  $t < 3.01$ , all  $p > .010$ ). For Emotion Representation, the scores were significantly higher for Flubber than for Proprioceptive ( $t(50) = 3.6$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and equivalent between Grid, Proprioceptive and Baseline (TOST approach, all  $p > .090$  for difference, all  $p < .050$  for equivalence). Significant  $p$ -values are followed by an asterisk and important ones are highlighted in bold.

	Grid vs Baseline			Flubber vs Baseline			Proprioceptive vs Baseline			Grid vs Flubber			Grid vs Proprioceptive			Flubber vs Proprioceptive		
<b>Distraction</b>	t test	TOST Lower	TOST Upper	t test	TOST Lower	TOST Upper	t test	TOST Lower	TOST Upper	t test	TOST Lower	TOST Upper	t test	TOST Lower	TOST Upper	t test	TOST Lower	TOST Upper
t	4.02	6.03	2.01	4.3	6.25	2.34	4.13	6.01	2.25	-0.33	1.34	-1.99	-0.3	1.22	-1.81	0	1.53	-1.53
SE	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.26	0.26	0.26	0.27	0.27	0.27	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33
df	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50
p value	< .001*	< .001*	0.98	< .001*	< .001*	0.99	< .001*	< .001*	0.99	0.75	0.09	0.03*	0.77	0.11	0.04*	1	0.07	0.07
FDR adjusted p-value	<b>&lt; .001*</b>			<b>&lt; .001*</b>			<b>&lt; .001*</b>			0.920			0.920			1		
<b>Sense of Presence</b>	t-test	TOST Lower	TOST Upper	t-test	TOST Lower	TOST Upper	t-test	TOST Lower	TOST Upper	t-test	TOST Lower	TOST Upper	t-test	TOST Lower	TOST Upper	t-test	TOST Lower	TOST Upper
t	0.94	5.29	-3.41	0	3.27	-3.27	-0.88	2.12	-3.89	1.05	5.95	-3.84	1.99	5.9	-1.92	1.15	5.06	-2.76



p-value	0.110	< .001*	0.090	0.230	< .001*	0.120	0.070	0.420	< .001	0.920	< .001*	<b>0.010*</b>	< .001*	< .001*	0.820	< .001*	< .001*	0.810
FDR adjusted p-value	0.160			0.270			0.140			0.920			<b>0.010*</b>			<b>0.010*</b>		
<b>Emotion Representation</b>	<i>t-test</i>	<i>TOST Lower</i>	<i>TOST Upper</i>	<i>t-test</i>	<i>TOST Lower</i>	<i>TOST Upper</i>	<i>t-test</i>	<i>TOST Lower</i>	<i>TOST Upper</i>	<i>t-test</i>	<i>TOST Lower</i>	<i>TOST Upper</i>	<i>t-test</i>	<i>TOST Lower</i>	<i>TOST Upper</i>	<i>t-test</i>	<i>TOST Lower</i>	<i>TOST Upper</i>
t	1.07	3.79	-1.65	2.25	4.46	0.04	-0.51	1.65	-2.66	-1.49	0.88	-3.87	1.49	3.87	-0.88	3.59	6.45	0.73
SE	0.18	0.18	0.18	0.23	0.23	0.23	0.23	0.23	0.23	0.21	0.21	0.21	0.21	0.21	0.21	0.17	0.17	0.17
df	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50
p-value	0.290	< .001*	<b>0.05*</b>	0.030*	< .001*	0.52	0.61	<b>0.050*</b>	<b>0.010*</b>	0.140	0.190	< .001*	0.140	< .001*	0.190	< .001*	< .001*	0.770
FDR adjusted p-value	0.350			0.090			0.610			0.210			0.210			< .001*		

**S8. Comparison of body posture (standing vs. seated) in the BER sample on ratings and questionnaires, in Study 2: Evaluation.**

*Significant effect of body posture on CR means for arousal ( $F(1) = 14.95, p < .001$ ). Post-hoc t-tests revealed higher CR mean for arousal in standing compared to seated posture ( $t = 3.87, p < .001$ ). No significant effect of body posture on SR, Distraction, Sense of Presence, Usability, Satisfaction and Emotion Representation (all  $F < 2.48$ , all  $p > .122$ ). Significant p-values are followed by an asterisk and important ones are highlighted in bold.*

ANOVA	Valence				Arousal						
	sum_sq	df	F	p-value	sum_sq	df	F	p-value			
Effect of posture	0.08	1	1.78	.190	1.66	1	14.95	< .001*			
Residual	1.83	40			4.44	40					
<b>Posthoc t-tests</b>											
					t	df	p-value	CI 95%	cohen-d	BF10	power
					3.87	40	< .001*	[0.19 0.61]	1.19	67.25	0.96
									7		

ANOVA	Valence				Arousal			
	sum_sq	df	F	p-value	sum_sq	df	F	p-value
Effect of posture	0.10	1	0.92	.343	0.18	1	1.72	.198

Residual	4.29	40	4.12	40
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ANOVA	Distraction				Sense of Presence				Usability				Satisfaction				Emotion Representation			
	<i>sum_sq</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p-value</i>	<i>sum_sq</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p-value</i>	<i>sum_sq</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p-value</i>	<i>sum_sq</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p-value</i>	<i>sum_sq</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p-value</i>
Effect of posture	6.10	1	2.48	.122	0.02	1	0.01	.913	4.86	1	0.02	.878	0.59	1	0.45	.507	0.07	1	0.07	.793
Residual	98.19	40			58.11	40			8079.05	40			53.05	40			40.44	40		

**S9. Comparison of CR variability (CR std) in Study 1: Selection vs. Study 2: Evaluation.**

Significant effect of video (valence:  $F(4) = 93.0, p < .001$ ; arousal:  $F(4) = 79.3, p < .001$ ) on CR std for both affective dimensions. Post-hoc  $t$ -tests revealed higher CR variability for Evaluation Sequence compared to the other Selection (LN, LP, HN, HP) videos, for both affective dimensions (all  $|t| > 10.4, p < .001$ ). HN: high arousal - negative valence; HP: high arousal - positive valence; LN: low arousal - negative valence; LP: low arousal - positive valence. Significant  $p$ -values are followed by an asterisk and important ones are highlighted in bold.

ANOVA		Valence								Arousal							
CR std	sum_sq	df	F	p-value						sum_sq	df	F	p-value				
Effect of video	11.21	4	92.98	<b>&lt; .001*</b>						8.13	4	79.26	<b>&lt; .001*</b>				
Residual	7.87	261								6.69	261						
<b>Posthoc t-tests</b>																	
	t	df	p-unc	CI95%	cohen-d	BF10	power	p-bonf	t	df	p-unc	CI95%	cohen-d	BF10	power	p-bonf	
HP vs. LP	1.591	100	0.115	[-0.02 0.15]	0.315	0.641	0.35	1	2.256	100	0.026*	[0.01 0.13]	0.447	1.957	0.608	0.262	
HP vs. LN	0.381	100	0.704	[-0.07 0.1 ]	0.075	0.223	0.066	1	3.071	100	0.003*	[0.03 0.16]	0.608	12.448	0.86	0.027*	
HP vs. HN	1.447	100	0.151	[-0.02 0.13]	0.287	0.529	0.3	1	-1.037	100	0.302	[-0.1 0.03]	0.205	0.337	0.177	1	

LP vs. LN	-1.346	100	0.181	[-0.12 0.02]	0.267	0.467	0.266	1	1.021	100	0.310	[-0.03 0.09]	0.202	0.332	0.173	1
LP vs. HN	-0.297	100	0.767	[-0.07 0.06]	0.059	0.217	0.06	1	-3.433	100	0.001*	[-0.16 -0.04]	0.68	33.274	0.925	0.009*
LN vs. HN	1.177	100	0.242	[-0.03 0.11]	0.233	0.387	0.215	1	-4.201	100	< .001*	[-0.19 -0.07]	0.832	358.383	0.986	0.001*
HP vs. sequence	-12.787	69.34 7	< .001*	[-0.52 -0.38]	2.568	1.80E+20	1	< .001*	-11.333	108.153	< .001*	[-0.43 -0.3 ]	2.135	1.07E+17	1	< .001*
LP vs. sequence	-17.723	80.07 4	< .001*	[-0.57 -0.46]	3.5	4.21E+30	1	< .001*	-14.878	110.738	< .001*	[-0.49 -0.38]	2.747	6.07E+24	1	< .001*
LN vs. sequence	-15.523	77.93 2	< .001*	[-0.52 -0.4 ]	3.076	1.39E+26	1	< .001*	-15.087	110.554	< .001*	[-0.52 -0.4 ]	2.815	1.68E+25	1	< .001*
HN vs. sequence	-20.064	91.52	< .001*	[-0.55 -0.45]	3.896	1.31E+35	1	< .001*	-10.415	108.958	< .001*	[-0.4 -0.27]	1.957	9.48E+14	1	< .001*

**S10. Comparison of Questionnaires responses after using Flubber between Study 1: Selection and Study 2: Evaluation.**

No significant effect of phase on the scores for Distraction, Sense of Presence, Usability, and Satisfaction (all  $F < 1.53$ , all  $p > .220$ ). For Emotion Representation, there was a significant effect of phase ( $F(1) = 10.95$ ,  $p < .001$ ), with higher responses for the Selection phase than the Evaluation phase ( $t(107) = 3.31$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Significant p-values are followed by an asterisk and important ones are highlighted in bold.

ANOVA	Distraction				Sense of Presence				Usability				Satisfaction				Emotion Representation			
	sum_sq	df	F	p-value	sum_sq	df	F	p-value	sum_sq	df	F	p-value	sum_sq	df	F	p-value	sum_sq	df	F	p-value
Effect of study	0.20	1	0.08	.780	2.19	1	1.53	.220	27.5	1	0.13	.720	0.61	1	0.49	.480	10.86	1	10.95	<b>&lt; .001*</b>
Residual	295.99	111			158.83	111			23153.39	111			136.52	111			110.12	111		
<b>Posthoc t-test</b>																				
t																			3.31	
df																			107.53	
p-value																			<b>&lt; .001*</b>	
CI95%																			[0.25 1]	



cohen-d	0.63
BF10	24.154
power	0.91