

Japanese company introduces irresistibly cute mind-controlled 'cat ears' (w/ video)

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(PhysOrg.com) -- In a bit of science mixed with whimsy, a Japanese company has created a set of electromechanical cat ears that can be worn on the human head and manipulated with nothing but the mind. Called the necomimi (a combination of the Japanese words for cat and ear) and looking very much like the ears that come with a cat costume, the ears respond to thoughts or mood by means of a sensor on a second small band pressed against the forehead; they can stand straight up when the wearer is concentrating, or wriggle and turn slightly when amused, or lay flat when tired or bored, demonstrating what the company calls, an ability to reveal emotion.

The company, called Neurowear, demonstrated its new product in the "Smile Bazar" at Omotesando Hills, which it captured on video and displays on its site; and while the participants are clearly amused by the cat ears moving around, and there is much smiling and some laughing, it's difficult to tell just how much control over the ears the wearers have. A natural question arises also as to whether people can get better at manipulating their ears if they wear them over time.

In spite of the gimmick quality of the necomimi, it's obvious that the concept could have a more serious purpose, such as helping those with communication difficulties express themselves.

Also, a not so obvious part of the necomimi experience is the reaction of the people around the person wearing the ears; in the video, it's impossible to not notice the looks of mirth on the faces of the people around, and, it's difficult to not smile yourself as you watch the people in the video try on the device; their reactions, and the way the ears react combined with the expressions on their face, is actually rather profound, though it's hard to say why. Whether it's the cuteness factor, or a feeling that something is being conveyed by the person, albeit artificial ears, that you don't generally see in any other way, there is something unique and sweet about the whole human/machine interaction that very clearly evokes something in others.

The necomimi is another in a long line of products that listen and respond to brain waves, and doubtless there will be many more, though what's not certain, is whether they will be nearly as cute.

More information: via neurowear.net/

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