

TOE-VIR24

in collaboration with Boet Bouten & Larissa Boerenstam

Project Overview

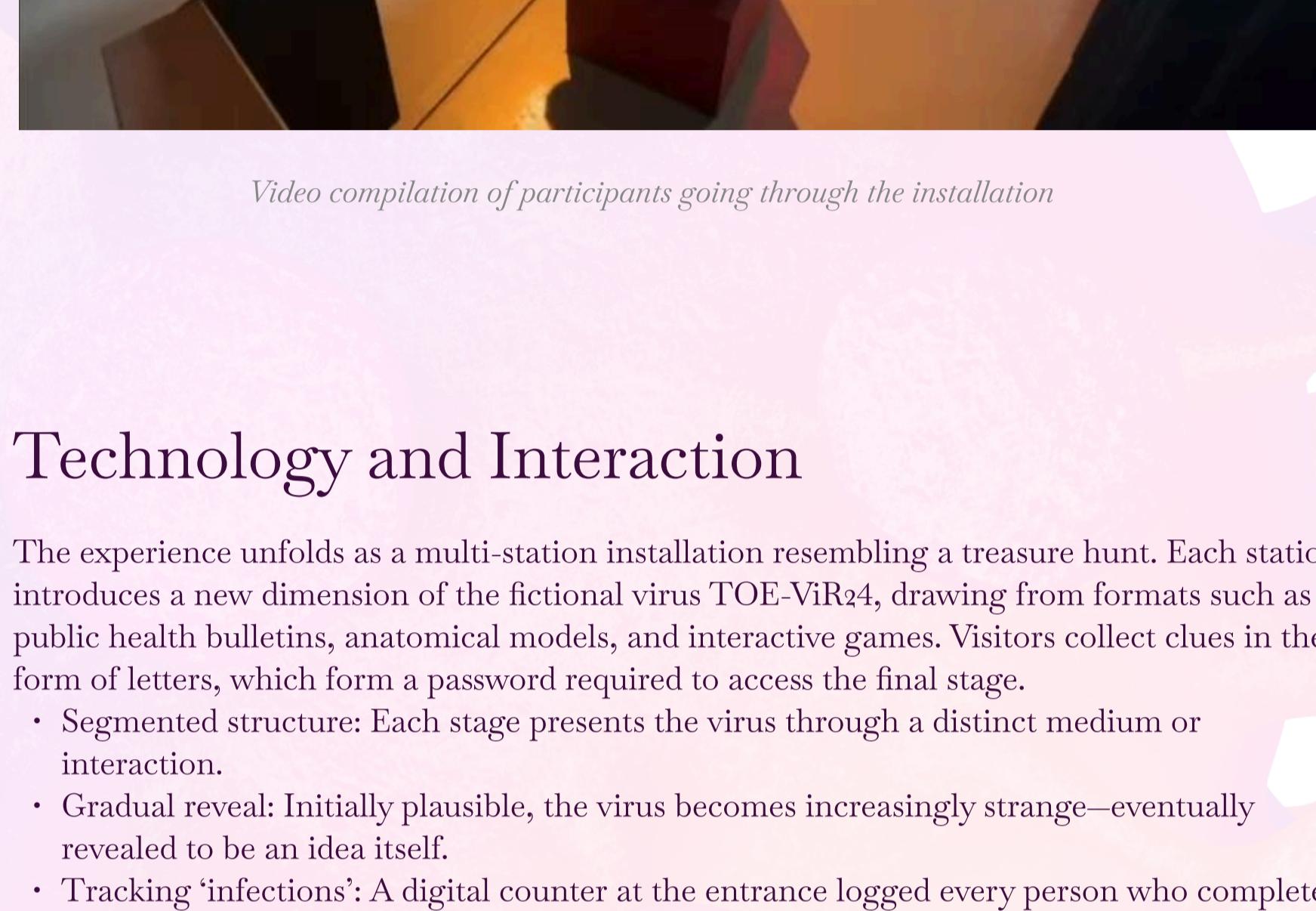
TOE-ViR24 is a distributed, narrative-driven installation developed as part of the Science to Experience course within the Media Technology Exhibition – LIVING. Initially, we were tasked with creating an exhibit responding to the theme of “living”—a prompt that opened questions not just about biology, but about behavior, systems, and cognition. Our output, TOE-ViR24, is an interactive exploration of how ideas can exhibit life-like properties. By drawing an analogy between viral replication and conceptual transmission, the work invites participants to reframe what it means for something to be alive.

Concept and Goals

The installation builds on anthropologist David A. Palmer's suggestion that theories and ideas may be considered "alive" if we assess them by their behavior rather than their substance. Just like biological viruses, ideas rely on hosts, mutate under influence, and spread through interaction. TOE-ViR24 proposes that thoughts themselves are "cognitive viruses"—dynamic, evolving entities that live through us.



At the entrance of the exhibition, Larissa Boerenstam and I greeted visitors in full quarantine attire, inviting them to participate in our interactive installation TOE-ViR24.

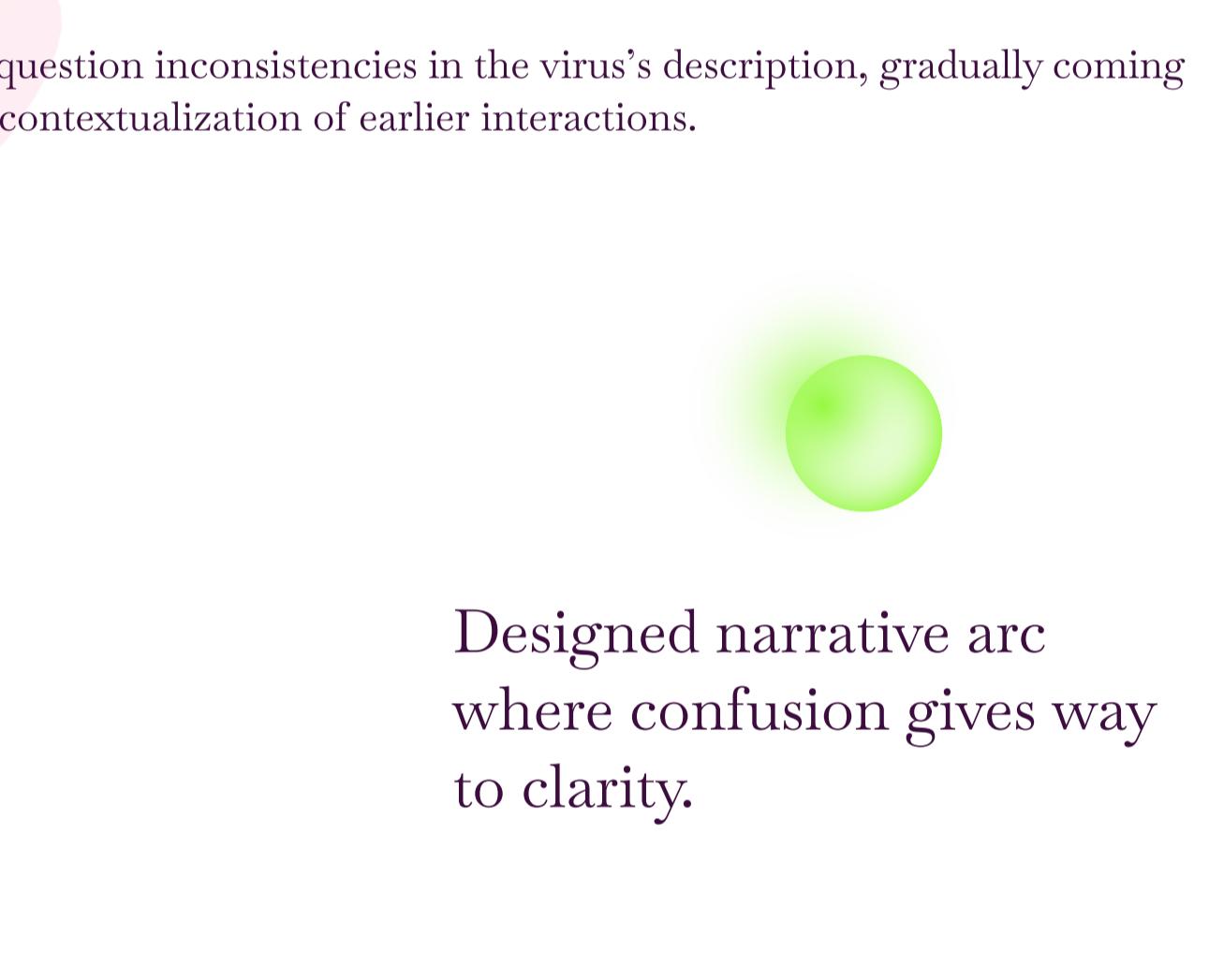


Video compilation of participants going through the installation

Technology and Interaction

The experience unfolds as a multi-station installation resembling a treasure hunt. Each station introduces a new dimension of the fictional virus TOE-ViR24, drawing from formats such as public health bulletins, anatomical models, and interactive games. Visitors collect clues in the form of letters, which form a password required to access the final stage.

- Segmented structure: Each stage presents the virus through a distinct medium or interaction.
- Gradual reveal: Initially plausible, the virus becomes increasingly strange—eventually revealed to be an idea itself.
- Tracking 'infections': A digital counter at the entrance logged every person who completed the full journey and thus became "infected."



Our peers and Professor Verbeek going for the first official run of the installation (station #2).

Development Highlights

Rather than taking a literal or didactic route, the installation plays with ambiguity. Visitors are encouraged to question inconsistencies in the virus's description, gradually coming to suspect that TOE-ViR24 is not a biological entity. This slow unveiling invites personal interpretation and recontextualization of earlier interactions.

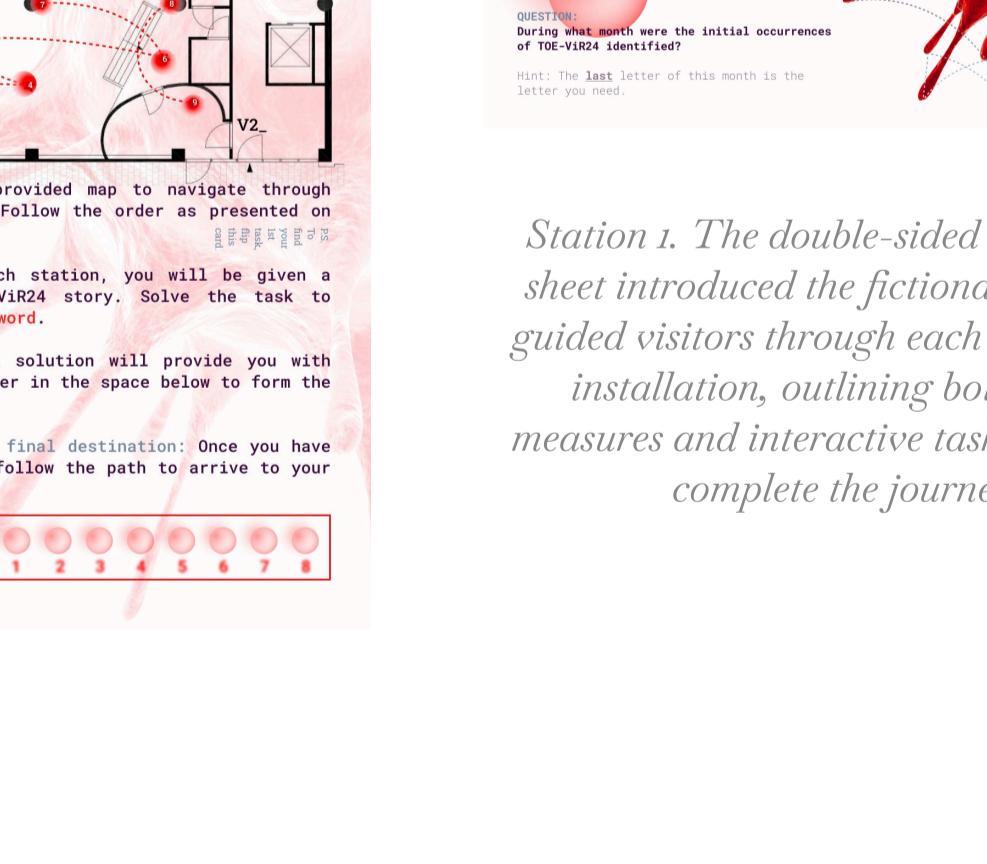


Crafted physical and media elements that simulate "viral" spread across minds, not bodies.

Shifted from traditional scientific theory toward idea-driven storytelling.

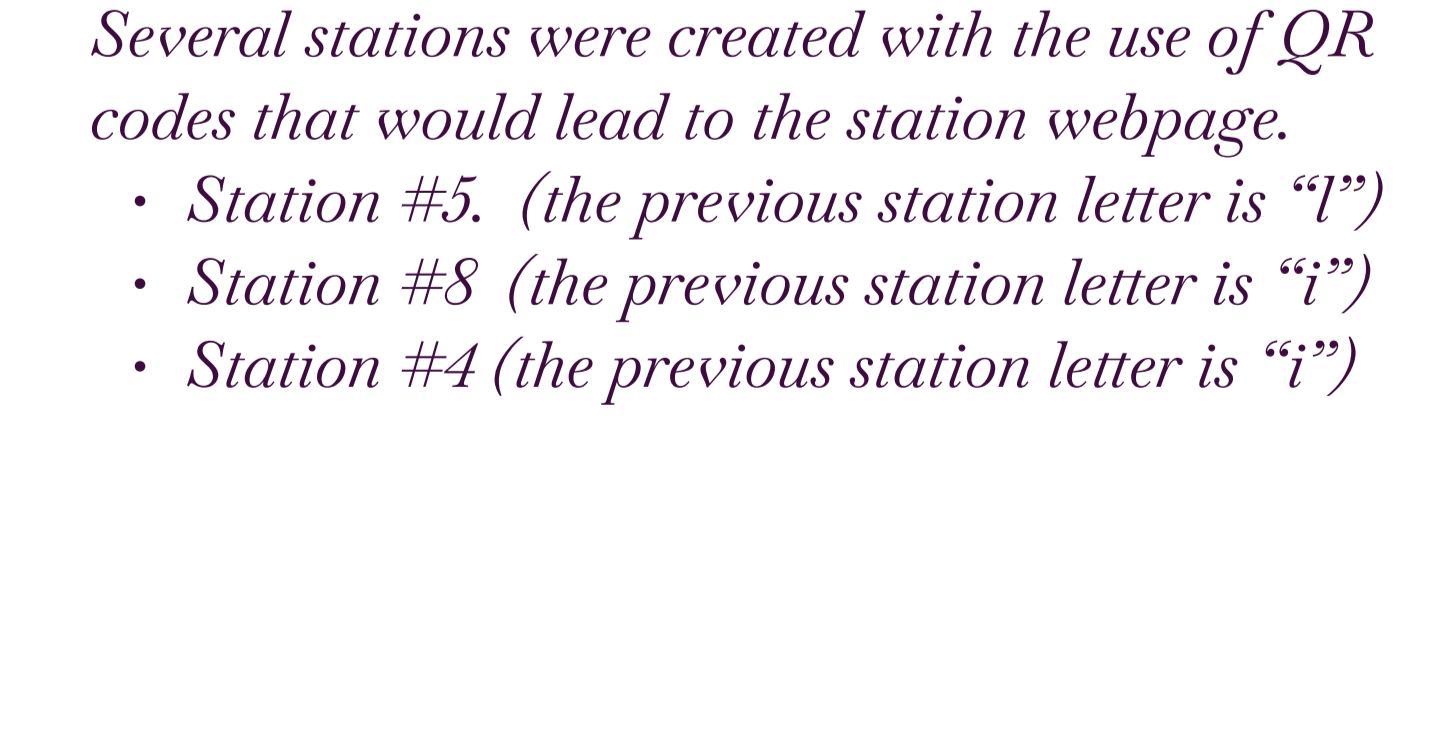
Designed narrative arc where confusion gives way to clarity.

Different Media displayed through the journey

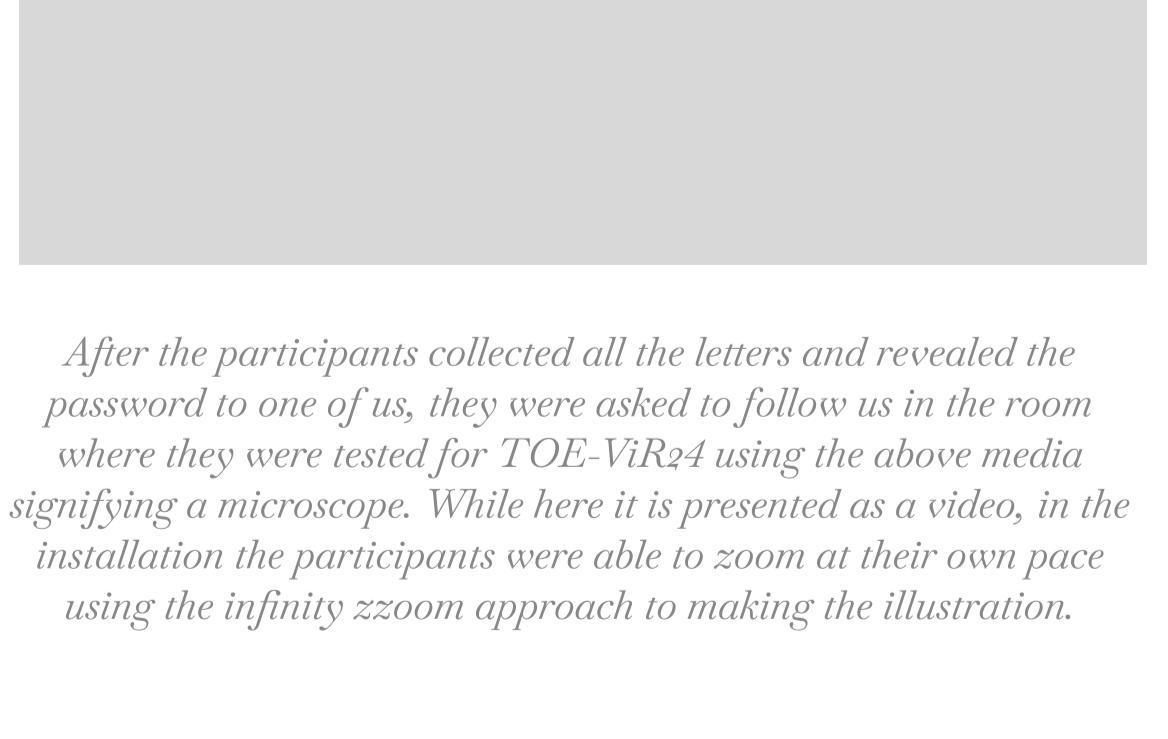


Station #2. News report about TOE-ViR24

Station #7. Infographic about TOE-ViR24 mutation



Station 1. The double-sided instruction sheet introduced the fictional virus and guided visitors through each stage of the installation, outlining both safety measures and interactive tasks needed to complete the journey.



Station #2. Newspaper about TOE-ViR24 mutation

Several stations were created with the use of QR codes that would lead to the station webpage.

- Station #5. (the previous station letter is "l")
- Station #8 (the previous station letter is "i")
- Station #4 (the previous station letter is "i")

After the participants collected all the letters and revealed the password to one of us, they were asked to follow us in the room where they were tested for TOE-ViR24 using the above media signifying a microscope. While here it is presented as a video, in the installation the participants were able to zoom at their own pace using the infinity zoom approach to making the illustration.

Outcome and Impact

TOE-ViR24 transforms the exhibition theme of LIVING into a speculative inquiry: if ideas need minds to live, are they not living beings too? Through interaction and reflection, visitors uncover the metaphorical nature of the virus—and in doing so, begin to see themselves as carriers.

By the end of the exhibition, over 100 visitors had been "infected" with TOE-ViR24, each carrying with them a small shift in how they think about knowledge, life, and contagion.

To see a short paper about this project, follow this link.