The Mental Network

Brussels 2020 Exhibition Report

Data, statistics and analysis

Summary

I° Preamble

At the invitation of Carine Fol, Artistic Director of the CENTRALE for Contemporary Art, the installation *The Mental Network* was presented for the very first time in the CENTRALE.box, a space dedicated to emergent artists.

While we curated together Roger Ballen's exhibition *The Theatre of the Ballenesque*, Carine also invited me to exhibit my work as an artist in the CENTRALE.box.
Faced with my doubts about putting forward two different hats (artist and curator) at the same time in the same institution, Carine explained to me her convincing vision: to put forward these dialogue games that took place among the various exhibitions (between Ronny Delrue and Roger Ballen, between the Centrale and the Smak, between Carine and Ronny, between Roger and me, between Carine and me, etc.). Overall, dialogue was omnipresent, becoming the guiding thread in the programming of these exhibitions at CENTRALE.

Rather than working on a new work or presenting a work in progress, it seemed pertinent to me to propose *The Mental Network*, an old project never realized which explored precisely this dimension of dialogue through written expression.
But unlike the other exhibitions presented, this project would be able to create an interesting contrast through its minimalism, as well as its dialogue between intimate and universal scales.

If the excitement for an artist to see his work materialize and "come to life" for the first time, this experience was all the more instructive because of the very context of this exhibition. Beginning as a dialectic between an immaterial interactive object immersed in the universalism of the cybernetic web, and a very real physical place of the viewer's intimate experience, *The Mental Network* was going to traverse the events of the world for the duration of its existence.
Receiving participation from every continent, the printed thoughts told us about the Australian fires, the Hong Kong and Brazilian demonstrations, politics in the United States or Europe, but also and above all, the many forms of intimate and profoundly human expressions.
Then came the pandemic, forcing all the world's museums to close their doors abruptly.
Plunged into the darkness of the museum emptied of its public and staff, the installation continued to function, receiving the doubts and reflections of those who continued to send their thoughts throughout this planetary confinement never before experienced.
Now that the world is awakening again, *The Mental Network* can finally fall asleep for good. Until its next show.

Thank you Carine for the invitation to exhibit *The Mental Network* at CENTRALE.box.
Thank you to the entire CENTRALE team for their precious support throughout this adventure, as well as i-CITY asbl, the City of Brussels, the Culture Department and its alderwoman's office.
Special thanks to Estelle, Olivier, Laura, Pascale, Tania, Jamal, Malika, Mariya, Afrânio, Riccardo, Bilal, Yvan, Wim, Anne-Gaëlle and Kelly.

II° Initial draft *The Mental Network*

Title : The Mental Network

Author : Stéphane Roy

Year : 2020 (project initiated in 2006)

Medium : net art + interactive and participative installation

Techniques : website, digital tablet, printer, black ink and A4 paper sheets

Dimensions : various

The Mental Network (simulation), wall-mounted printer and A4 sheets of paper, variable dimensions

This minimal, participative and evolutionary installation, with a universal dimension, touches on the intimacy of the most personal thoughts of those who contribute to its existence. Through the participations, this installation draws a wide social radiography of our time, its problems and existential questions.

The Mental Network was developed at the time of the emergence of social networks such as Myspace, before the international success of Facebook.
Using chain mail networks at the time, I collected the email addresses of private users to then send everyone a single question : "What are you thinking about?" It was announced to each person that their answers would form a work of evolving art, intended to collect the thoughts of people around the world.
Many answers were collected, coming from various parts of the world. Sometimes very intimate thoughts of all sizes.

For the continued existence of this participatory and evolutionary installation, a very simple website with a form/mailbox will be developed, allowing anyone to participate in this vast collection of thoughts.
This site will include an archive of all the collected thoughts.
Each thought received will be printed directly, via a printer fixed to the wall of the institution hosting the work. The printed sheet falls among the others, gradually occupying the space.
Each visitor is invited to plunge his hand into these numerous thoughts, gathered at random.
The installation is minimal.
A computer can be added at the entrance of the installation, allowing audiences without smartphones to interact directly with the installation.

WEBSITE

Domain name : Creation and acquisition of the domain name with the title of the work

Tree structure : 1 site, 3 tabs :
(home tab) Form to send a message + countdown before the inauguration of the physical installation, with minimal practical information (name + address of the institution + dates of the exhibition + date and time of the opening) ;
An "about" tab with a short introductory text mentioning essential information related to the project + a live countdown of the number of thoughts received ;
An "archive" tab containing all the thoughts received, which can be consulted free of charge. The archives will be presented in the form of a window allowing one thought at a time to be seen, presented randomly. A "next" button will invite the spectator to click to discover each thought, always randomly.

Synchronization : Each thought sent must be printed automatically upon receipt of the message, letting all the information mentioned appear (Name, age, City, Message).
The message is received, triggering the printing. The printer takes out the sheet which automatically falls to the ground.
The printer is thus fixed in height, at least 2m20 from the ground.

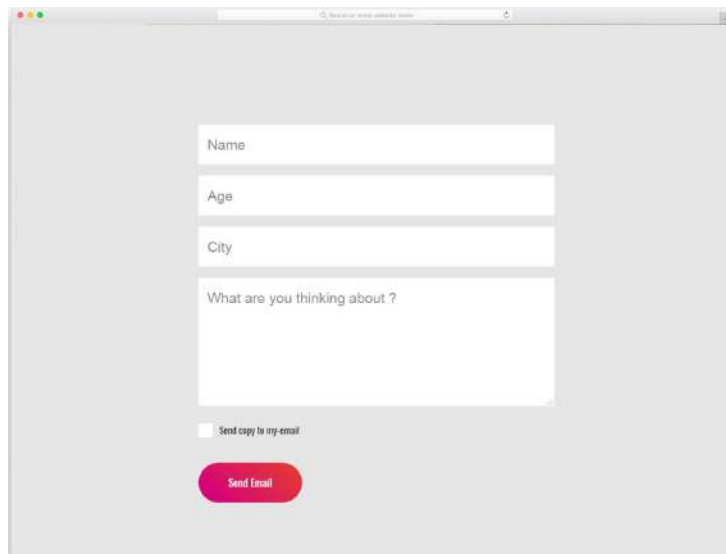**Message sending form :** Users must enter the following information :
- Name
- Age
- Location
- Thought

Users can, if they wish, receive a copy of their message.
This copy will send the user a short word of thanks for his or her participation.
The "send" button will allow the user to send their thoughts.
A box will need to be checked that meets the requirements of the RGPD.

III° THE MENTAL NETWORK - Brussels 2020

Website (done by i-CITY asbl)
Domain name : http://www.thementalnetwork.com/

Features: minimal and interactive. Accessible throughout the installation.
Trilingual site (FR, EN, NL).
Three headings (about us, practical information and thought submission form).
A synchronised countdown timer for the inauguration of the installation, with a visual effect (rain of A4 sheets).
The last ten thoughts are scrolled at the bottom of the page.
Icons referring to the artist's website and social networks (Facebook and Instagram).

Text present on the website (FR version) :

About :

"The Mental Network" is an interactive project created by Stéphane Roy, combining a website accessible to all and a physical installation directly connected to it.

"What are you thinking about?"

This simple question can be answered in many ways, from the lightest to the most intimate thoughts. The answers entered via the website, feed the art installation in real time. Each answer is printed by the installation and thus ensures a progressive extension of the installation. The website will remain accessible until the end of the exhibition. The interactive work created will be constantly evolving, inviting visitors to take a look at the many printed thoughts. Here, your thoughts become a universal work of art.

Practical information :

The installation "The Mental Network" makes its debut in the CENTRALE.box in Brussels. This space in the contemporary art centre CENTRALE offers young artists the opportunity to present their latest creations.

Exhibition "The Mental Network" by Stéphane Roy: 23.01> 14.03.2020
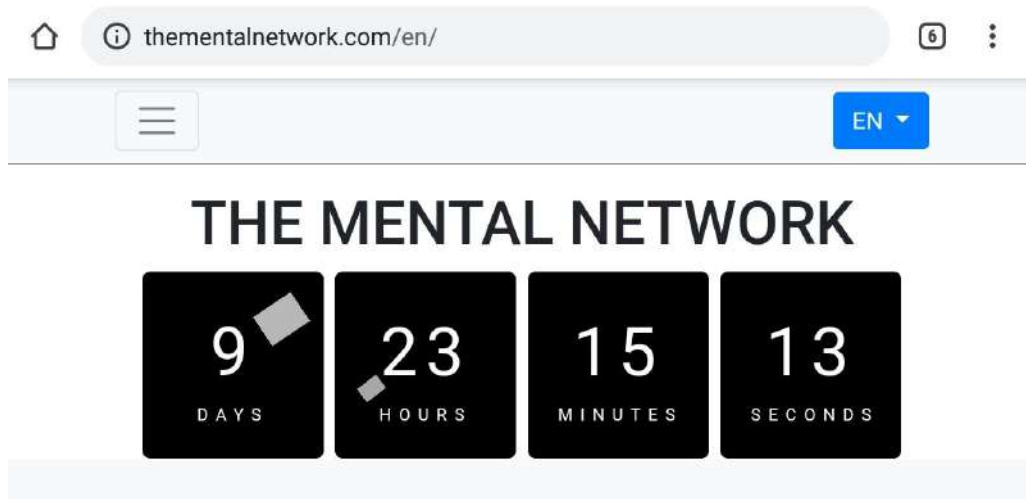Opening: 22.01.2020 - 18:30> 20:30
Free admission

CENTRALE.box
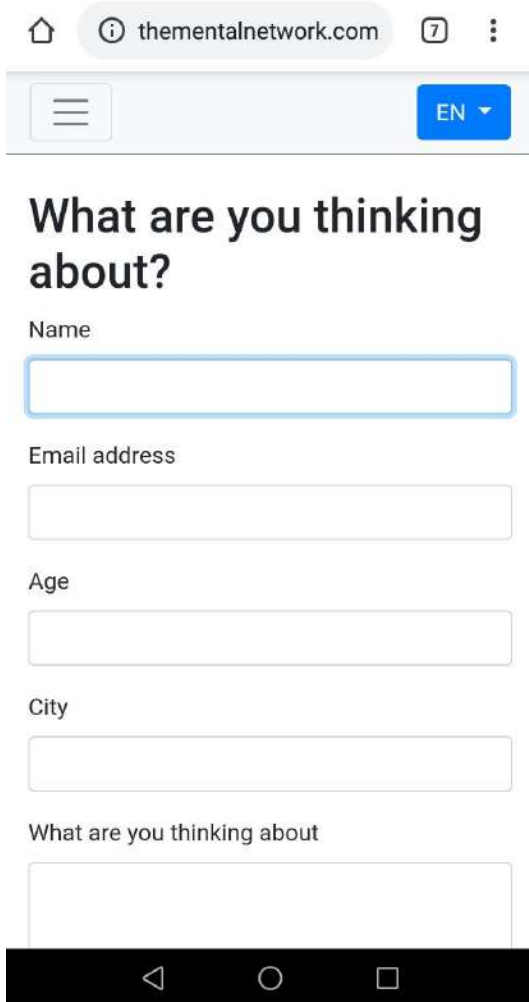Place Sainte-Catherine 44, 1000 Brussels
+32 (0) 2279 64 44
Wednesday> Sunday - 10h30> 18h00

Screenshots of the website :

Countdown with animation (rain of paper sheets)
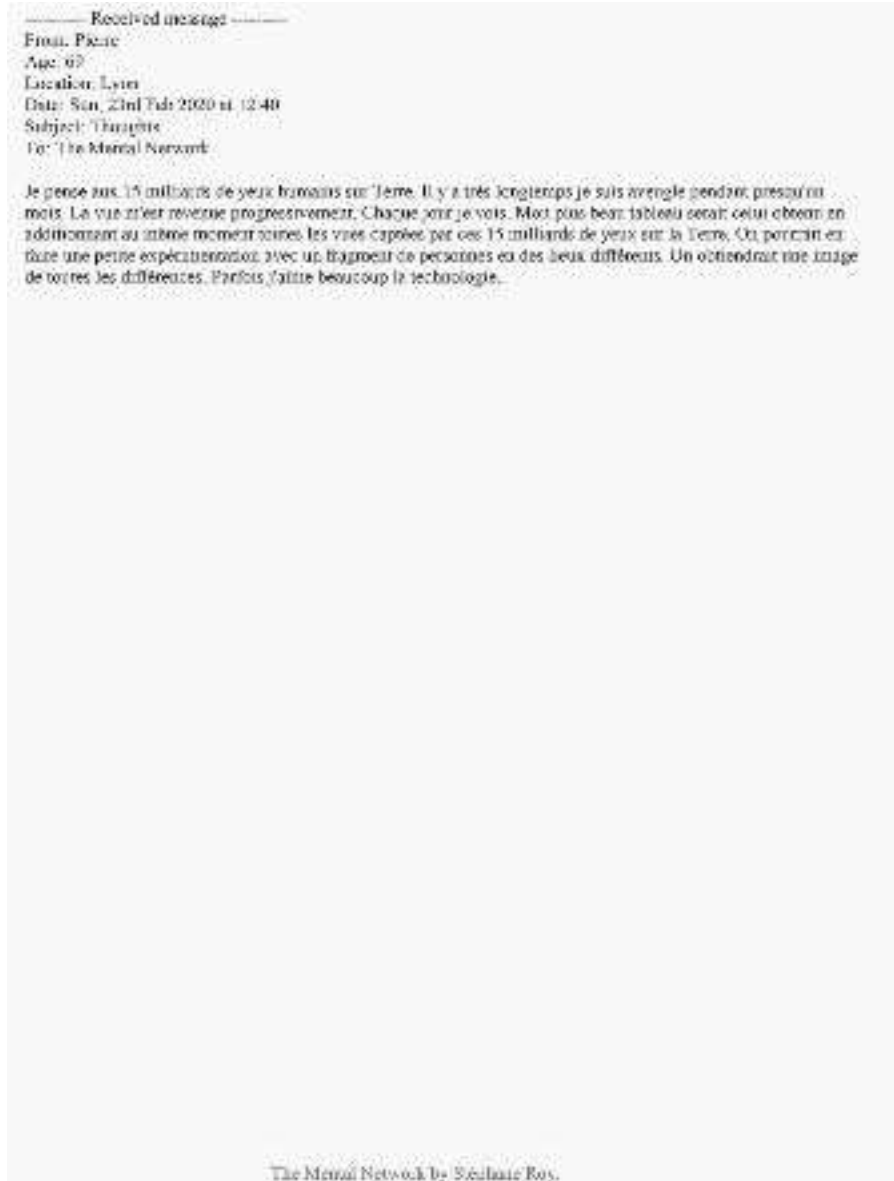

Online form for sending thoughts

Display the latest thoughts sent at the bottom of the site

Thoughts

Each sent thought generates the creation of a pdf and the use of a template inspired by the transferred mails.

For example :

The printed thoughts automatically fall to the ground, gradually covering the ground during the exposure.

The audience is free to walk on the sheets and to grab them.
No rules or prohibitions are communicated to the public.

Once the exhibition is over, all the thoughts are collected and stored in a box labeled with the exhibition name (see page 37).

Scenography

Minimal installation: white room, neon light (as neutral as possible). A printer fixed to the back wall, at a higher height (unreachable for the public), and slightly detached from the wall. The tilt towards the floor will allow the leaves to fall to the ground.

On the opposite wall, at the entrance of the exhibition, a digital pad connected to *The Mental Network*'s website will be installed.
The public will thus be able to participate directly with the installation, which will be also accessible to people without smartphones.
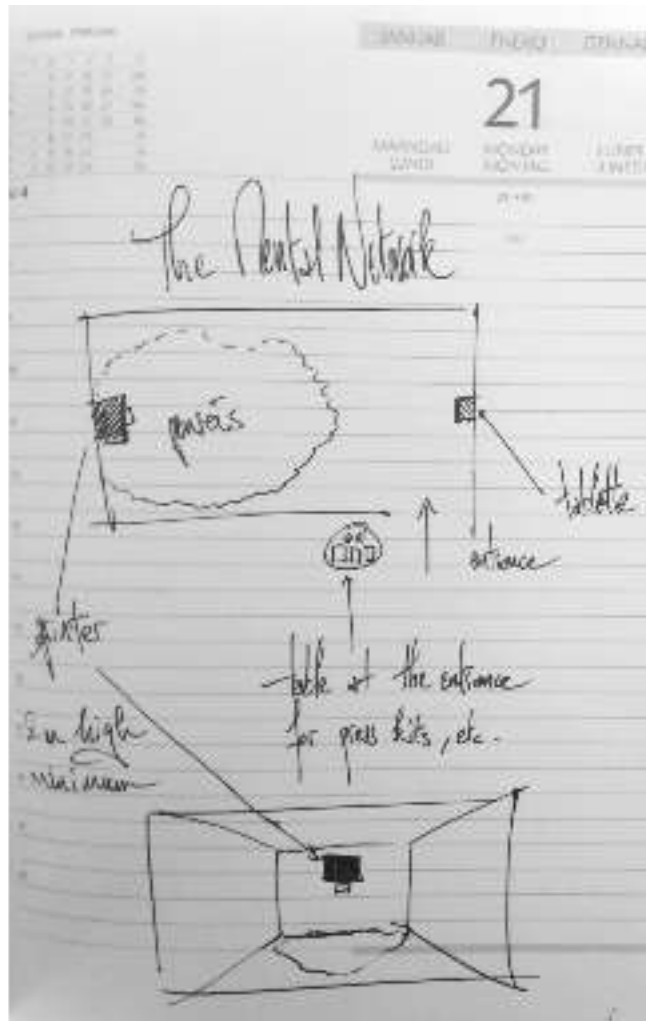
Communication

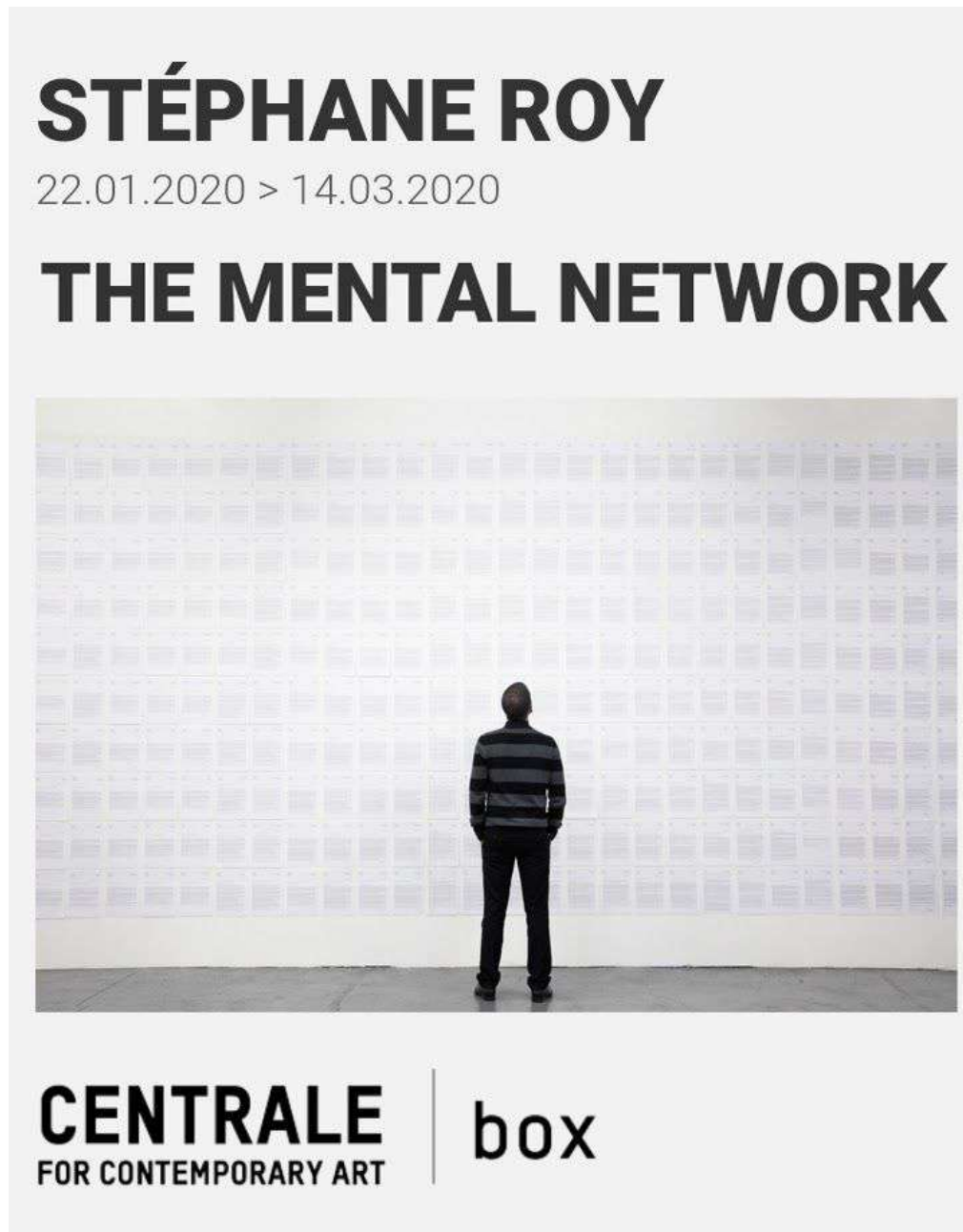Visual used to announce the exhibition :

Since no visual of The Mental Network existed before its first exhibition, the visual of the installation "The Wall of Motivations, or the modern madness of integration" was used to promote the exhibition.
This installation consisted of a collection of 400 motivation letters I have written between 2012 and 2017, sent to as many employers. It was through this installation that Carine Fol discovered my work as an artist.

Promotion before the exhibition :

In order to encourage and invite the public to participate in the activation of the installation, a promotional campaign was carried out beforehand. Taking up one of the main themes of my practice, that of our relationship to work, business cards were printed and distributed in Brussels.

Visuals of the business cards :

WAAR DENK JE AAN ?

WHAT ARE YOU THINKING ABOUT ?

À QUOI PENSEZ-VOUS ?

www.thementalnetwork.com

On the back was simply the logo of the CENTRALE :

BXL

A complementary communication was also carried out on social networks and by email.

Promotion during the exhibition :

In order to encourage continued participation from the audience, a selection of thoughts was published daily on social networks. A layout that respected the project's graphic design made it possible to emphasize the essential information on each printed sheet, with the exception of the date and time.

A few examples of these thoughts laid out for social networks :

Marie • 16 • Antwerp

Escaping reality and finding my dreams.

Babette • 26 • Ixelles

Qu'adviendra-t-il ensuite de toutes ces pensées ? Where will they go ? What will they do ? Et qu'est-ce qu'il se pasera quand l'encre de l'imprimante sera épuisée ? Devrons nous arrêter de penser ?

Jean-Pierre • 66 • Machelen

Het zand bleef rustig liggen op het strand, blijkbaar was er niets aan de hand

Karolien • 42 • Hasselt

Aan dit kunstwerk. En aan wat maakt dat het kunst is. En waarom dat dan zo is. Wie dat beslist. Of ik ook een kunstenaar kan worden. Of al ben. Of wil zijn. En wat ik dan zou maken.

Bertille • 20 • Bxl

Au fait que je suis peut-être en train de passer à côté de ma vie.

Eleonore • 29 • BXL

I have to stop overthinking.

Christine • 63 • Ganshoren

Un infini mouvement de personnes qui se font l'accolade dans une immense manifestation contre toute forme de racisme.

Lilian • 23 • Berlin

Wenn meine Katze von mir träumt... miaue ich in ihren Träumen?

Fabian • 39 • BXL

Quel paradoxe, je suis tout le temps perdu dans mes pensées mais maintenant qu'on me demande à quoi je pense en ce moment, c'est le néant dans ma tête...

IV° Activation

Vue de l'entrée de l'exposition

Official exhibition dates: 22 January 2020 - 14 March 2020

Installation activation dates (including first tests): 02 January 2020 - 01 June 2020

151 days of facility operations

Approximately 7 weeks of exposure (31 opening days)

944 visitors

1541 unique thoughts received (1689 total including duplicate prints)

Comparative views of the installation on the first and last days :

Wednesday, January 22nd, 2020, before the inauguration of the facility.

Wednesday 03 June 2020, following the closing of *The Mental Network*

Some complementary views of the exhibition

View of the tablet at the entrance of the exhibition

The Mental Network accessible from smartphones

© Lemon Curry

We will now delve into all the data gleaned from the encoding of thoughts sent to *The Mental Network*. This data only tells us about the people who participated in the thought submission, not the entire audience that attended the exhibition. Moreover, this information is limited to the data mentioned by the participants themselves, without the possibility of verifying the veracity of this information.

V° Participants

A) Gender distribution

There is a balanced distribution between men and women.

A significant number of stakeholders could not be placed in one of the two categories listed, due to the inability to analyze their potential genders solely on the basis of the names used.
Between non-generic diminutives and pseudonyms favouring anonymity, this third category completes our gender breakdown of *The Mental Network*'s stakeholders.

Gender	Participants	%
Women	645	42%
Men	687	45%
Unknown	209	13%
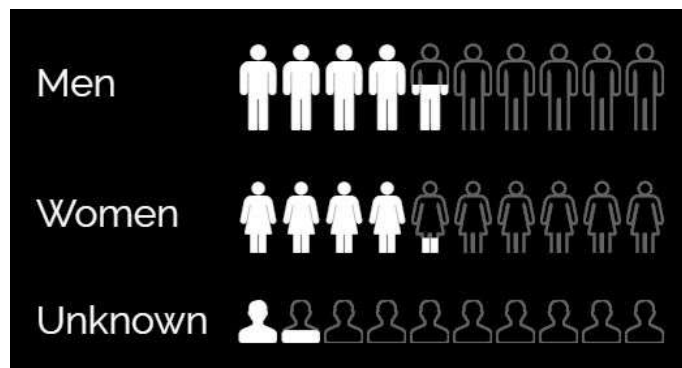
It should be noted, however, that we are not able to accurately determine the difference between users physically present at the installation site and users acting remotely. However, this option could be considered in the future, if deemed appropriate.
Finally, the very issue of the titles of the genders mentioned here could be discussed, so that the membership of the participants could be fully respected (although the form itself does not request this information).

B) Generational distribution

We are proceeding cautiously with the data listed below.

Indeed, many participants opted for the anonymous solution by indicating an unrealistic age (under 10 and over 90).

The messages themselves betray these temporary digital identities, unless these generations are suddenly endowed with capacities of expression and use of technological tools similar to the activities of the younger generations (teenagers and young adults).

Youth is the dominant category with a high concentration of participants in the 18 to 30 age group. Teenagers are also numerous.

Adults of the following generations are mostly concentrated in the 31 to 50 age group. Beyond that, we are forced to observe a rapid exhaustion of people in the advanced ages.

This element allows us to question the reason for such a difference in representation, in particular whether the digital divide is the main cause.

Mobility can also play an important role (school groups are often more present in exhibitions than older people).

Finally, the active or passive mediation around the work, as well as the group phenomenon, are determining psychosocial factors in explaining the distribution of participants according to their age categories.

Age	Participants	%
0 - 17	135	8.58%
18 - 30	626	40.70%
31 - 50	581	37.78%
51 - 65	84	5.45%
66 - 100	115	7.46%
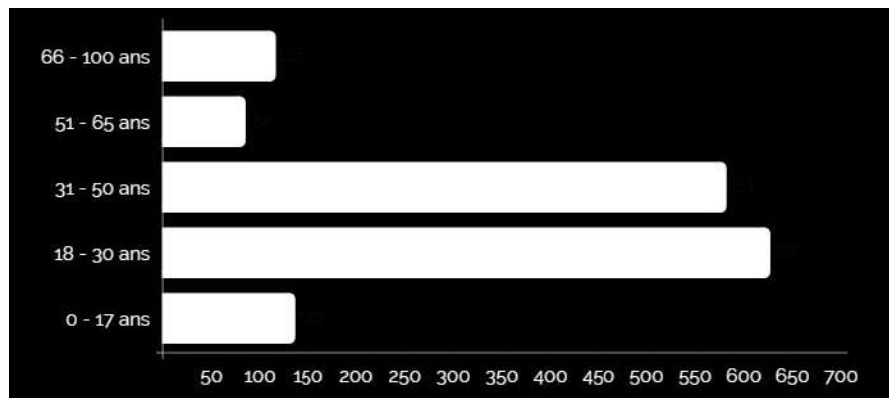
C) Langages

Although the French language accounts for almost half of the thoughts received, it must be said that many Dutch-speaking people have opted for English in their speeches.
English is thus strongly represented. Dutch comes in third place.

In fourth position are classified under the category "Others", all the remaining languages used within the installation.
German has a strong presence, overtaking Italian, Spanish and Portuguese.
Still in the same category are a minority number of other languages such as Finnish, Hungarian and Romanian.
We also find other forms of digital expression (emojis and various graphic compositions, mostly related to the male reproductive organ)..

Langage	Participants	%
EN	539	35,05%
FR	766	49,81%
NL	130	8,45%
OTHER	102	6,63%
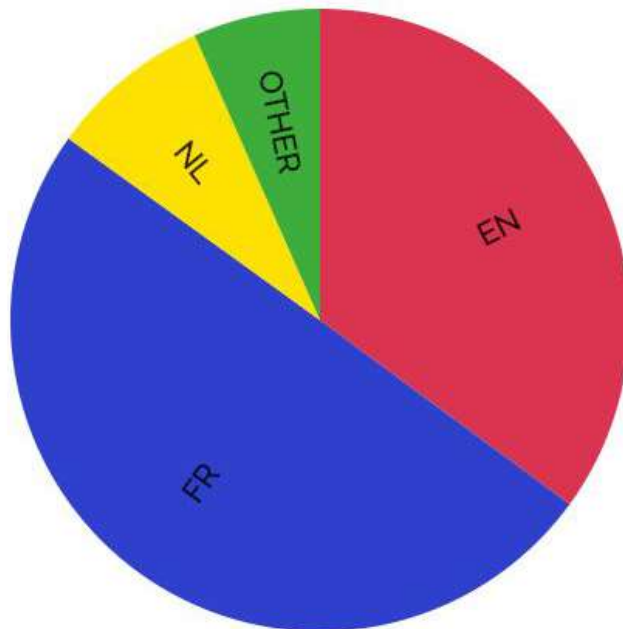
VI° Interactions

A) Temporality of the installation

a) Total duration of activities : 151 days

The Mental Network was officially inaugurated on January 22, 2020. However, a promotional campaign was carried out before the opening, in order to check the proper functioning of the installation before its launch. The first test is thus noted on January 2, 2020.

Initially scheduled to close on 14 March 2020, the museum became suddenly inaccessible to the public from 13 March 2020, following the containment linked to the global coronavirus pandemic (COVID19). But the printer remained connected the whole time.

The particularity of *The Mental Network* makes it possible to go beyond the physical dependence of the exhibition to ensure and maintain the activity of the work. Indeed, while the museum was closed, the installation continued to be activated by the sending of thoughts via the website.
.
The facility thus remained active until May 31, 2020, during the whole time of the containment in Belgium.

Although the number of interventions was lower during the containment period, there was a higher quality of thought received. These depict the world as it is happening, showing the doubts and questions of humans about the world of tomorrow.

The total duration of *The Mental Network* reached 151 days, including the testing phase and the promotional campaign to activate the installation.

b) Evolution of interactions over time

The graph below shows a high level of activity during the first month of the exhibition. This activity will gradually slow down until considerably during the lockdown.
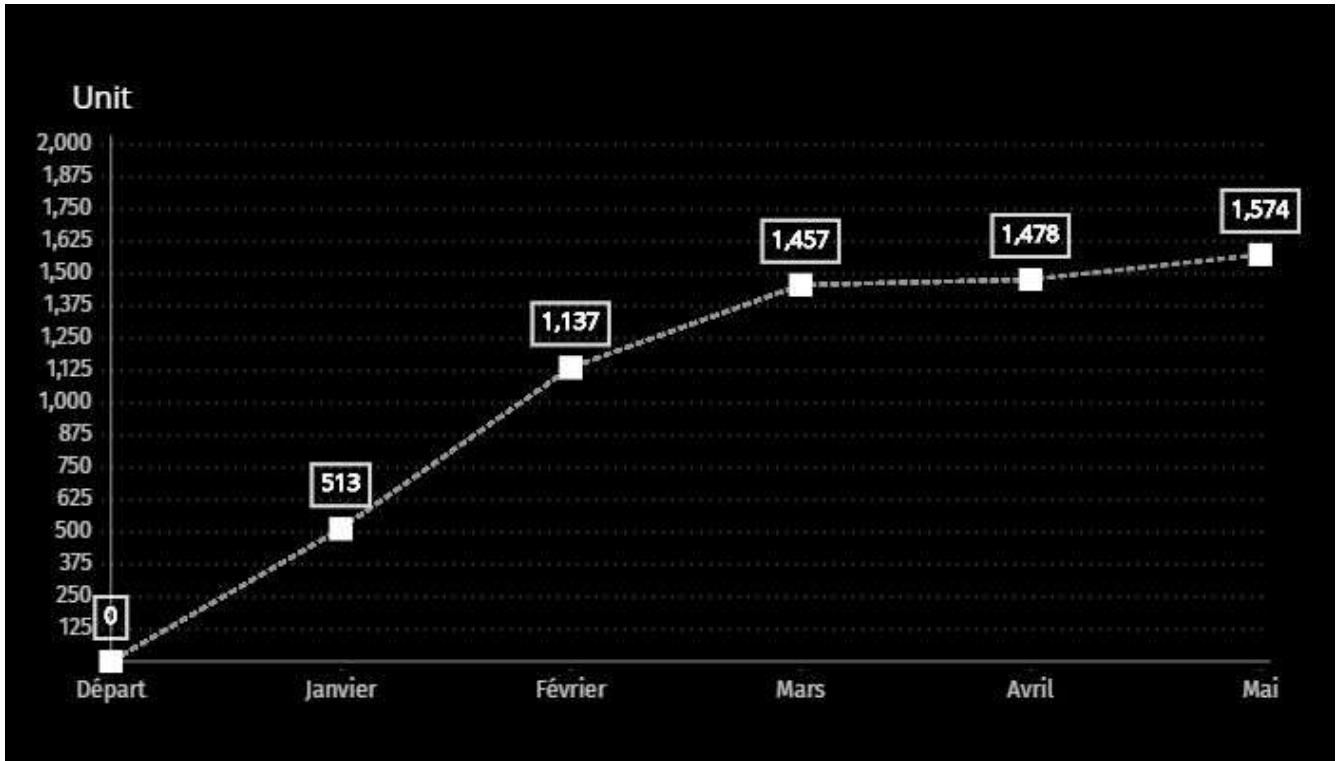
Nevertheless, the thoughts themselves received throughout the exhibition allow us to distinguish between people physically present within the exposure (the majority) and those acting at a distance (the minority).
The containment only confirmed this pattern.

However, from a qualitative point of view, the thoughts received during the containment very often indicate a tendency to critical reflection and questioning. While those sent from the facility often tended to be more test-like and entertaining.
We will come back later in the brief analysis of the various categories observed among the thoughts received.

c) Interactions by day of the week

Although the opening hours of the Centrale museum undeniably increase the activity of the participants, we observe an honourable participation outside the opening hours (confirmed by the analysis of the time distribution below concerning the sending of thoughts).

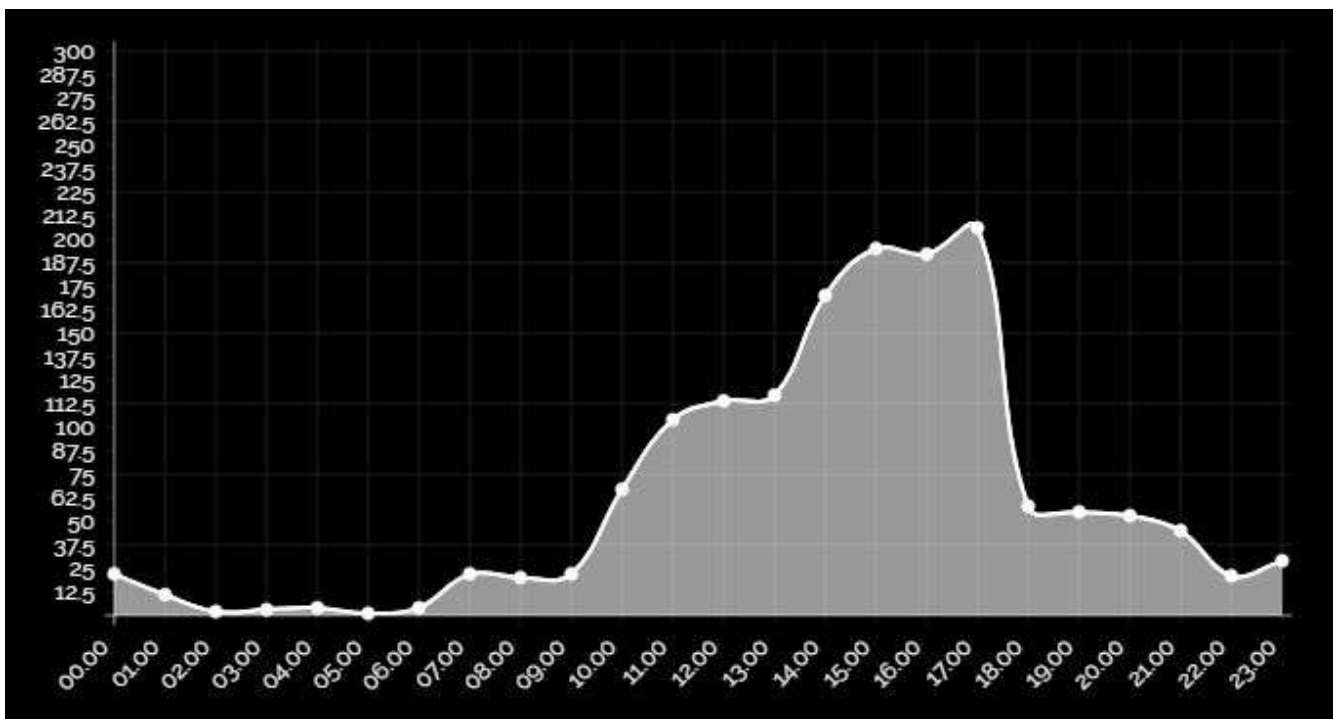| Day	Participants	%
Monday	120	7,80%
Tuesday	116	7,54%
Wednesday	244	15,86%
Thursday	158	10,27%
Friday	205	13,32%
Saturday	404	26,26%
Sunday	291	18,92%
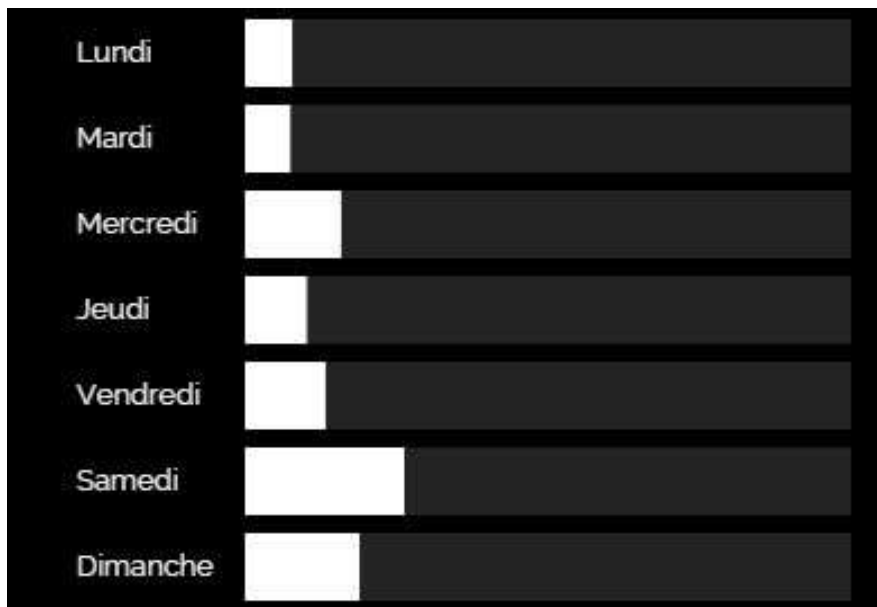
d) Hours of interaction

The fluctuation of the participants over 24 hours reveals a progressive concentration of participants between 10 am and 6 pm. The afternoon remains the time with the highest participation.

Interactions remain stable in the morning (07:00 - 09:00) and in the evening (19:00 - 21:00), with a double participation in the evening.

While the flows remain low during the night (23h - 06h), it is interesting to note that we recorded continuous activity throughout the duration of *The Mental Network*, including during these hollow night periods.
However, we are basing ourselves here on the figures received, without taking into account the time difference of the countries participating in the installation.

The graph below shows the total number of entries for each recorded time slot, and is presented as follows: "00.00" means all interactions that took place between 00:00 and 00:59.

B) Space

    a) Geographical distribution

        i) According to Country

The Mental Network very quickly conquered all the continents, including Antarctica.
The great diversity in the geographical distribution of participants is interesting to observe.

Belgium remains of course the country with the largest number of participants, with a total of 58.32%, followed by France (15.35%) and Germany (4.42%).

Here is a ranking of the ten most represented countries in *The Mental Network*, including "Unknown", a category that includes all unspecified locations :

COUNTRIES	TOTAL
Belgium	897
France	236
Germany	68
Unknown	67
The Netherlands	44
USA	23
Italy	22
England	16
UK	12
Spain	9

Below is a map representing the extent of the countries found in *The Mental Network* (except Antarctica which is not included in the Excel template used).

The majority of the European and American continents are represented. The Asian continent is also very well represented.

Africa remains the continent with the lowest representation among the participants.

Here is the alphabetical list of the countries mentioned :

Afghanistan

Antarctica

Argentina

Australia

Austria

Belarus

Belgium

Bolivia

Brazil

Bulgaria

Cambodia

Canada

Cape Verde

Chile

China

Colombia

Congo

Croatia

Cuba

Czech Republic

Denmark

Egypt

England

Estonia

Ethiopia

Finland

France

Germany

Greece

Guatemala

Hong-Kong

Hungary

Ireland

Israel

Italy

Jamaica

Japan

Korea

Latvia

Macedonia

Malaysia

Morocco

Mexico

Mozambique

Nepal

Pakistan

Paraguay

Peru

Philippines

Poland

Portugal

Romania

Russia

Scotland

Senegal

Serbia

Singapore

Slovakia

Slovenia

South Africa

South Korea

Spain

St Marin

Sweden

Switzerland

Taiwan

The Netherlands

Tunisia

Turkey

UK

Ukraine

USA

Vietnam

ii)   According to Cities

In total, we count 462 different cities mentioned, from the big world capitals (Washington, Paris, London, Mexico City, Berlin, Moscow, …) to more remote towns and villages.

Although the diversity is also remarkable, there is a strong difference in terms of the distribution of these data, with the City of Brussels being the most represented (40.38%), not counting the adjacent municipalities in the Brussels region, which undeniably represent a majority among the participants.

The major French cities are also very present, with Paris, Lyon and Lille as the leading trio.

The distribution of foreign participants according to their cities underlines an undeniable close relationship with Brussels, testifying at the same time to the cultural practices within the tourist flows in the Belgian capital.

LOCATION	FEMALE	MALE	UNKNOWN	TOTAL
Brussels	275	258	88	621
Paris	31	38	6	75
Berlin	23	12	3	38
Lyon	3	30	0	33
London	9	8	5	22
Lille	12	8	0	20
Antwerp	10	6	3	19
Liège	8	8	0	16
Gent	8	5	1	14
Amsterdam	5	5	2	12
Ixelles	6	5	1	12
Leuven	5	5	0	10
Schaarbeek	7	2	0	9
Saint Gilles	2	5	1	8
Liege	2	5	0	7
Mons	7	0	0	7
Forest	4	1	1	6
Hasselt	5	0	1	6
Rennes	4	2	0	6
Rotterdam	3	2	1	6

C) Content

  a) On the diversity of thoughts received

Although it would be very difficult, and even limiting, to classify the thoughts received in a graph so as to eventually identify the percentages of this or that category, we can nevertheless underline the great diversity of the thoughts received and note the various characteristics observed to date :

- On the length of thoughts

It was defined from the outset that there should be no limit on the length of text, so as to guarantee the full expression of the thoughts sent.
On the whole, the vast majority of the thoughts expressed remain relatively short, from a few words to one or more sentences.
Nevertheless, some participants took the time to express longer thoughts, from one to several paragraphs.
Some people even filled out a full page.
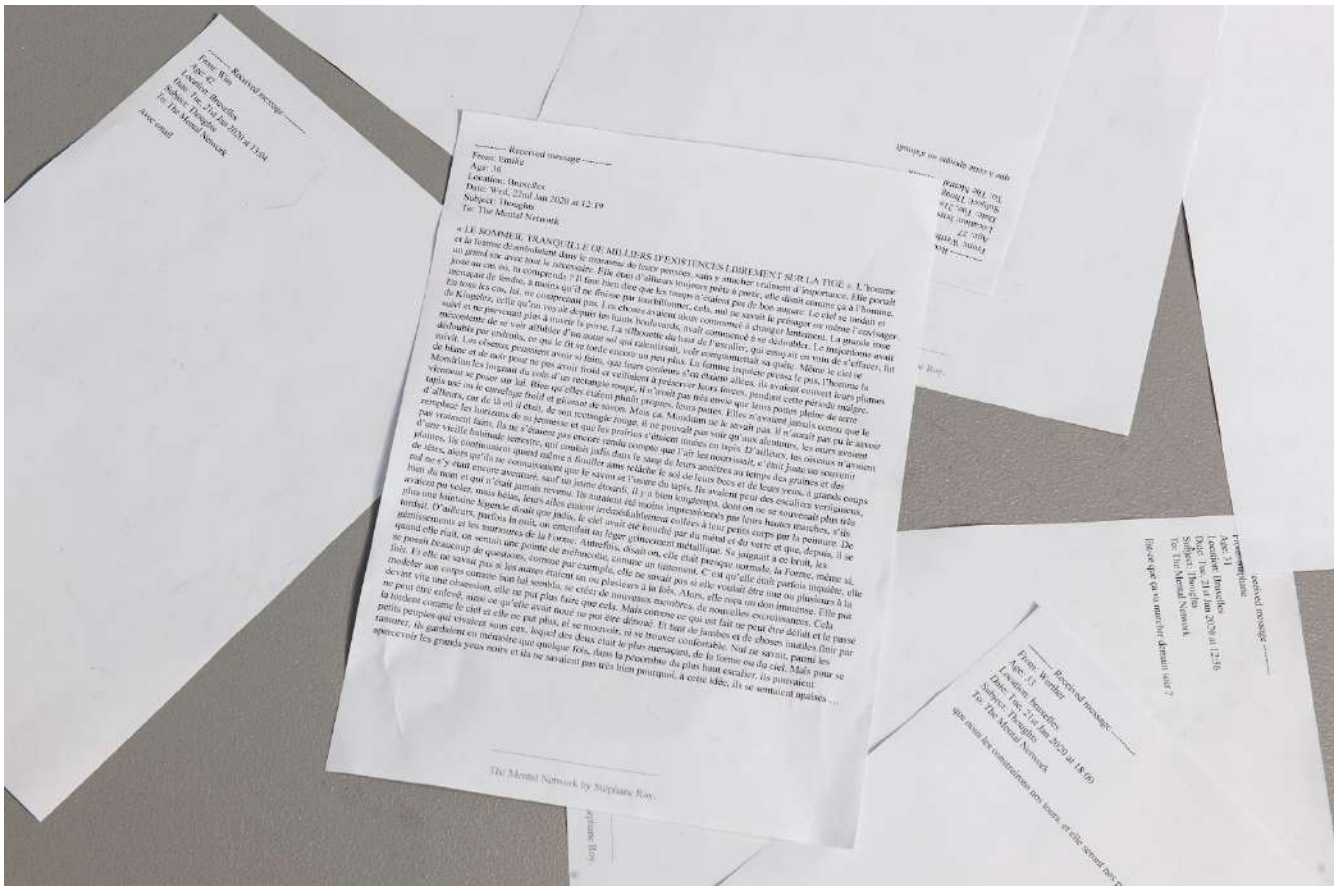
- On the various types of thoughts

There is great diversity in the thoughts received. As mentioned earlier, the exercise of identifying categories of thoughts may be somewhat reductive, but nevertheless we can try to summarize the whole range of thoughts expressed by highlighting some very specific trends. We therefore note the following categories among the thoughts received :

- the tests : visibly sent by people physically present on site, curious about the operation of the installation and eager to interact with it ;

- the provocations : like the tests, these thoughts express a willingness to interact with the installation, while challenging it and the project in question. Between immature thoughts, provocative messages or (although very rarely) insults, these thoughts remain in the minority. We add to this category those who have expressed dissatisfaction with what they consider to be a waste of paper ;

- random thoughts : rather than using the pejorative term "superficial", random thoughts denote a presence of people in the very moment they express themselves. Whether it is about the food they are going to eat, or the weather at that moment, these thoughts remain rather short and light ;

- political thoughts : unlike random thoughts, political thoughts are aimed at very specific subjects, directly related to the news at the time they are sent. Manifestations of the commitment of some people, or thoughts and feelings of others, these thoughts vary in size ;

- social thoughts : mark the very existence of individuals in a social and societal context. In majority can be noted the marks of love and family attachments ;

- intimate thoughts: the last category of thoughts, and often the most popular among visitors dipping their hand into the printed sheets, these thoughts are of a strong intimacy. Between the expression of very personal thoughts, or the disclosure of personal subjects, these thoughts act as secrets revealed to the eyes of the world, betraying both our need for existence in this world through its expression, but also our exhibitionist tendency to reveal to voyeurs of our species the very personal elements that belong to us.
  The recurring subjects are sex, fantasies, trauma and the manifestation of intimate emotions or taboo intentions. Some personal reflections may also be included through their tendency to resemble the writing practice of the diary

  .

b) Interactions of present audiences and unanticipated interventions

Throughout the duration of the exhibition, we were able to count a strong participation of the public physically present within the installation and showing a positive reception of it.

Let's start with the opening, which was certainly the moment with the most people present at the same time. However, it is interesting to note that it was not the day with the most printed thoughts. From the first day, the people present showed almost all the behaviours that we would observe later on, during the exhibition :

i) Passive observation from a distance: the public often remained at the entrance of the exhibition, incredulous and not necessarily understanding what it was all about.
These visits are often brief and, at first sight, of little interest.

ii) Active observation from a distance: the public remains at a distance but shows a marked interest, between curiosity and enthusiasm, with diverse reactions and light interactions (mainly consisting of taking photos and videos).
Visits are sometimes short, but often longer, with documentation taken at the entrance of the exhibition.

iii) Immersive action: the next step up from the previous point, here it is about audiences daring to take the plunge by walking among the leaves that have fallen to the ground. Photography is more recurrent here, with many selfies among the installation.

iv) The first degree of interaction (the readers): the public seize the leaves and do not hesitate to search and read the printed thoughts, in order to satisfy their curiosity.
Some people do not hesitate to grab some of these printed thoughts (often their own thoughts) before leaving the premises with their precious memories.

v) Second level interaction (the participants): audiences who have become aware of how the facility works and of the invitation to participate in it. Whether via the tablet at their disposal, or by using their smartphones, these audiences participate directly by sending their thoughts and seeing them printed live before their eyes, often amused.

vi) Third degree interaction (the creative ones): the audiences intervene directly in the installation in a more personal and creative way (handwriting on the printed sheets, folding and other interventions on the papers, etc.).

Some images of the installation frequented by the public :

This last point also raises an interesting aspect regarding the installation and its appropriation by the public present. Indeed, if the reaction and interaction of the public is generally important in my approach, I always try to set up a framework that is as specific as possible, while keeping in mind the unknown factor: the unexpected reaction of the public.
We can say that here, the public has not disappointed by thwarting expectations.

We point out various original interventions, from drawings and writings on the printed sheets, to origami, folding and finally, the forms of small installations made with these reappropriated sheets.

Example: two sheets were folded and then installed in the corners, on either side of the printer, so as to stand upright along the walls. These sheets were covered with calligraphic shapes made with red posca.

Finally, *The Mental Network* inspired another visual artist, Werther Gasperini, who, on Saturday February 22nd, created a long-lasting performance within the installation itself.

For the entire opening day of the museum, the artist sat underneath the printer. Every ten minutes he sent the following message: "I have ten minutes left". Each message sent was printed before falling to the ground (sometimes on the artist or at his feet). The rest of the time, the artist took notes and read books he had brought along.

Werther Gasperini, Saturday, February 22nd during his performance in *The Mental Network*

The public continued to visit the exhibition, somewhat confused by this seated person (often mistaken for the artist).

VII° Conclusion

The Mental Network was undeniably an enriching experience that needs to be renewed. Throughout the activation of the installation, we were able to observe the desire and pleasure of interaction between the viewer and the work.

This spectator moving in turn between participant-exhibitionist, or observer-viewer, only further affirmed our deep universal desire for existence in this world. The Cartesian "I think therefore I am" becomes the "I post therefore I am" of our cybernetic era of social networks.

But in this desire for existence is also revealed our desire to belong. Audiences with wide open eyes probe the collected thoughts that are printed before their eyes. And in front of them grows the breath of the world as it happens.

The Mental Network takes the form of a memory, a black box of our planet in the making. In it we read the thoughts of people in Australia telling us about the fires. The Hong Kong demonstrations and the Brazilian revolts appear on the white pages.
And then the pandemic that is gradually emerging on the horizon, before we manage to seal off all our nations.

But *The Mental Network* does not, of course, have the ambition to play the news. It is much more familiar with the language of the diary.
It is a way of accumulating thoughts tinged with emotion, full of reflections. Feelings in profusion that accumulate on the floor of the installation as for it minimal.

The neutrality of the installation, by its apparent clinical coldness yet dehumanized, is overwhelmed by this growing mound of sheets covered with the words sent by the many participants. The participants all become equal, having the same space for expression delimited by the four corners of the white A4 sheet of paper. No social hierarchy. Young and old, from the great megacities and other rich countries to Third World countries, everyone gradually takes their place in the immaculate space.

Day and night, the machine continues to print to the rhythm of the thoughts that are sent to it...
With each new printed sheet, its original coldness disappears a little more, gradually replaced by this great radiography of the world, this portrait of our species in constant evolution.
With each new thought received, this same white sheet of paper, tinged with words, always leaves the printer, falling to the ground in a final whirl, a dance each time unique in the space of the exhibition. Many found this hazardous choreography somewhat hypnotic and satisfying, rekindling a hint of childlike wonder buried in each of us.

Oscillating between physical place and imaginary territory, the installation goes beyond the physical framework of the exhibition to invite any connected person to feed the work, at any time and without any censorship.
The very question of the work as such could then be asked: is it defined by its materialized form, via printed thoughts? Or is it already worked in its digitized form?

In acting in the cybernetic sphere, *The Mental Network* tends to be as open and inclusive as possible, reaching many age groups, and across many countries as we have seen.

Of course, the installation nevertheless reveals one or more shortcomings. Although it has never had the ambition to resolve this dilemma, the work in its digital form cannot exist without its physical format, and vice versa.
Moreover, in this interdependence resurfaces the great outcasts of our present and future world: people who do not have access to new technologies.

This digital divide remains one of the major problems of our societies, as museum institutions have well understood. Thus, the CENTRALE has endeavoured to deploy its mediation tools, in particular by accompanying the oldest and most vulnerable sections of the public to enable them to have easy access to the work.
The museum thus confirms its societal role: to become an agora of experiences and knowledge, forming the individual through plastic, creative and reflective languages.

In this temple of emotion that are museums, dialogues emerge that touch those who want to cross the threshold.
Art is an encounter, a conversation with the soul of the being, reaching the sensitive chords of a universal memory specific to our species. Indeed, whether by its reflexive power or by its sensitive charge, the work goes beyond the borders and obstacles of morals, cultures and languages, to better connect us.
By resembling life, Art brings people together.
Art gathers us with Others, but also and above all with ourselves.
Revealing the forms of the world, Art lifts the veils of ignorance to connect us to the sparks of existence of a world in perpetual construction, of a life in eternal change.

With *The Mental Network*, I try to humbly pursue the construction of a practice defending the idea of Art that connects us to life that connects us to art. An infinite and grandly growing circle, conducive to emancipatory forms and symbols of our quest for wholeness.

Thank you for the time and precious attention.
Yours sincerely,
Stéphane Roy
Brussels, June 2020