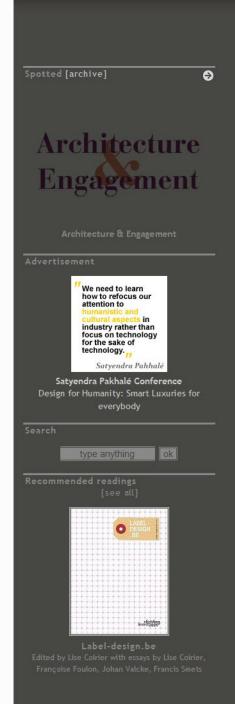## TOUCH, AN
URBAN INTERACTIVE INSTALLATION

The touch project takes as a starting point Brussels' 145 m high Dexia Tower, from which 4200 windows can be individually colour-enlightened, by RGB-led bars, turning the façade into a huge screen.

Instead of considering this infrastructure as a flat screen (surface) displaying pre-rendered video loops, the project is working on the architectural characteristics of the tower and its urban context. These characteristics of the building; orientation, volume, scale ... are used as parameters to set up a spatial, temporal and luminous concept, which further allow people to directly interact with the tower.

On Brussels' Rogier Place, at the bottom of the tower, a station is mounted where people both individually as collectively can interact with the visual and luminous display (= the tower) trough a multi touch screen. Both static (touch) as dynamic input (gesture) is recognized to generate an elementary graphical language of points, lines and surfaces combined with physical behaviours (growth, weight, ...) taking a monochromatic colour palette (background) combined with black and white (graphical elements).

light design is the design of communication

There are many ways to think about light and design; one of these is to consider light as information : is it on the level of a receiver, transmitter or sender? From this viewpoint and from the term's we applied to it — light design is the design of communication.

    Already in the year 1999 when working on an enlightening proposal for the Heysel plane, a project called lightscapes (not realised) , we, LAb[au], focused on the spatial and temporal programming of light rather than considering the design of its support such as the design of a streetlight... In this manner we wanted to establish an enlightenment which shapes a dynamic environment evolving and reflecting the usage of space, be it on an individual (interactive) or collective scale.

    When working on the urban interactive installation ' touch' similar considerations have been our main focus such as to create a relationship in between the user, the citizens and the tower transforming the perception of the tower as a publicity screen towards an urban art and enlightening project. Therefore the challenge for us was to design participation and identification; that user could get involved with a new urban sign. For this reason we have been setting up an entire communication chain running from the individual interaction with the enlightening of the tower towards sending out a new view of Brussels landscape as greeting card.

    Each of these greeting cards is the actual view of a user's interaction choosing in real-time the color of the tower and animating it with points, lines and surfaces underling the architecture and its characteristics. This abstract and constructivist language of verticals, horizontals, diagonals is for us not only our reductionist and elementary way to design but also the best manner to face the user to the main objective of the project : to create a relationship inbetween the tower, its architecture, the city and the user. No more, no less.

According to this objective we have been looking for the most intuitive way of interaction; wherefore we developed a touch-screen allowing multiple finger inputs at the same time and to make the screen as big as possible so that people actually could get the feeling of touching the tower, and even to interact with other people in the same time. The design and the programming of the interface therefore aimed on the direct transcription of user's gestures and finger movements to a graphic and dynamic language while sticking to the spatiality of the building.

For the last element, the design of the interactive station, we have been looking for the same temporal and spatial principles as applied to the interface and the entire light design. We opted on the spatial folding of lines incorporating all the different functions we wanted. Each of the three foldings which constitute the station thus is related to a specific function while following the principles of the entire design, desiging light as information on an urban and artistic level.

written by MANUEL ABENDROTH on 6 January 2007

Founded in 1997 and based in Brussels, LAB[AU] mainly creates interactive artworks and audiovisual performances, for which it develops its own software and interfaces. Its four members (Manuel Abendroth, Jerome Decock, Alexandre Plennevaux and Els Vermang) have a background in architecture, art and music, and also run since 2003 a digital design gallery, MEDIARUIMTE, in the centre of Brussels.

COMMENT