

MEDIA**TECTURE**

Christoph Kronhagel (Ed.)



Mediatecture

The Design of Medially Augmented Spaces

Christoph Kronhagel (Ed.)

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... Algorithms and Light ...

LAb[au], laboratory for architecture and urbanism, is a Brussels-based interdisciplinary group of artists including Manuel Abendroth, Jérôme Decock and Els Vermang. The work of the group addresses the interface between architecture and controlled lighting, which is explained by the fact that its members include specialists in both fields. This expertise enables the group to create highly complex algorithms as a means of setting up interactions between installations and urban space.

ARCHITECTURE OF LIGHT

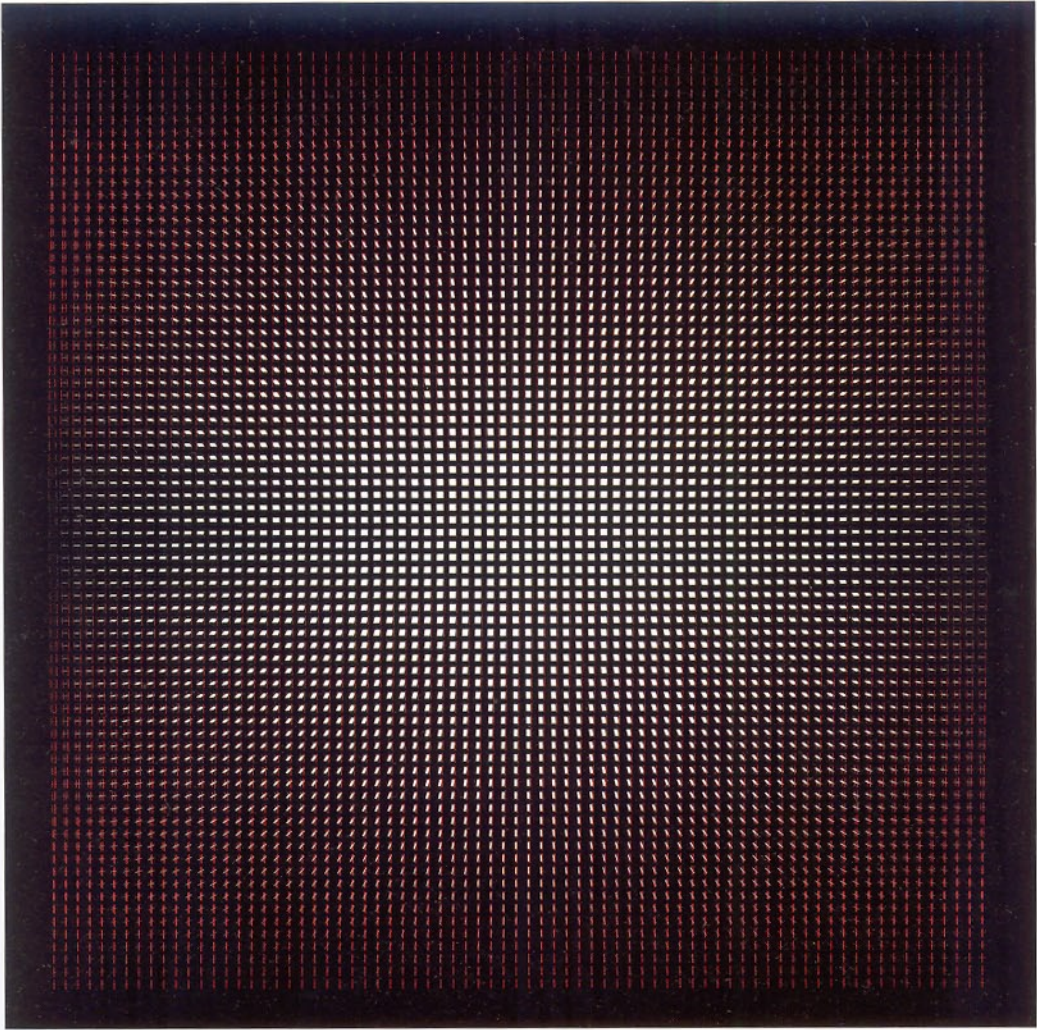
Manuel Abendroth

Architecture has always had a close relationship with technology and technological progress. The industrial age has, for example, created not only new building materials and forms but also a wide range of new building types. In addition to this, the emergence of such new means of transport as the railway and the car has led to basic changes in urban structures. When one compares cities before and after the industrial revolution one becomes very aware of the extent to which technical progress has influenced both architecture and urban planning.

The international style and "new ways of building" were expressions of these changes and represented the new self-image of architecture. But as well as merely responding to fundamental changes in society and in its economic, political and social structures, modern architecture also sought to influence these changes: to make a statement. This relationship between technology and architecture thus raises a basic question: what is the extent to which technology changes the way in which we live and what is the extent to which architecture can be

a physical expression or part - or a sign or symbol - of this process?

The world of artistic production is constantly witnessing new signs and symbols (semantics) and methods (praxis) which have been triggered by aspects of technical progress. The very term "design" for example, as it emerged from the Bauhaus at the beginning of the last century, is a symbol of the transformation from a pre-industrial to an industrial society. Its meaning lies in the new definition of artistic creation at a time of fundamental technical and social change and seeks to form a bridge between such changes and the notion of art itself. Since then, our understanding of design has – like technology itself – experienced further dramatic developments: from industrial design to visual communication; from process design to cybernetics ... and the result of such developments is that technology has come to determine many of the basics of artistic production – its forms, methods and content.



Framework notation, Lab[au] 2009, 1.4x1.4 m digital print

The emergence of the computer signaled a further wave of far-reaching social change. Just as the invention of the steam engine had heralded the industrial revolution, the computer symbolized the beginning of the information age. Both inventions led – and are still leading – to both fundamental transformations in all aspects of life and to new ways of thinking. Our understanding of material, bodies, space and time has fundamentally changed and is today increasingly related to the notion of information. Information-based structures, processes and systems widen our understanding;

our understanding of space, through the use of such parameters as immersion and ubiquity; our understanding of time, through real time and entropy; our understanding of materials, through smart and nanomaterials and our understanding of biology, through genetic technology (to name but a few). In such a way, information influences our daily life and our very social and cultural being. In view of such changes it is only natural that architecture should address the issue of information – with the result that it is common today to speak about information architecture, architecture as in-

terface or medium or, even, architecture as code. This is all an expression of a new architectural understanding and of architecture's new role.

The conclusion from the above is that, in the information society, architecture must address the development of software and hardware and the issue of content management as a means of integrating new forms of communication, information processes and information flows into spatial artifacts. And the influence of such issues on architectural design is, in the future, set to increase. One thinks, for example, only once about the meaning of designing a library in the network age. But the issues involved are much more than

Parameter Design

This new understanding of architecture finds expression in LAB[au]'s "Parameter Design" method which is based upon the interdependence of media-specific and architectural parameters and demands that artistic design and thought processes employ methodical and conceptual ways of dealing with media and technology.

This interdependence is established by a control system and program; an algorithm, which is based, on the one hand, on a language or general logic and, on the other hand, on the functionality of the chosen technology. Parameter

the network integration of buildings – just like the design of a library has to do with much more simple questions of storing and retrieving books. The issue is much more one of creating a new form for these new functions and processes in order to establish a signal: just like the way in which a library embodies our knowledge-based society and humanistic way of thinking.

When addressing issues of network technology it is important to pay attention to both the creation of new artistic forms of expression and layers of meaning and the examination of the deeper questions of contemporary social symbols and social change.

Design depends upon the integration of a series of semantic systems (those of architecture, software and hardware) in the sense that it both accommodates and gives a particular aesthetic treatment to media-specific structures and processes, as a means of binding these into a cultural symbolic canon. In following these principles this design method creates both a form and a symbolism for the construct itself, which is once again consistent with the word "design" and its derivation from the Latin word "designare" or "to describe". The way in which a work of art is executed is derived from the specific ap-



Binary waves, cybernetic installation, Saint-Denis canal, Paris 2008

pearance of the context – or “setting” - which is transformed into both the content and starting point of the work. Most important here are concepts and ideas which are regarded as of equal value for the artistic work. Accepted ways of seeing things, terminologies and connections are challenged and reduced to parameters as a means of creating new rules, connections and associations. The result is that Parameter Design leads to a coherent language of artistic forms and creates a methodology and an aesthetic for technology-based design.

“One of the roles of art and artists is to be witnesses of their time, which is to say that they should investigate the artistic aspects of the use of new technologies - whether in connection with new materials or the development of new ideas.”
 E.L.Schöffers Commentary about LAb[au] _ Catalogue of the bi-annual art grandeur nature 2008

Light as Medium

The following description of various projects realized by LAb[au] in the past few years is intended to shed some light on this relationship between architecture and technology with a particular focus on the special aspects of light architecture. There are many ways of addressing media façades and their relationship with architecture and urban context. A first approach is to consider

In summary, one can say that the projects of LAb[au] are about the creation of signals in urban spaces. And yet a signal is only seen as such when it employs a universally understood language or primary code. In order to be understood as symbols of the age such projects also have to employ the latest technology as a means of establishing a clear relationship with contemporary social and cultural processes. Parameter Design is one concrete way of dealing with technology in the creation of artifacts whose semantics operate on such a meta-level. Its methodology is derived from the worlds of communication and information science, process methodologies (industrial design) and the spatial concepts of architecture.

the largest common dominator of these constructions – light – as part of the architectural content. This approach of light is illustrated by the “chrono.tower” project which was developed by LAb[au] for the Dexia Tower in Brussels.



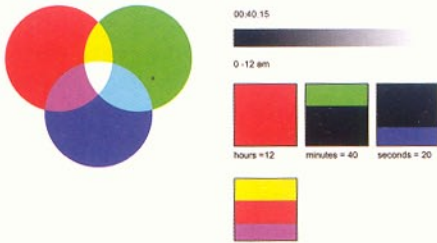
Chrono.tower _ midnight, Dexia Tower, Brussels, Belgium 2008



Chrono.tower _ 22h36m2s, Dexia Tower, Brussels, Belgium 2008

Each of the 4,200 windows of the 145 m high tower can be individually illuminated by a RGB-LED lamp. But instead, as is often the case with such interventions, of treating the resulting light façade as a huge screen with a resolution of 45 x140 pixels, this project attempts to highlight the spatial and temporal aspects of the lighting of the tower.

The lighting concept is based on a simple relationship between the basic units of time and the primary colors of light, namely: hours=red, minutes=green and seconds=blue.



The result is a process in which three colored surfaces progressively illuminate the façade of the building. With each second that passes an extra level of windows is colored blue; with each minute, one in green and with each other hour, one in red. The result is that the three primary colors overlap –which results in the creation of areas of the secondary colors: yellow, cyan and magenta.

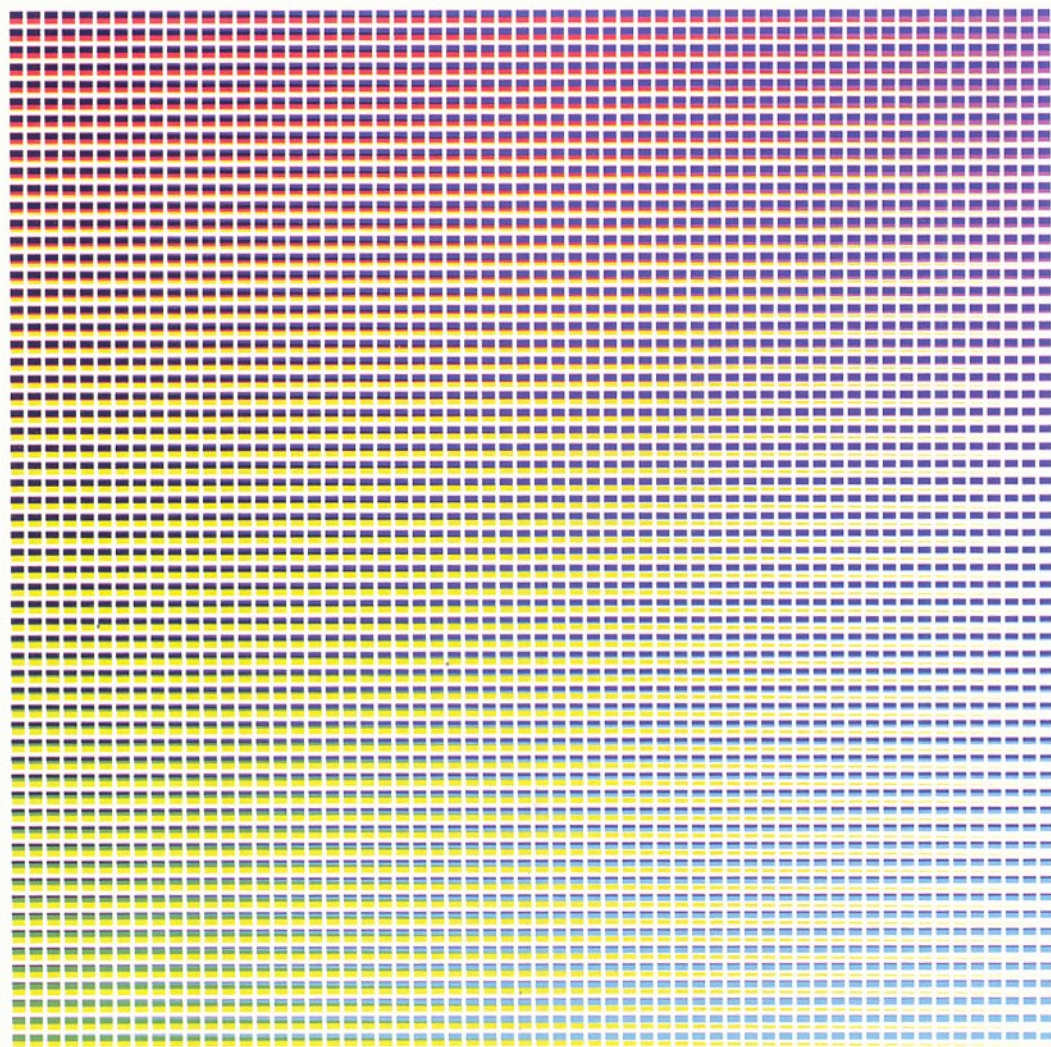
As midnight approaches, the overlapping of these colored surfaces increases and the illumination of the building becomes ever more intense. At midnight, when all three RGB colors fill every window, the tower appears to be completely white. Then the process is reversed, with the result that, as areas of color progressively recede, the illuminated area climbs slowly to the top of the tower.

This time-related change in the intensity of the light lends the process a symbolic character. Nightfall is generally associated with a loss of light – or darkening – whereas midnight represents the start of a new day and a resulting increase in lighting levels. This project reverses this relationship in that the lighting intensity of the tower increases as night advances until the white burst of light at midnight heralds the start of the new day. From this moment however, the light recedes until just a thin illuminated strip can be seen at the top of the skyscraper: the artificial light climbs towards heaven where the light of day gradually appears.

The process behind this project is based on a widely understood relationship between the parameters of light and time, a relationship which we experience as our circadian rhythm. The basic unit of time underlying this biological rhythm is 24 hours and its light component is the light of the sun. Modern and, above all, metropolitan man may feel increasingly separated from such natural forces, but this must not mean that he has lost his relationship with light and its rhythms. Quite the opposite in fact: this project uses a color-light cycle rather than an illuminated clock precisely in order to lend the relationship a new, appropriate and urban expression.

In conclusion, the project is an artistic response to the relationship between light and architecture. Light becomes the actual content of architecture – it becomes medium. And as a medium it communicates nothing other than its own construct.





Chrono.prints

The "Chrono.prints" are a variation of the process which lies behind the chrono.tower. Each of the 24 prints represents the development of one hour of the day starting, top left, with its first second and carrying on to the 3,600th image in the lower right hand corner. Each of these 3,600 squares is further divided into clearly denoted colored surfaces which correspond with the time-based additive color system. To the viewer, these prints appear to be

chromatic motifs, which one can best describe as chromatic time textures.

These prints are the results of a computerized calculation process based on very simple parameters. The theme of the images is light and its relationship with time. In this sense, the prints represent not just a formal examination of the traditional medium of painting but also of its central themes: color and light, which not only

places them in the tradition of the abstract, minimal concept-art of the 1960s but continues this tradition with the help of a computer. The programming of such a system, which is based on a program language – that is to say, on something logical – creates a pictorial language made significant by the creation of rules. These “chrono”

works demonstrate that Parameter Design is just such a method: and one which can be employed using various media (in this case the lighting of a tower or computer-generated printing).

Touch _ a Light Symbol in the City

In order to create light architecture one can either – as in the chrono.tower project – use widely understood parameters in order to create a symbol in the city or one can choose another approach which involves the entire public realm in the process.

“Touch”: the project which inaugurated the illuminated façade of the Dexia Bank tower in Brussels, serves as an example of such an approach. The objective was to shift perceptions of media façades away from corporate design and towards collective urban light art. The challenge was to use interaction to encourage public participation and identification in order to transform architecture into a form of communications design.

A pavilion was built at the foot of the tower in which passers-by could use a multi touch screen to interact, both individually and collectively, with the light in the tower windows. Not only simple, static inputs but also dynamic gestures were recorded in order to generate and animate points (single windows), strips (between the building edges) and areas (entire façades) of lighting. These geometrical forms appeared on the otherwise monochromatically illuminated façade in real time in either black or white light, depending on whether the information was input positively or negatively (up/down, left/right ...). A simple touch of a finger on the interface could transform the entire appearance of the 145m high tower. Such forms of interaction establish a new relationship between architecture and the individual. And in the case of this project, the reduced and geometrical formal language made it easier to both recognize and experience the architecture.

One could also use the interface to take, at any one moment, a snapshot of the “tower composition” set against the Brussels skyline – a photo, which could be sent as an e-card from the pavilion. The composition created by the user could be seen from right across the city and, as such, influenced the entire image of the city; this was “his/her” image, which could be viewed at anytime (on the website) and shared with others. This chain of different forms of communication made it possible to hold a real-time conversation – a dialogue between a newly created building and the inhabitants of the city – and then to capture the moment, create an image of it and place this image, via a social network, in the internet. The use of technology made it possible to experience and to identify with the public space - to define architecture as interface.

www.mediatecture.info/14







The Design of the Architectural Interface

This made it vital to pay special attention to the design of the Interface. The basic idea was that the multi touch screen was a two-dimensional representation of the tower on which each coordinate represented a specific window. This virtualization of the tower created an intuitive interface between the user and the pixel façade which gave the user the impression of touching the actual building. To achieve this, the interaction was reduced to a very simple input procedure and the direct feedback from the light tower was optimized in order to focus the attention of the user on the tower rather than on the interface. The reduction of the tower imagery to an abstract game with forms also had the intention of confronting the viewer with an architectural vocabulary and focusing his attention onto the resulting dialogue, rather than allowing him to be distracted by illustrative or – even worse - figurative images.

The first input from a user – in which he touched any point on the screen – resulted in a dramatic alteration of the tower lighting. A point (window) would become a vertical line (window column) and then spread like a curtain across the entire façade with the color being defined by a combination of the coordinate on the screen chosen by the user and the visible light spectrum. The aim of this opening sequence was to emphasize the closeness of the relationship between user and tower. The development of the required technology (a weather-resistant multi touch screen measuring 0.8 x1.7m) demonstrated the extent to which a technological development can result from the development and execution of a project idea (and even influence the project title!)



Touch interactive urban installation, Interactive station, LAB[au] 2006-2007, Dexia Tower, Brussels, Belgium

But the development of the interface was not only limited to questions of software and hardware but, as a result of the urban scale, also required that the design of the pavilion was addressed. This pavilion was a spatial element formed of three folds: the first fold created a "desk" where the interaction could take place, the second created a projection box which made it possible to follow, from street-level, the symbol on a screen with the finger and the third directed the attention of the user towards the tower. This principle of folds was drawn from the image of the tower on the screen and hence became the leitmotiv for the entire project. The implementation of the project extended the notion of interface to a spatial object, in the sense that it took the architectural and media-specific parameters of the adopted technology and used these as the content – the very theme - of the lighting concept. As is the case with architecture, these parameters communicate their meaning on the meta-level, which makes them media in their own right. The conclusion to be drawn from this is that the latest communication and information technologies offer us the opportunity to fully rethink such classic architectural themes as the design of façades, the creation of public space and the creation of representative symbols in this space.

The projects described here required the development of a feature which is vital to the implementation of media façades and other similar forms of lighting infrastructure. This feature is "Content Management". These projects, for example, use a lighting concept which LAb[au] developed from the very start in close cooperation with the client, the Dexia Bank. The focus of this development process was the relationship between art, architecture and light as embodied by interactive, performative and generative lighting projects. And, in addition to this, design criteria for the artwork were developed which addressed this relationship on an abstract and conceptual or, so to say, meta-level. In short, it was necessary to establish both a detailed timetable and a clear artistic position for the tower project. Such a "repertoire" is perhaps something which we associate more with cultural establishments

such as theaters or museums - and it is certainly seldom so clearly reflected in the physical architecture of a project. But this is appropriate in this case because the bank understood that the project was much more than an element of a marketing strategy and saw itself much more in the role of an architectural or artistic player on the scale of the city. The result was that the tower was able to become a landmark in its urban context.

In the case of LAb[au]'s projects for the Dexia Tower, the lighting design had no direct influence on the built form of the architecture of the tower. And although the projects were based on the relationship between light and the architecture of a building in its urban context, this cannot hide the fact that a "global" architectural concept is missing – a fact that is particularly obvious during the day when the lighting system is switched off and the banal corporate architecture of the tower is once again apparent.

The conclusion of this experience is that media-architecture must be based on the complementary relationship between media and architecture: In order to achieve this, architecture must be understood as a medium and, vice versa, media must be designed as architecture. Parameter Design is a method which shows how the characteristics (the parameters and processes) of the chosen media can be related to the parameters of building and urban design, as a result of which it should be possible to treat media and architecture as equals.

The following projects not only highlight these parameter-based borderlines between media and spatial artifacts but also provide a snapshot of the moment at which the borderlines completely disappear.

Binary waves _ Cybernetic Installation

The installation "fLUX, binary waves" measures flows of traffic (passing cars, etc) and communications (the electromagnetic fields caused by mobile telephones and radios, etc) and transforms these into light, sound and movement. The installation was designed in 2008 for the forecourt to the railway station in the Paris suburb of Saint-Denis, a transport hub used by around 60,000 commuters every day. The station forecourt opens onto the Seine Canal but the steps from the station down to the canal end facing a blank wall on the opposite side of the canal. The two bridges flanking the steps give the whole space a stage-like theatrical atmosphere.

In this setting, a kinetic canvas was created consisting of 40 illuminated panels measuring 3m high and 60cm wide which rotate about their vertical axes. The individual panels rotate at varying speeds creating a wave-like effect which is reinforced by their alternating black and white

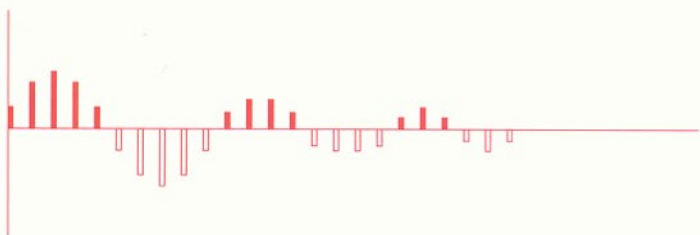
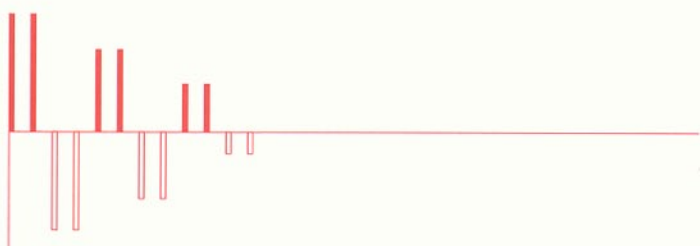
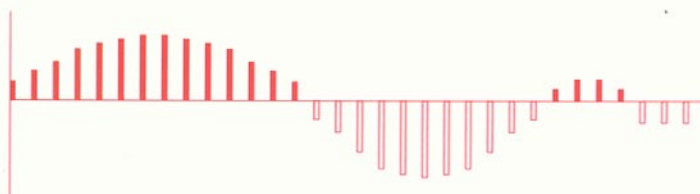
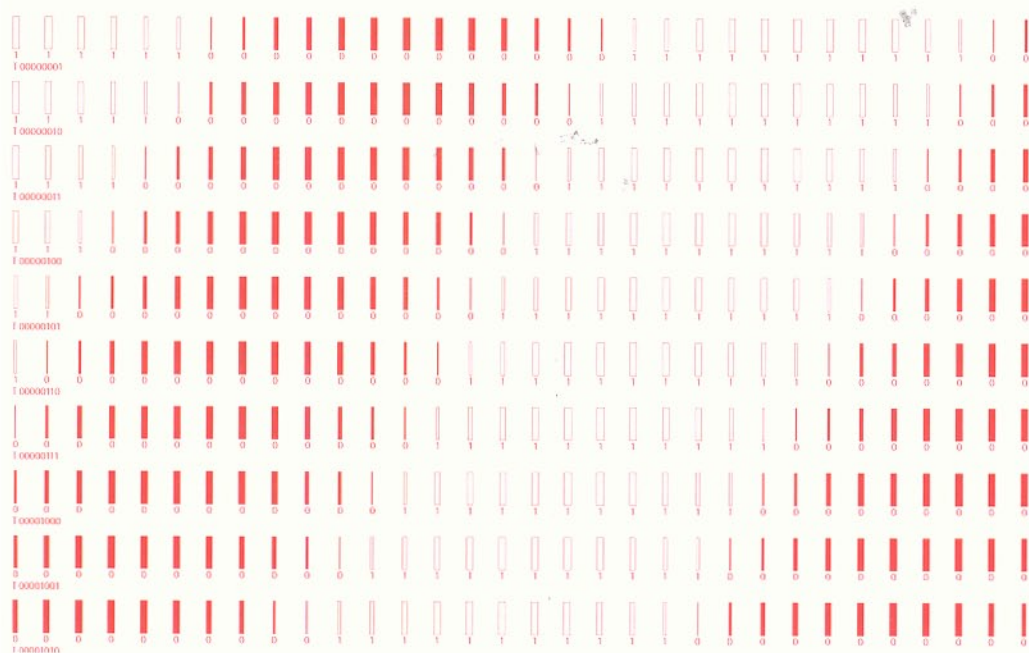
surfaces. The waves oscillate from one side of the installation to the other gently slowing down until the moment when a new pulse sets a new wave in motion. In addition to these panels, red and white lighting strips are illuminated at irregular intervals accompanied by short tones. The kinetic principle of the installation is derived from the water and the connection with the context is reinforced by the interplay between the reciprocal optical effects of the panels being reflected in the water at the same time that the water is reflected in the panels.



www.mediatecture.info/15



Binary waves, cybernetic installation, day photo + wave pattern, Saint-Denis canal, Paris 2008



The sequence of movement and the light signals are determined by measurements of the local traffic and communication flows. The speed at which the panels rotate is, for example, determined by the traffic flow whereas the red light, which illuminates one side of the panel in the form of eight horizontal lights, indicates the intensity of the local electromagnetic field and the white light, which illuminates the edge of the panel, reflects the frequency of passers-by on the bridges. The intensity and frequency of the lighting signal varies in line with traffic density and the strength of the local electromagnetic waves.

This analogy between the spreading out of waves, kinetic behavior and the light effect is derived from the concept of combining single urban events into a collective image. The installation reveals all the rhythms of the big city in that it even records both individual movements in the urban space and those invisible

electronic waves which are, nevertheless, vital to urban life. This makes the installation both the mirror image and the spitting image of the public space.

Hence the "fLUX" concept (which also features in the name of the work) represents the transformation of flows (flux) into movement, sound and light (lux). The installation employs a control-system which requires the linkage of measured signals, the programming of patterns of behavior and the design of output equipment (hardware). It is this information architecture which determines the actual meaning of the work. The creation of such a "meta" system as that which lies behind this work has its roots in the cybernetic art of the 1960s and, above all, in the work of Nicolas Schöffer. The cycle is thus also an official homage to this pioneer of an art form located somewhere between science, technology and architecture.

Binary waves, cybernetic installation, night photo + impulse/waves, Saint-Denis canal, Paris 2008



framework f5x5x5

Amongst other works in the cycle known as "16n" is the interactive installation framework f5x5x5. This kinetic lighting sculpture consists of 5 modules, each measuring 2x2 meters, which combine to form an architectonic element with a length of 10 meters. Each element is further divided into five horizontal and five vertical square "English" frames creating a total grid of $5 \times 5 \times 5 = 125$ frames. The title of the installation "f5x5x5" corresponds with the variable nature of the installation which is derived from the "decomposing grid".

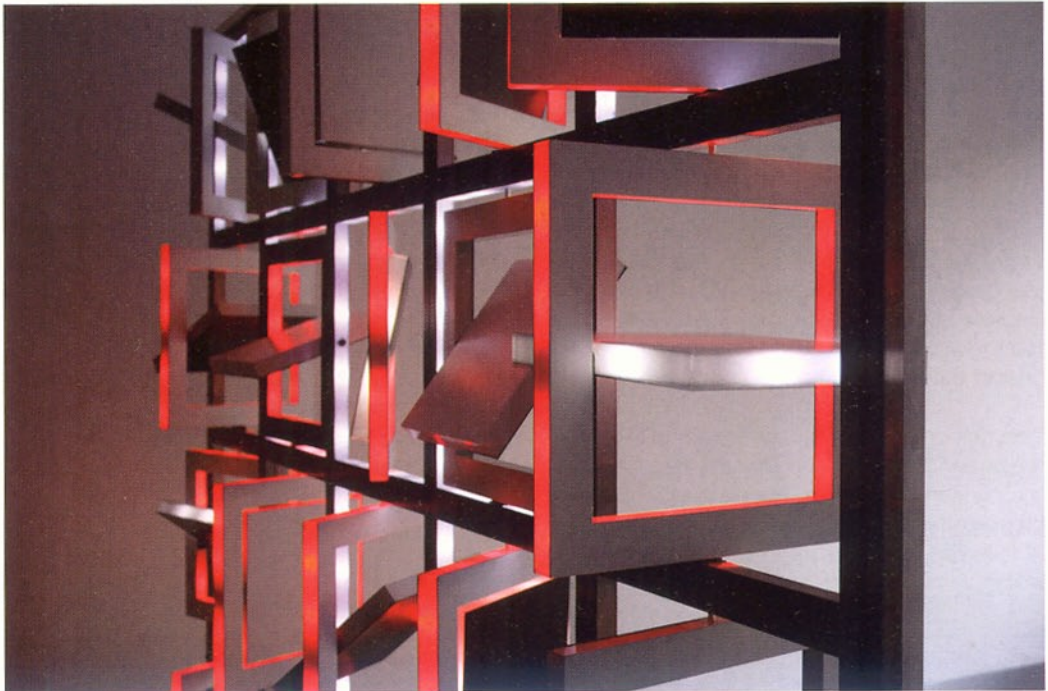
Each frame contains two further motorized frames which can be rotated about both their vertical and horizontal axes. In addition to this, red and white LEDs are fitted to the visible edges of the frames. Each vertical column of the grid is marked in the base of the installation by an infrared sensor which reacts to any object which cuts across the infrared beam by sending a

piece of binary information. These sensors note the position and direction of movement of any viewer. If he moves along the installation then he will be followed by a series of illuminated frames. As soon as he stands still all frames will be directed towards him like a vector field.

In this way, constantly changing lighting patterns are created by a combination of measured signals, binary information and complex kinetic behavior. Hence, an important part of the project was the establishment of parameters for determining when and on the basis of which information a particular program or mode of operation would be triggered. These rules for governing rules are the meta-structure or "framework" of the installation.

In informatics, the term "framework" denotes an outline program or a structure which the programmer uses to create an application. It is

Framework f5x5x5, LAB[au] 2007-2009, detail



based on a diagram which shows the flow of data and the interfaces between individual programs and calculating processes. In the case of this installation the term “framework” describes the logic inherent to the interaction as well as such information as which mode of operation will be triggered by which signal in order to create the movement and lighting patterns designed to catch the attention of the viewer.

The starting point of this project is an information architecture based on the interpretation of binary signals. And, by employing the binary principle in its detailed execution, the installation also gives this principle a physical appearance. The installation is, for example, black (1) on one side and white (0) on the other, which makes it possible to contrast a white surface with an opposing black one. It is precisely this contrast which allows the visitor to properly recognize the various movement patterns. The binary principle is also used to determine the positions and lighting conditions of the frames: open/closed, rotating/still, light on/light off, red/white etc.

The spatial division of the structure also rejects such classical principles of architectural design as proportion and is based instead on a technical figure, the resolution of the pixel image. The 5x5 grid and its colored layout are divided up in a way which makes it possible to represent letters and symbols in a similar way to the rotating displays which one knows from airports and railway stations – although these are just black and white (which is to say binary). This determines the design of the information system, while the decision as to whether this information is abstract, graphic or symbolic in nature will be defined, once again, by the “framework”.

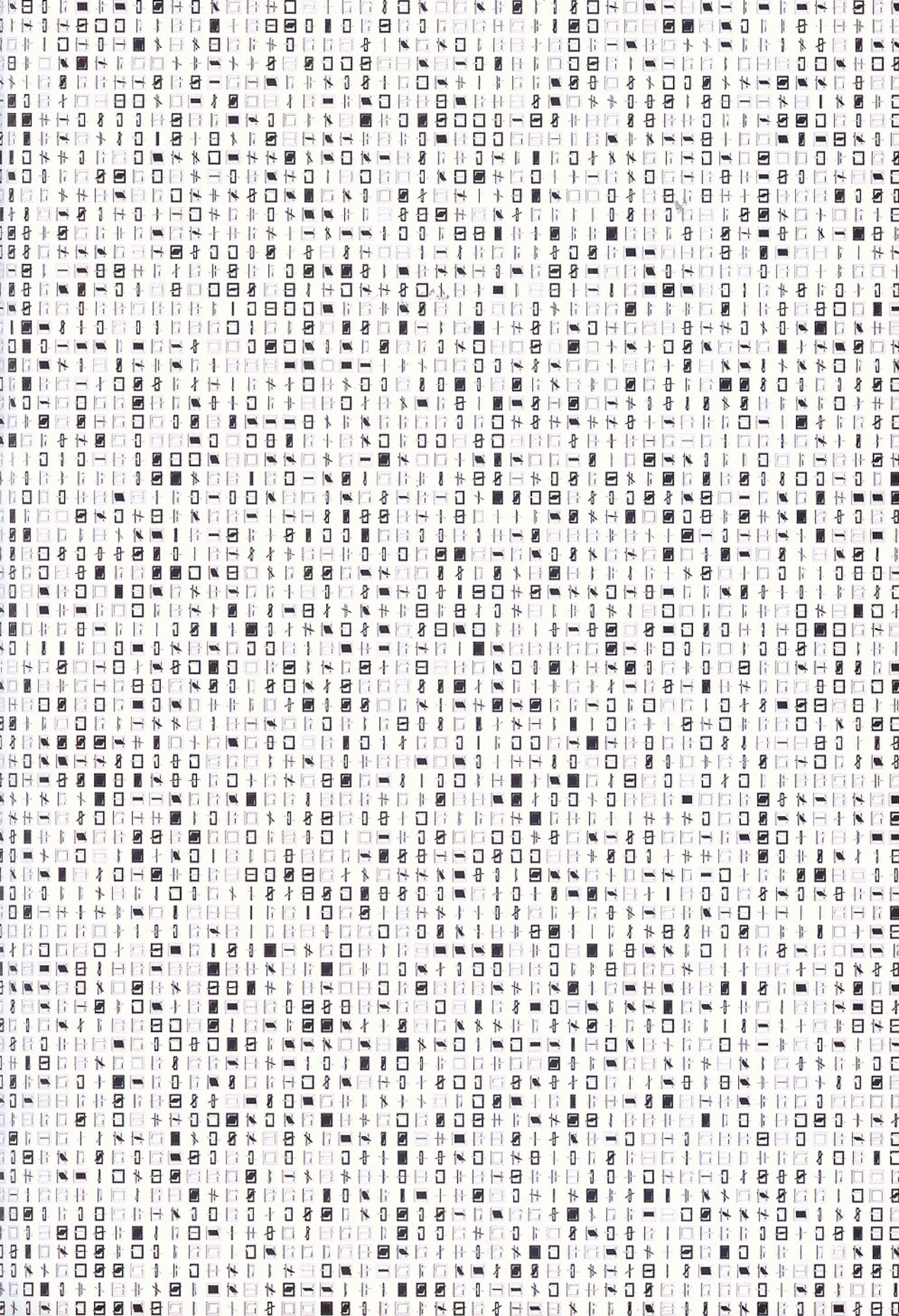
This demonstrates a further aspect of “Parameter-Design”: the demand that the parameters of the chosen technology should be both clearly presented and concretely used. This principle is followed in all the projects described in this article:

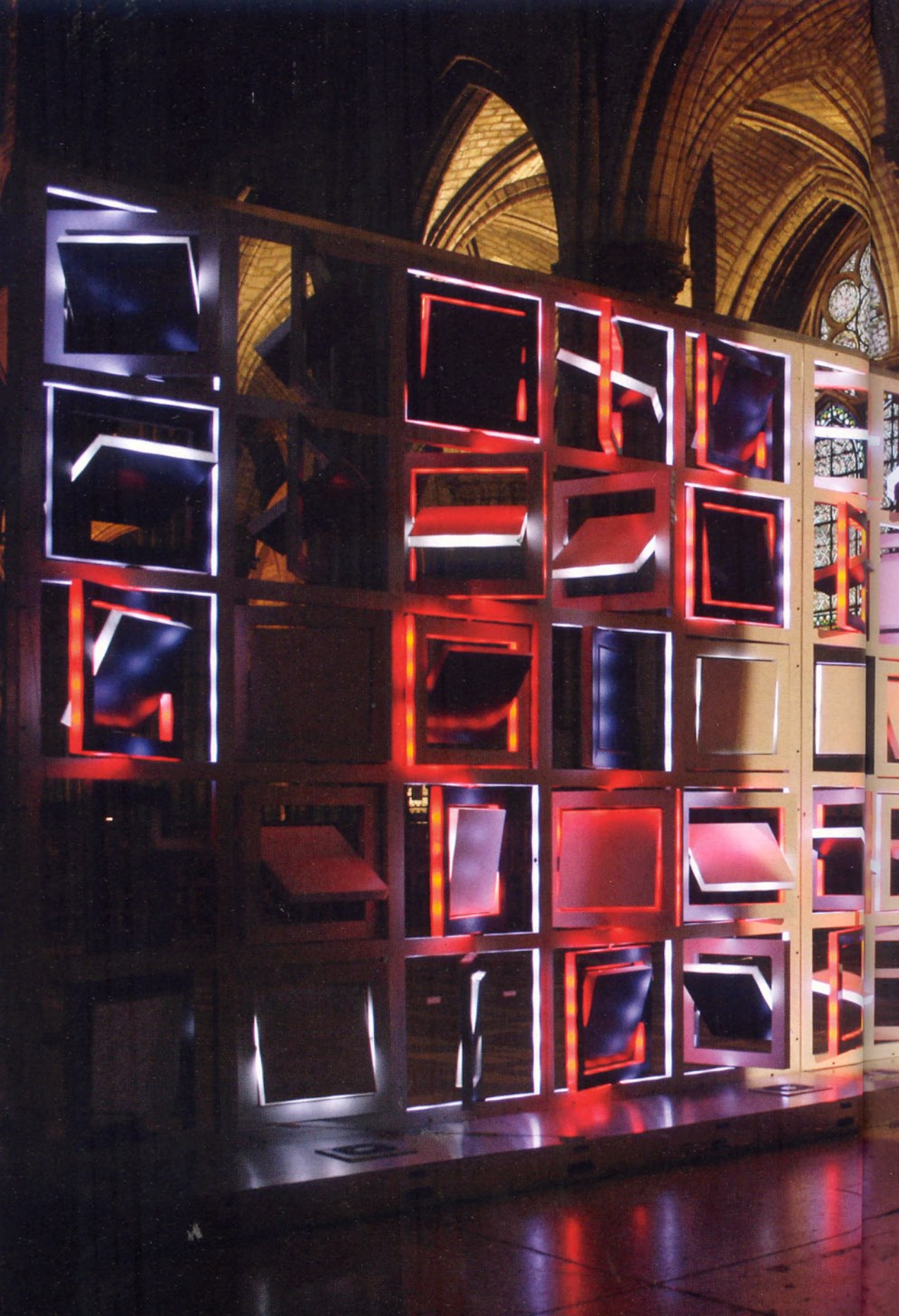
For example, primary colors are the parameter defining the use of light in the “*chrono.tower*” project while the modification of this light and the resulting animation of the tower use the parameter of time. The “*touch*” project similarly uses geometrical light forms to highlight the architectural characteristics of the building and these characteristics are communicated very clearly to the user by the way in which the multi touch screen responds to his touches and gestures. In doing so the “*touch*” project appropriates the spatial division – and both projects appropriate the pixel resolution – of the tower. Windows are reduced to colored points of light and the input of users is recognized by means of infrared technology before being transformed into geometrical forms. Both projects involve the incorporation of the light spectrum into a spatial concept.

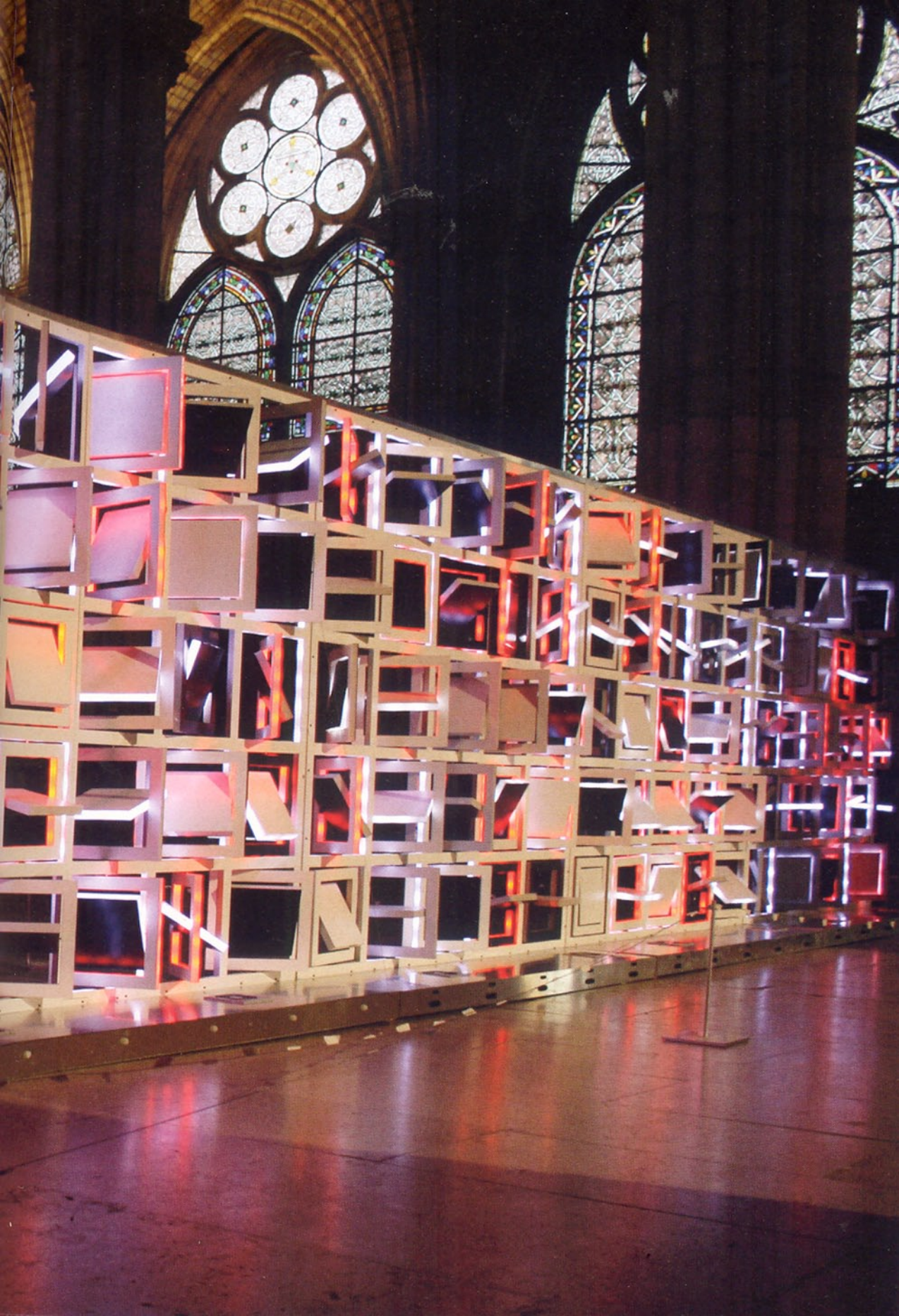
This concrete design of the parameters of the “setting” also occurs in the “*siloscope*” project. Here, vectors are represented by the straight elements which form the hyperbolic figure and similar parameters govern the functioning of the sound analysis and the light concept. The same is true of the black and white panels and kinetic and light waves which embody the binary signals in the “*binary waves*” project.

From which the conclusion can be drawn that mediatecture should be based on the complementary relationship between media and architecture. In order to achieve this, architecture too must be seen as a medium and, vice versa, media must be designed as architecture. Parameter Design is a method which shows how the characteristics (the parameters and processes) of the chosen media can be related to the parameters of building and urban design. As a result of which it is possible to treat media and architecture as equals and combine them into a common formal language.









“Mediatecture” is the first handbook for a new design method that provides a foundation for creating media facades and for Architecture as Medium. It is intended to meet the needs of architects, designers, communication specialists and interested building contractors – in short, of all those interested in how physical living spaces can concretely and sensibly be connected to medial life worlds.

“There has long since ceased to be any justification for the differentiation between physical and virtual reality. The Internet has become our omnipresent companion and transformed the living spaces of human beings into junctions in a network of global interactions. The concept of mediatecture, which Christoph Kronhagel helped to develop and which is presented here, is in a positively disquieting way self-explanatory, sound and avant-garde in equal measures. Can a façade change its expression as a face cab? Is architecture not precisely a symbol of our longing for something reliably static in an incalculably dynamic world? Mediatecture is provocatively unconventional and so fascinating that readers will find it easy to join the editor and author on this exciting and well-informed walk along the borderlines of this collection of ideas, projects and theories.”

Prof. Dr. Peter Kruse, Organizational psychologist for intelligent networks and business consultant (nextpractice)

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