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Rafael Lozano-Hemmer: Urban Projections

[RLH]

Stoel, Elizabeth. “Rafael Lozano-Hemmer: Urban Projections.” *Praxis* 2008, Issue 10: 114-119. Print.

Contemporary public space has become overwhelmingly privatized and scripted, and constant surveillance is now the normative condition. Mexican-Canadian artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer brings this condition to our consciousness, employing video technology for play rather than control, and reintroducing participation and performance into the urban environment. Two recent projects, *Under Scan* and *1000 Platitudes,* are temporary appropriations of the built environment—works in which Lozano-Hemmer actively engages the surfaces that construct the city. These surfaces and their inhabitants become complicit actors in his reflections upon the twenty-first century metropolis.

The large-scale video installation *Under Scan* was, in the words of the artist, "intended as a public takeover of a city by its inhabitants, linking high technology with strategies of self-representation, connective engagement and urban entitlement." In the five cities where it was installed, Lozano-Hemmer brought video portraits of local residents into play with passers-by on the stage of each city's public square. Videos were projected into the shadows of unsuspecting individuals, transforming the public from disengaged occupants, to spectators, to participants. For Lozano-Hemmer, the project seeks "what Brecht called 'a noticing of the knots': the moment of complicity between the representation and reality."

1000 Platitudes also used projection technology, but to very different ends. Lozano-Hemmer performed a kind of guerrilla appropriation of building façades, including public housing projects, shopping malls, government offices, industrial facilities and corporate headquarters. Under dark of night, he projected a single letter onto each building and photographed it to produce the constituents of an "urban font." These letters were recombined to construct an image of the city, made of the 1,000 words used most frequently by developers to promote urban living.

Throughout his work, Lozano-Hemmer addresses issues of the global city—from the abandonment of downtown centers, to surveillance, to privatization of public space—questioning the role of the individual within the urban environment. —ELIZABETH STOEL

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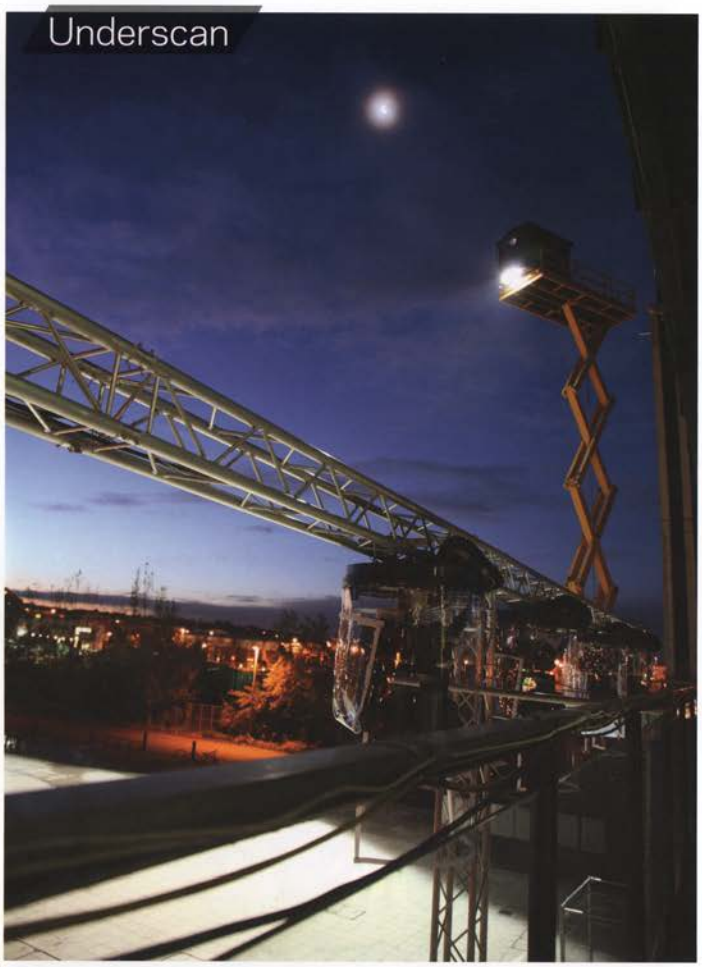

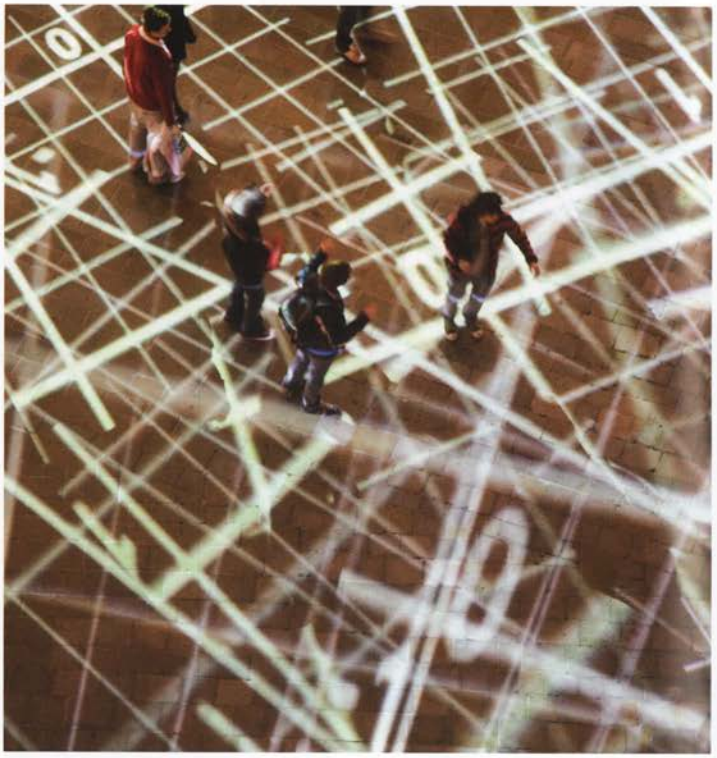

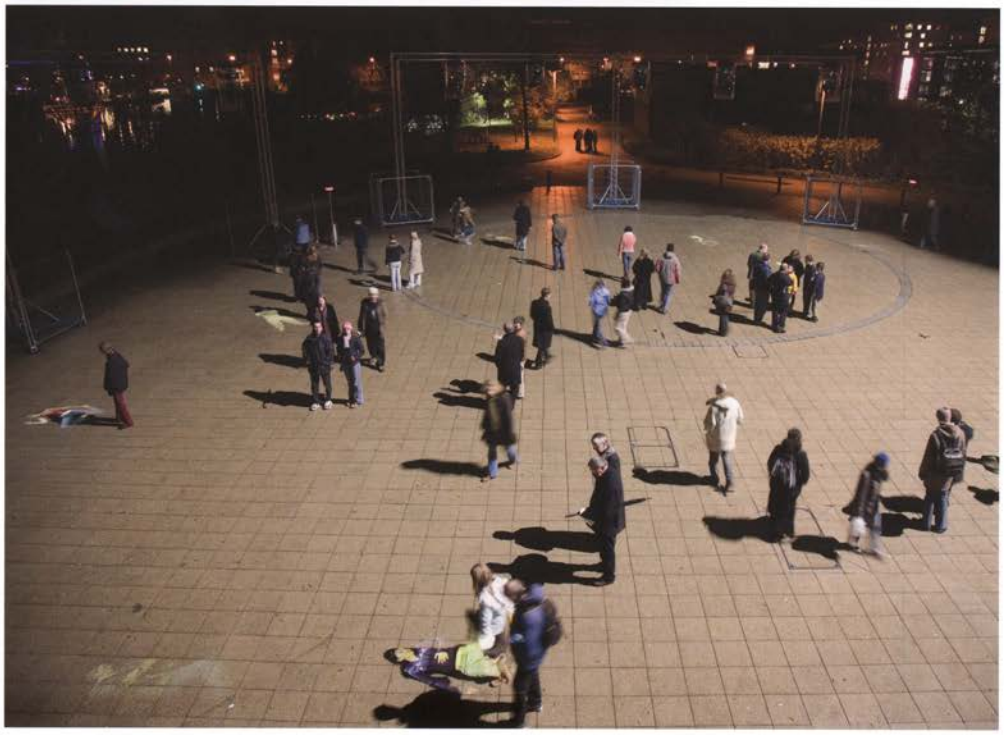

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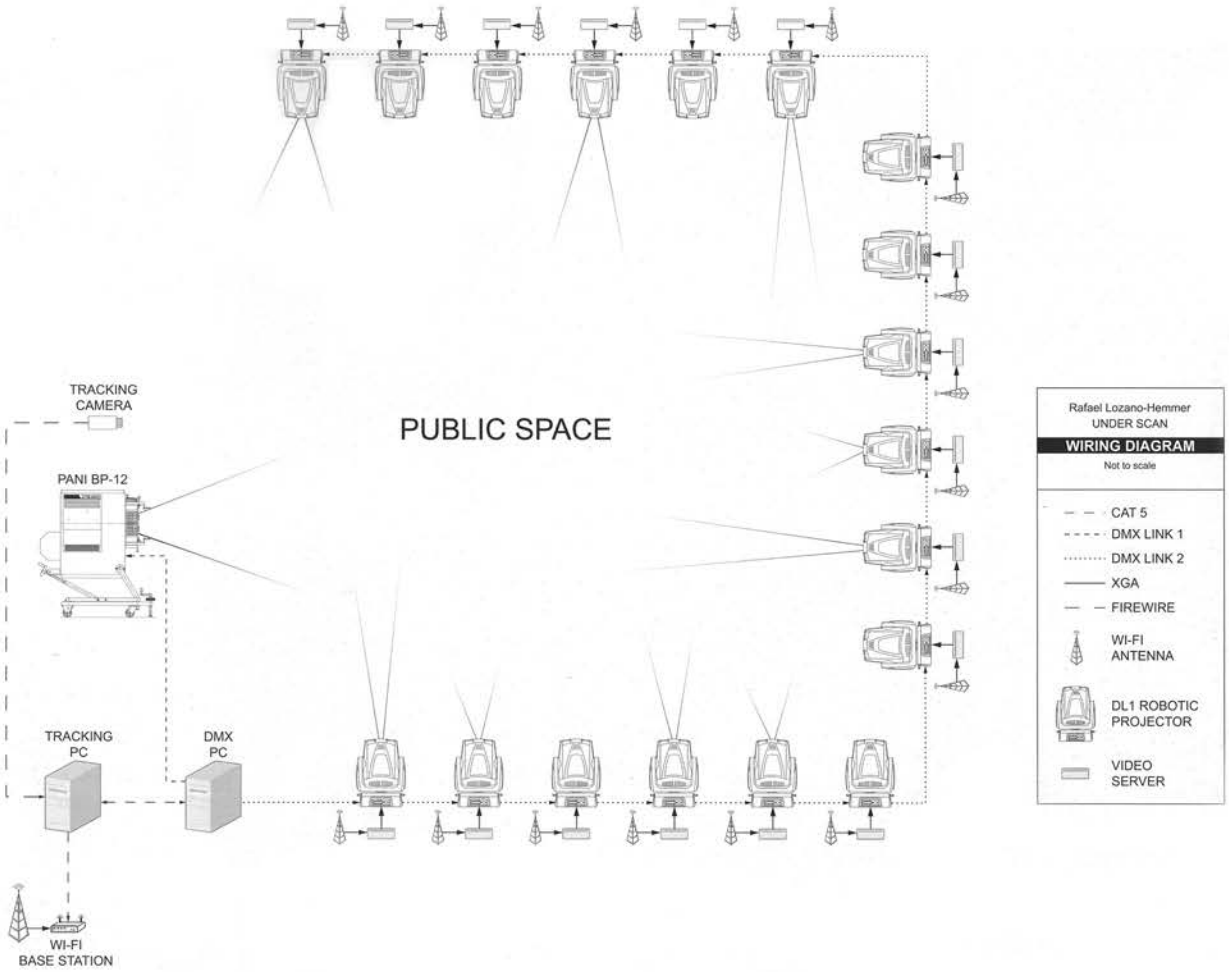

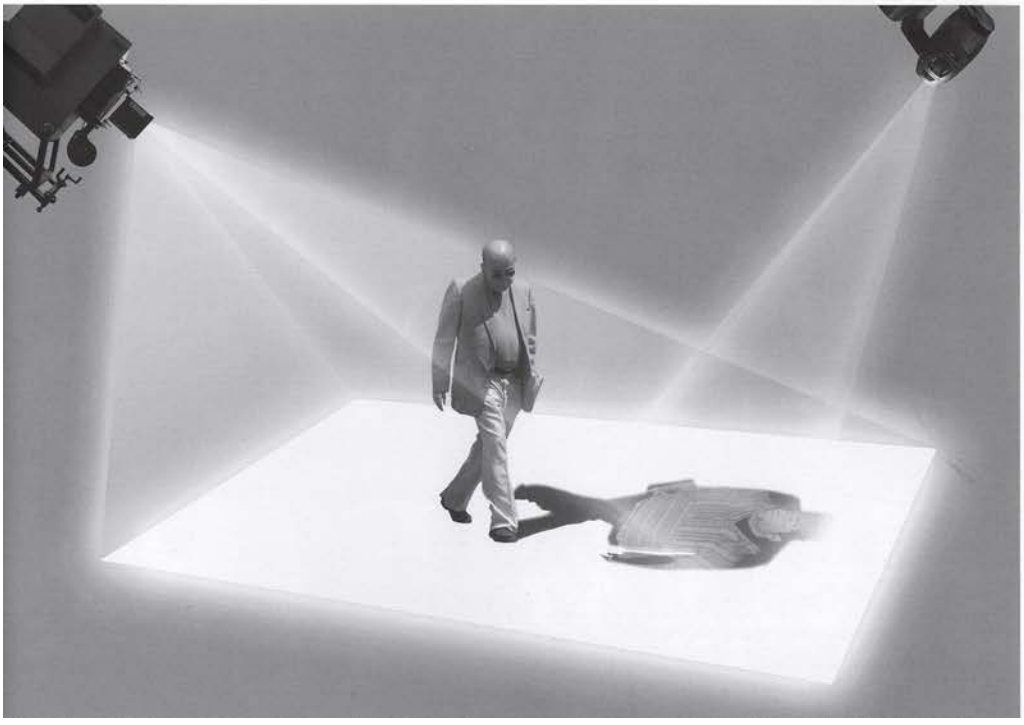

Under Scan was installed in five cities from 2005 to 2006. In each instance, a scaffold was installed in a public square. From this armature, a bright light was cast over the site . A camera-based tracking system followed passers-by and estimated their trajectories. 14 robotically controlled projectors received the data from the tracking system and projected video portraits within the heightened shadows of the plaza occupants, replacing their shadows with moving images of others who appeared to interact with them.

The shadow portraits are 1,000 videos of area residents shot by local videographers. Each participant was filmed lying down; the only instructions were to begin the sequence facing the camera and to end facing away.

facing page, right: Every seven minutes the project paused to reveal the tracking mechanism in a light sequence that visualized the callibration grid used by the surveillance system.

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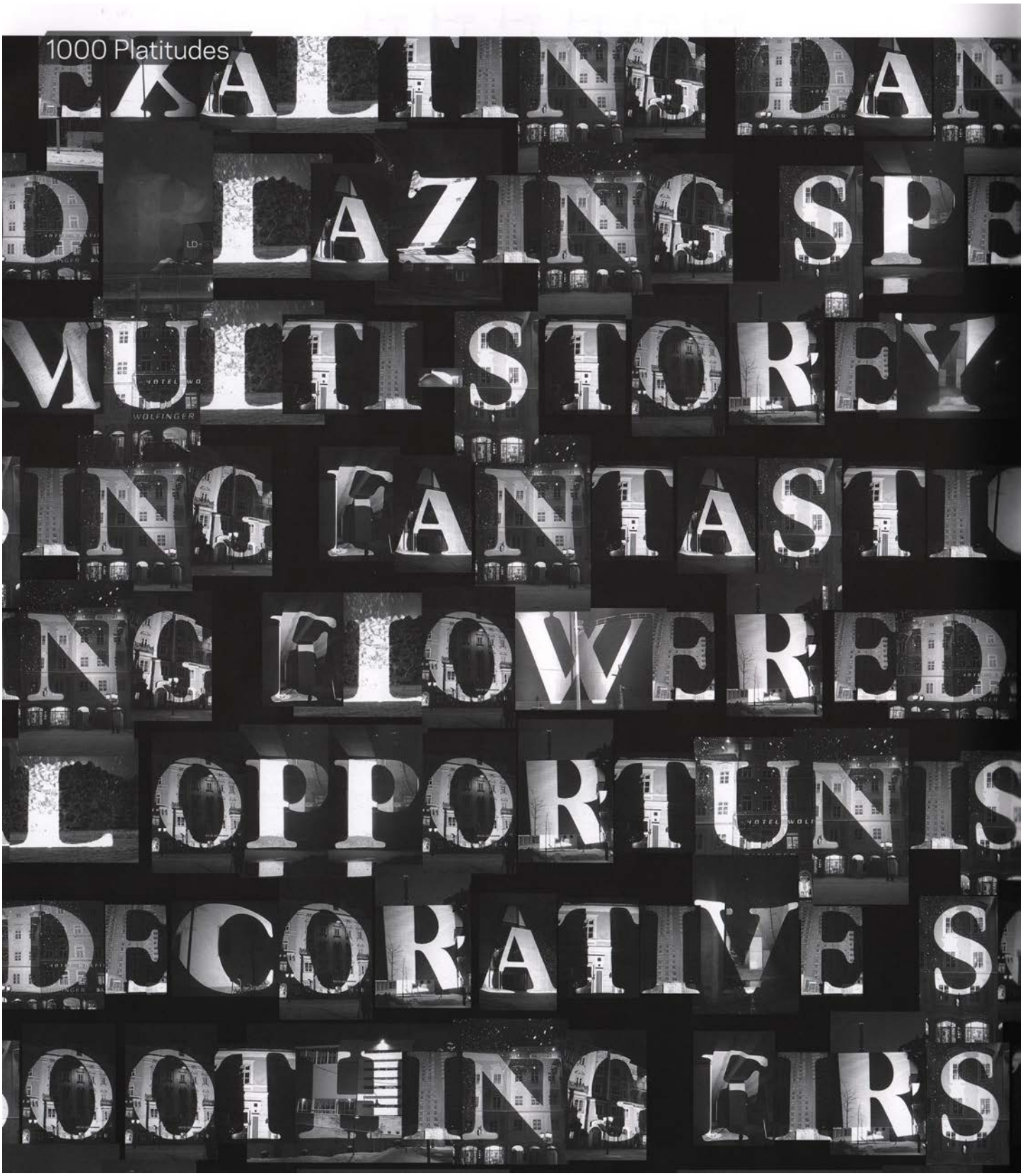

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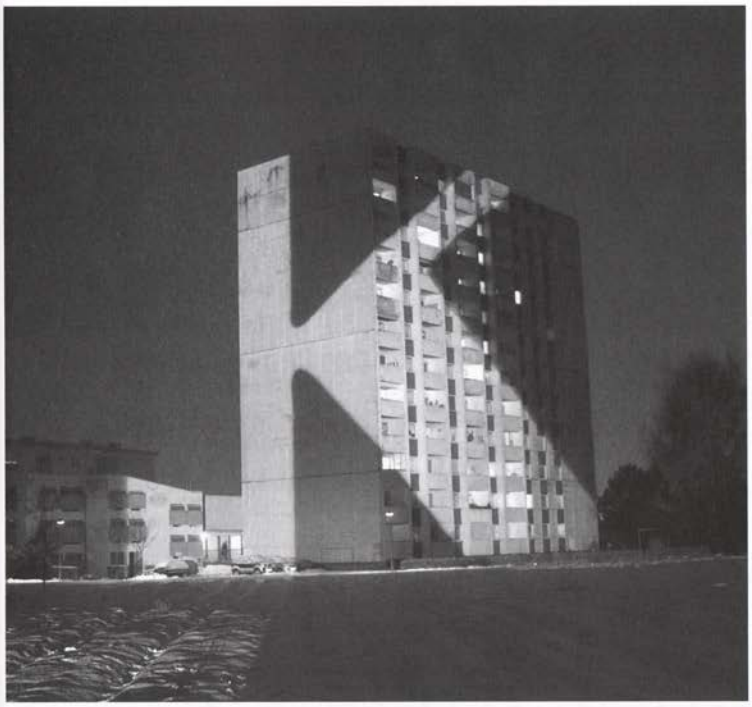

City as font: public housing projects, shopping malls, government offices, industrial structures, and corporate headquarters are transformed into language as Lozano-Hemmer projected letters onto their surfaces. Each letter was projected onto a different building and photographed at night.

The resulting font was used to construct a triptych of 1,000 words commonly used by developers to describe what Lozano-Hemmer calls "the generic globalized city."

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