

CITY OF SOUND

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SINCE 2002

« The Personal Well-Tempered Environment | Main | OMA renders cold North European light beautifully »

January 22, 2008

Façades: expressive, responsive, interactive

A series of notes on the contemporary façade, from expressive and performative to responsive and interactive.

(This is by no means an attempt at an exhaustive survey; there are many more advanced façades out there - do feel free to note your favourites below. And for further examples, see the excellent [Interactive Architecture dot org](#). Nor is this about contemporary façades in general (currently foremost for me, the glowing "lenses" of Steven Holl Architects' extraordinarily beautiful, quietly bravura [Block Building for the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City](#) (amateur video [here](#) and [here](#)) and the soap-bubble structure meets ETFE skin of [Arup/PTW's National Aquatic Centre in Beijing](#)).

Instead, this is simply a curated set of façades, juxtaposing a few different approaches to expression or interaction.

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A more advanced example is CCC's work on [Blinkenlights](#), for the Haus des Lehrers, at Berlin's Alexanderplatz. (Berlin, a city so deeply in debt it might as well be renamed Das In Brussels, the Dexia Tower has been hosting nightly shows by the installation artists Lab(au) for months now, with a recent showing [enthusiastically reviewed by CR blog](#). There have been several shows on, including once called Touch, which enabled viewers to control the light display from a touch-screen over the road:



A later installation responded to, and conveyed, weather information. As such it's akin to some of the ideas in the [Personal Well-Tempered Environment](#).

"The project displays tomorrow's temperature, cloudiness, precipitations, and wind, by using colors and geometrical patterns to visualise these data. A color-code corresponds to tomorrow's temperature compared to the monthly average, linked to a scale of color-temperatures ranging from violet (-6° or colder), blue (-4°), cyan (-2°), green (monthly average), yellow (+2°), orange (+4°) to red (+6° or warmer)"



NOTED ELSEWHERE

[Lexington: Farmers v greens \[The Economist\]](#) / sustainability carbon USA agriculture politics climate_change

"The debate about climate change prods all sorts of cultural sore spots: liberal versus conservative, urban versus rural, the coasts against the heartland. To an urban locavore, pricey fuel does not sound so terrible. In his book "\$20 per gallon: How the Inevitable Rise in the Price of Gasoline Will Change Our Lives for the Better", Christopher Steiner, a journalist, rejoices that Americans will eventually give up driving and move to densely-packed cities where they can walk to the shops. To people like Mr Wright, that sounds like Hell. "It'd be like living in Beijing," he gasps, gazing across an open plain to the mountains in the distance." [Sign](#).

[Video: the HALOsonic electric car sound system \[guardian.co.uk\]](#) / cars electricity hybrids sound_design urban_sounds electric_cars

"Electric cars have a potentially deadly silence about them, but a new device hopes to combat all that - spaceship sound effects optional." Well, I wrote a bit about this issue a while back. This, sadly, isn't good enough.

[Music industry: How to sink pirates \[The Economist\]](#) / music piracy music_industry TV film videogames business

"All of this offers a lesson for other types of media, such as films and video games. Piracy thrives because it satisfies an unmet demand. The best way to discourage it is to offer a diverse range of attractive, legal alternatives. The music industry has taken a decade to work this out, but it has now done so. Other industries should benefit from its experience—and follow its example." Obvious, but no less true because of that. Add TV to that list of media.

[£3m Australian gum tree memorial completed \[Building Design\]](#) / memory architecture trees Queensland

"Queensland practices m3architecture and Brian Hooper Architect have completed a £3 million memorial for a gum tree that played an important part in Australia's history." Rather lovely.

[Links in Print: Story of a Beautiful Failure \[A\]](#) / newspaper_design newspapers graphic_design experience_design typography

"In January 2009 we were invited to take part in a paid pitch for the print redesign for the Swiss newspaper Tages-Anzeiger. All in all five agencies took part in the pitch. We were the only UX oriented agency. The story of a beautiful failure. We put all eggs in one basket and worked for one month like mad men. We developed a pretty tight concept around the idea of usability, readability and cross media connection. Here is what we came up with" Worth reading Mario Garcia's reflections elsewhere too.

[Bondi caveman's cliff-top home demolished \[SMH\]](#) / Sydney caves transient_architecture

"Waverley Council is demolishing the ramshackle cliff-top dwelling of alleged rapist Peter James Paul Millhouse, also known as the "Bondi caveman". It is understood the operation began this morning after the council received legal advice that it was authorised to dismantle Mr Millhouse's home, which is on Crown land. The 54-year-old, who goes by the name Jhyim "Two Hats" Mhyiles, is a well-known figure at Bondi, writing and reciting poetry in his campsite and surviving on donated food and other goods."

[Oil demand: A developing thirst \[The Economist\]](#) / China India oil energy

"GLOBAL demand for oil is set to rise from 84.7m barrels per day (bpd) in 2008 to 105m bpd in 2030, says the International Energy Agency in its latest annual energy report. Transport will account for 97% of this increase as rising numbers of cars hit the roads of the developing world. Demand from these countries will overtake that of the industrialised OECD nations by 2030. By then, America, Japan and Europe will be using less oil than in 1980. But the thirst for oil will balloon in Asia—and in India and China in particular—where demand is predicted to rise by as much as 400% compared with 2008."

[Ideas for Cities \[a GOOD Blog\]](#) / soft_infrastructure cities urbanism education urban_governance urban_planning social_entrepreneurship design_thinking social_innovation

Some good things here. Good that it's non-built (i.e. soft) infrastructure.

[Never mind the music. Your chance to vote for the best of 2009's vinyl sleeve art \[Eye blog\]](#) / graphic_design record_sleeves music

"Formats come and formats go (and MP3s are going the way of cassettes now that we have room for ALES), but vinyl has had a surprisingly long afterlife, writes John L. Walters. And so has the dying artform of sleeve art, which keeps lurching to grab our attention like one of Michael Jackson's dancing zombies. Best Art Vinyl 2009 is an award scheme designed to promote the year's best cover designs. Go to the Art Vinyl website and you can nominate your choice of three outstanding vinyl releases."

[NuFormer's 3-D Building Projections \[At Issue\]](#) / projection video

"From Netherlands-based design firm, NuFormer Digital Media, comes a new way of projecting three-dimensional images onto a building exterior. Custom-designed to fit any building façade and scale up to any size, the video mapped objects are made visible by a set of powerful projectors. Without physically constructing new architecture or permanently altering the streetscape, NuFormer hardware/software technology enables users to transform an outdoor public space into a virtual yet live experience."

■ I am cityofsound on Delicious



(You might pause to wonder about the waste of electricity in these displays, though the creators and owners are quick to point out that most are LED-based, and thus far more efficient than previous displays (Dexia uses a third of the energy of Tour Eiffel, for example.) And if they genuinely add to the experience of the city, this positive contribution should be taken into account - in a way most sustainability indexes don't.)

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