CITY OF SOUND

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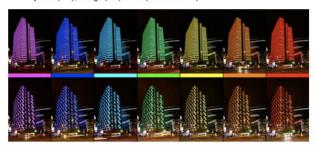
Instead, this is simply a curated set of façades, juxtaposing a few different approaches to expression or interaction.

....

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:

LAb[au] - Touch (Dexia Tower, Brussels, 2006-07)
★ ★ ★ ★ ★

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)"

LAb[au] - Touch (interface)
★ ★ ★ ★ ★

0:00 / 3:41

(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.)