

LET THERE BE LIFE

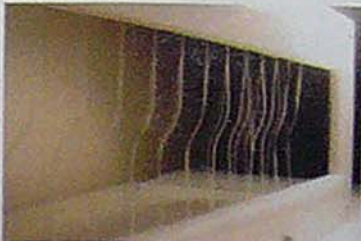
Interactive Architecture Symposium
 Eyebeam
 540 West 21st Street
 January 25

Once the reigning buzzword of the Internet, the term "interactive" is now popping up ever more frequently in the realm of architecture. But what exactly does it mean to call architecture interactive? A recent Eyebeam symposium shed some light on the topic, as six leading figures in the field discussed their methodologies and projects; the event was moderated by Stephen Gage, a professor and director of design and technical teaching at London's Bartlett School of Architecture.

The tech-savvy group of presenters revealed how they imbue buildings and other environments with various interactive abilities, using sensors and software of the sort usually found in digital art installations in galleries. One high point was a talk by David Benjamin and Soo-in Yang of up-and-coming New York architecture firm The Living, whose mantra is to make visible the invisible. The duo discussed projects such as *Living Glass* (2006), which was designed to answer the question, "What if architecture responded to you?" Their transparent, kinetic window senses the carbon dioxide from human breath and gracefully bends open to allow the gas to escape through slits. Another project, *River Glow* (2006), was spurred by the question, "What if architecture could create its own energy?" Powered by a self-sufficient photovoltaic system, *River Glow* is a network of pods that float on urban waterways and signal water quality via fiberoptics that glow green or red, depending on the water's pH level. Equally interesting is the methodology behind such projects: The duo offered a detailed deconstruction of their "flash research" technique, in which they create a full-scale functioning prototype within three months, on a budget of only \$1,000.

Two of their protégés, Carmen Trudell and Jenny Broutin of the design studio FLUXlab, presented their own approach to sustainable energy, harvesting power not from the sun but from *Homo sapiens*. First developed in Benjamin and Yang's Living Architecture class at Columbia University last year, **continued on page 31**

Soo-in Yang and David Benjamin's nonmechanical *Living Glass* is silent, transparent, lightweight, and thin (the surface is only 1/16 inch thick).



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Trudell and Broutin's *Revolution Door* generates electricity from the human energy expended to move it. It's a work in progress, but in the future, the architects hope to use energy from the revolving door to supplement a building's power supply.

Marek Walczak's talk revealed an artist bent. His *Podium Light Wall* (2006–2007) at 7 WTC, created in collaboration with several other artists, plays with the concepts of performance and awareness: The building's facade reacts to a passerby's presence by casting columns of blue LED light that are imperceptible to the passerby himself but clearly visible to distant observers. Walczak's design company, Kinacity, created the interactivity using a proprietary video-based motion tracking system. "If you stretched [the concept] really far, you could do energy-efficient street lighting by tracking movement to the position of people...but the reality is, we never thought of it purely on that basis," the architect-trained artist said. "It's much more about that relationship between the individual and the building."

While such projects probed relationships between people and their environments, others seemed more obscure. When Phil Ayres of the London-based research group sixteen* (makers) described a project in which robotic contraptions react to variations in microclimates by opening and closing like flowers, some in the audience were left baffled as to its purpose. Overall, though, the symposium provided an interesting snapshot of interactive architecture in its nascent phase, as slowly but surely, buildings are starting to stir and show signs of (artificial) life.

LISA DELGADO IS THE COPY EDITOR AT AN.



Marek Walczak's *Podium Light Wall* (above) is a seven-story interactive installation on the south and north facades of 7 WTC. When a pedestrian walks by, a tall column of LED lights follows him, like a bright shadow. The *Revolution Door* designed by architects Carmen Trudell and Jenny Broutin gathers the energy used to turn it and converts it to electricity (below).

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