Science & Technology

One Fish, Two Fish...

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When we look at a river in New York City at night, we usually see lights and activity — our city reflected back at us," says architect David Benjamin '05GSAPP. "But what if, instead of looking at the water and seeing a mirror, we were able to see it as the membrane of another ecosystem?"

To call attention to aquatic life in the city's waterways, Benjamin and several colleagues recently installed sonar equipment in floating plastic tubes capped by lights that twinkle when fish swim underneath. The lights also change color to indicate water quality — blue means that oxygen levels are higher than the previous week, which is good news for organisms below; red signals that oxygen levels are decreasing, which can indicate pollution.

The project, called "Amphibious Architecture," is led by Benjamin and Soo-In Yang '05GSAPP, codirectors of Columbia's Living Architecture Lab, and Natalie Jeremijenko, an installation artist and engineer at NYU.

The sensors are at Pier 35 in the East River and at East Tremont Avenue in the Bronx River through the end of 2009; a permanent bank of sensors may soon be installed at Pier 35.

"We want to engage people's curiosity," says Benjamin. "The water surface is one of the city's most beautiful facades, and there are lots of interesting things going on below there."

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