URBAN ASSEMBLAGE: THE CITY AS ARCHITECTURE, MEDIA, AI AND BIG DATA.

• Paper / Proposal Title:
Invisible Geographies - The Poetics of digital infrastructure

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• Abstract (300 words):
What can performance art practice reveal about the role invisible digital infrastructure plays in the production of space?

Invisibility, rather than being a natural quality of digital infrastructure, is a fundamental driver in the philosophy, design and development of ubiquitous and mobile computing. Invisibility enables the use of digital technologies but also has the potential to mask surveillance and misuse of personal data. This carries ethical and political consequences as ubiquitous computing becomes a reality and more environments and objects are embedded with computational capacities. Performance practices that explore the aesthetic qualities of digital infrastructure can play a valuable role in thinking about this problematic.

The research used performance techniques that focus the participants’ attention on the materiality and poetics of the usually invisible infrastructure of ubiquitous and mobile computing. Two studies were organised. The first, ‘Invisible Geographies’, made use of
specially designed radio receivers to make the transmission of communications infrastructure such as wi-fi, Bluetooth, and mobile phones, audible. The second, ‘Searching for the Cloud’, tracked down the sites of East London’s data centres, linking them through a walk that revealed the physicality of the infrastructure that supports cloud computing.

The experience of the two performance studies produced a multiplicity of poetics of digital infrastructure, inspiring new spatial imaginaries. The participants actively formed alternative realities around sites and their digital infrastructures, and I argue that this is a necessary process in the development of a politics and ethics capable of responding to the challenges posed by the introduction of ubiquitous and mobile computing to urban space.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

John Wild is a London based artist who works across performance, sound, text, code, electronics and machine learning to carry out speculative research into the utopian and dystopian futures imminent within digital technology.

John has presented his work at Transmediale (Berlin), iMAL (Brussels), Late at the Tate (Tate Britain), the Barbican (London), Catalyst Arts (Belfast) and the Royal College of Art. He is currently a [SPACE] Art + Technology residency artist.

John holds a PhD from the School of Electronic Engineering and Computer Science, Queen Mary University of London, a Masters degree in Sculpture from the Royal College of Art, and a Ba in Fine Art from Chelsea College of Art.