

33rd IAA SYMPOSIUM ON SPACE AND SOCIETY (E5)
Contemporary Arts Practice and Outer Space: A Multi-Disciplinary Approach (3)

Author: Prof. Marie-Pier Boucher
University of Toronto, Canada, mariepier.boucher@utoronto.ca

Dr. Alice Jarry
Concordia University, Canada, alice.jarry@concordia.ca

DOWN TO EARTH: ON SPACE URBANISM AND SPACE CITIES

Abstract

What are space telecommunication infrastructures used for and by whom?

Today's most important global telecommunication infrastructures are located in the Geostationary Orbit (GEO) where satellites make most Earth-based communication possible. One paradox with the GEO is that while its effects are ubiquitous, it is not only out of sight, it is also out of reach: the GEO is located 32 000km above the Earth's surface.

Down to Earth suggests that this paradox can be overcome by engaging with the material and immaterial forms that space technology takes in the city. Scholars in urban studies argue that changes in infrastructure technology are mutually contingent with urban changes. (Graham and Marvin, 2001) Down to Earth starts with the city as a prime location for the materialization, deployment, and accommodation of space telecommunication infrastructures to engage with artistic and civic examples of cohabitation strategies that give rise to informed participation and engagement as well as to new forms of urban value. While space telecommunication infrastructures are seemingly separated from the Earth, they are actually in close connection with it. The interdependence between space and the city is prevalent at several levels. For example, activities carried onboard the ISS are dependent upon the station's terrestrial moorings (Damjanov and Crouch, 2020), meaning that the ISS exists in virtue of its connections with the Earth.

Space telecommunication infrastructures are not only embedded in cities in the form of mission control rooms, data centers, and cell phone towers, they also provide the means to condition, monitor, activate, enable, and foreclose specific forms of urban life. This paper will present a series of artistic and urban projects that deploy ethical, tactical, and creative strategies for the urbanization of space technology through the accommodation and re-purposing of space technology, materials, and data for civilian use. It will introduce and discuss art works and civilian projects that offer the conditions for the creation of urban communities built around space technology. From satellite hackers to participatory design projects in Latin America, from artworks launched in orbit to be seen from the Earth to open softwares initiatives for data sharing, Down to Earth thinks of the space artist/urbanist as a creator of opportunities to act more than as a creator of forms (McGuirk, 2015) and asks What micro-politics are necessary to reshape the processes of adaptation of space technology?