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## **The Architectural League of New York Request For Qualifications**

### **Situated Technologies: Toward the Sentient City**

An exhibition critically exploring the evolving relationship between ubiquitous/pervasive computing and urban architecture

#### **SUBMISSION DEADLINE: June 27, 2008**

The Architectural League of New York invites architects, artists, designers, technologists, engineers, urbanists, or teams thereof, to submit qualifications for an exhibition that will critically explore the evolving relationship between ubiquitous/pervasive computing and urban architecture. The League will commission five to seven teams to develop urban interventions—to be installed in and around New York City in spring 2009—that will imagine alternative trajectories for how various mobile, embedded, networked, and distributed forms of media, information and communication systems might inform the architecture of urban space and/or influence our behavior within it. Commissioned projects will receive support ranging from \$5,000 to \$25,000.

The exhibition continues the League's commitment to supporting original research into the implications of ubiquitous/pervasive computing for architecture and urbanism. In fall 2006, the League, along with the Center for Virtual Architecture and the Institute for Distributed Creativity [iDC], presented "Architecture and Situated Technologies," a 3-day symposium organized by Omar Khan, Trebor Scholz, and Mark Shepard, that brought together researchers and practitioners from art, architecture, technology and sociology to explore the emerging role of Situated Technologies in the design and inhabitation of the contemporary city. The project continued in winter 2007 with the publication "Urban Computing and Its Discontents," the first of nine pamphlets to be published over the next three years that explores how our experience of the city and the choices we make in it are affected by mobile communications, pervasive media, ambient informatics and other Situated Technologies.

## **BACKGROUND**

Since the late 1980s, computer scientists and engineers have been researching ways of embedding computational “intelligence” into the built environment. Looking beyond the paradigm of personal computing, which placed the computer in the foreground of our attention, research in ubiquitous or pervasive computing projected a world where computers would vanish into the background, displaced to the periphery of our awareness. Enabled by tiny, inexpensive microprocessors and low-power wireless sensor networks, information processing was to become ambient. No longer solely “virtual,” human interaction with and through computers in this near-future world would be more socially integrated and spatially contingent as everyday objects and spaces became linked through networked computing.

Today, as computing leaves the desktop and spills out onto the sidewalks, streets and public spaces of the city, we are increasingly finding information processing capacity embedded within and distributed throughout the material fabric of everyday urban space. Artifacts and systems we interact with daily collect, store and process information about us, or are activated by our movements and transactions. Pervasive/ubiquitous computing evangelists herald a coming age of urban infrastructure capable of sensing and responding to the events and activities transpiring around them. Imbued with the capacity to remember, correlate and anticipate, this near-future “sentient” city is envisioned as being capable of reflexively monitoring its environment and our behavior within it, becoming an active agent in the organization of everyday life in urban public space.

Few may quibble about “smart” traffic light control systems that more efficiently manage the ebbs and flows of cars, trucks, and buses on our city streets. But some may be irritated when discount coupons for their favorite espresso drink are beamed to their mobile phone as they pass by a Starbucks. And many are likely to protest when they are denied passage through a subway turnstile because it “senses” that their purchasing habits, patterns of movement and current galvanic skin response (GSR) reading happens to match the profile of a terrorist.

Despite the obvious implications for the built environment, architects have been largely absent from this discussion. To the extent that business interests and government agencies drive these technological developments, we can expect to see new forms of consumption, surveillance and control emerge. Within architecture, the recent fascination with building envelopes wrapped with large-scale programmable “urban screens” or corporate lobbies outfitted with so-called “interactive architecture” highlights the dilemma. In an age of urban computing and ambient informatics, what opportunities for the design of urban artifacts and spaces lie beyond the architectural surface as confectionary spectacle or the interior vestibule as glorified automatic door opener?

## **THE CHALLENGE**

The Architectural League seeks to commission architects, artists, designers, technologists, engineers and related practitioners to produce urban “interventions” that demonstrate alternative trajectories for imagining this near-future Sentient City. We are interested in expressions of interest that not only re-imagine applications for the various mobile, embedded, networked, and distributed forms of media, information and communication systems introduced by the paradigm of pervasive/ubiquitous computing, but that also critically explore the technê of contemporary social networks, media ecologies, and urban and environmental systems that this paradigm introduces or redefines.

### *Privacy, Security, and Dataveillance*

How might Situated Technologies address the situation where we are increasingly compelled to trade privacy for security? The disclosure of detailed and extensive personal information has become the price we pay for privileges of easy access and enhanced mobility. EZ-Pass RFID tags enable commuters both quick passage through tollbooths on bridges and interstate highways as well as enhanced tracking of suspected terrorists by law enforcement agencies. “Trusted Traveler Programs” such as NEXUS and SENTRI offer expedited border-crossing “for low risk, pre-approved travelers,” effectively producing an elite travel class. Yet perhaps more troubling is the introduction of new technologies for data acquisition that are invisible to the average citizen. How might we make visible the various dataveillance techniques made possible by read/write RFID tags and GPS-enabled mobile devices when identity, location and time-stamps are shared, aggregated and mined by networked information systems?

### *Social Space*

The dialogue between technology and sociality is longstanding. As Georg Simmel noted at the beginning of the 20th century, “before buses, railroads and trains became fully established during the 19th century, people were never in a position to have to stare at one another for minutes or even hours on end without exchanging a word.” Along with new technologies come new social spaces spawning a variety of spatial practices for mitigating awkward or inconvenient situations. The social impacts of the telegraph, telephone, television and Internet are extended to the physical space of the city by the iPod and the mobile phone. Simultaneously a means of sensorial extension and amputation (McLuhan), these technologies have been cited both for atomizing public space and connecting publics in new ways. What new techno-social situations can we project in this near-future Sentient City? How might we imagine new spatial applications of technology that work toward greater social integration and at the same time maintain the possibility of the serendipitous encounter?

### *Environment*

As environmental sensing technologies become less expensive and more readily available in consumer markets, what new forms of public participation in the monitoring of environmental conditions are enabled? In the wake of the EPA fiasco surrounding the accuracy of reports concerning the environmental impact of the destruction of the World Trade Center, new practices of what has come to be called “Citizen Science” are emerging where the reporting of local environmental conditions are placed (literally) in the hands of the ordinary citizen. How can we imagine ways that these reports have an agency that has a direct impact on our experience of the city and the choices we make within it? How can this information be aggregated and displayed in ways that can compete with the perceived authority of those from established scientific bodies and governmental agencies?

### *Advocacy*

Advocacy is the act of arguing on behalf of a particular issue, idea or person, and addresses issues such as self-advocacy, environmental protection, the rights of women, youth and minorities, social justice, the re-structured digital divide and political reform. How might Situated Technologies be mobilized toward changing and/or influencing social or political policies, practices, and beliefs? What new forms of advocacy are enabled by contemporary location-based or context-aware media and information systems? How might they lend tactical support to the process of managing information flows and disseminating strategic knowledge that influences individual behavior or opinion, corporate conduct or public policy and law?

*Situated Technologies: Toward the Sentient City* is curated by Mark Shepard and organized by the Architectural League of New York.

## **HOW TO SUBMIT**

The League is only requesting qualifications as described below in this first stage; full proposals for projects are not required. A shortlist of finalists will be chosen to develop a full project proposal. A total of five to seven projects will be commissioned with support of \$5,000 to \$25,000. All projects must be developed specifically for this exhibition and cannot have been previously presented publicly.

### **Submission Materials**

1. Statement of Interest (2 pages maximum): The Statement of Interest is intended to articulate your interests in the theme of the exhibition. Please note that specific proposals are not requested and will not be reviewed at this time. What interests you about this exhibition? What themes, concepts, sites, or technologies might you explore? What perspective and/or experience do you bring to the project? Have you installed projects in public space before? If so, describe the project and the outcome.
2. CV/Resume (5 pages maximum)
3. Images and Descriptions of Past Work (5 pages maximum)

The entire submission package must be submitted as a single pdf file of not more than 10 MB to [sittech@archleague.org](mailto:sittech@archleague.org).

### **Questions**

If you have questions about the submission process or other aspects of this RFQ, email them to [sittech@archleague.org](mailto:sittech@archleague.org). FAQs and responses will be posted on the League's web site, [www.archleague.org](http://www.archleague.org), and on [www.situatedtechnologies.net](http://www.situatedtechnologies.net) beginning May 26, 2008.

### **Submission Deadline**

All submissions must be emailed to [sittech@archleague.org](mailto:sittech@archleague.org) by 6:00 pm (EST) on June 27, 2008.

### **SELECTION PROCESS**

A selection panel will review qualifications and past work with the goal of selecting approximately fifteen finalists to develop full project proposals, from which five to seven proposals will be commissioned.

#### *Selection Panel*

Amanda McDonald Crowley, Executive Director, Eyebeam  
Keller Easterling, Associate Professor, Yale University School of Architecture  
Rosalie Genevro, Executive Director, The Architectural League of New York  
Omar Khan, Co-Editor, Situated Technologies Pamphlet Series  
Laura Kurgan, Director, Spatial Information Design Lab  
Gregg Pasquarelli, Partner, SHoP Architects  
Trebor Scholz, Co-Editor, Situated Technologies Pamphlet Series  
Mark Shepard, Co-Editor, Situated Technologies Pamphlet Series  
Gregory Wessner, Exhibitions Director, The Architectural League of New York

### **TIMELINE**

May 2008	Request for Qualifications announced
May–June 2008	Submission period, Q & A
June 27, 2008	RFQ submission deadline
July 14, 2008	Shortlist announced
September 3, 2008	Project proposals due
September 26, 2008	Commissions announced
October 2008–April 2009	Project development
May 2009	Exhibition opening
August 2009	Exhibition closing
December 2009	Catalogue publication

## **RELEVANT LINKS AND RESOURCES**

- [www.archleague.org](http://www.archleague.org)

- [www.situatedtechnologies.net](http://www.situatedtechnologies.net): Includes podcasts of many of the presentations from the fall 2006 conference, "Architecture and Situated Technologies." Also includes additional links, information, discussion boards, and a bibliography of relevant articles and books.

- The Situated Technologies Pamphlet Series is available at Urban Center Books, [www.urbancenterbooks.org](http://www.urbancenterbooks.org). It is also available through [lulu.com](http://lulu.com); search for "Situated Technologies."

## **ABOUT THE ARCHITECTURAL LEAGUE**

The mission of the Architectural League is to advance the art of architecture.

The League carries out its mission by promoting excellence and innovation, and by fostering community and discussion in an independent forum for creative and intellectual work in architecture, urbanism, and related disciplines. We present the work and ideas of the world's most interesting and influential architects and designers to New York, national and international audiences, through lectures, exhibitions, publications, and the world-wide web. We identify and encourage talented young architects, through competitions, grants, exhibitions, and publications. And we help shape the future of our built environment by stimulating debate and provoking design thinking about the critical issues of our time.

The Architectural League is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization supported by the National Endowment for the Arts; the New York State Council on the Arts, a State Agency; and the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs. League programs are also made possible by contributions from foundations, corporations, and League members and friends.

For more information about League programs, visit [www.archleague.org](http://www.archleague.org).

## **FURTHER INFORMATION**

For more information, email Gregory Wessner, Exhibitions Director, The Architectural League of New York, at [wessner@archleague.org](mailto:wessner@archleague.org).