

# Connecting to Ground: A Séance in the Wick Woodlands

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✧ the land holds our secrets. ✧

## 1 Project Description

Connecting with nature, spirits, histories, and the emergent and experiential dimensions of sound, we resist performative egotism and challenge technosolutionism in music technology through séance. Spirit mediums - human vessels that interact with, channel, or anthropomorphise spirits - are cultural links between humans, animals, and the surrounding environment. In Western contexts, the medium conducts a specialist practice of discovering and performing techniques to call upon spirits; however, it is our position that anyone has the potential to become a spirit medium, just as anyone has creative voice. Using a collection of musical instruments, both acoustic and electronically augmented, we propose an opportunity to spiritually connect with the land and its spirits near the Loughborough University London (LUL) campus during the New Interfaces for Musical Expression (NIME) conference. The séance overlaps ritual practices of experimental music-making, healing of the connection between humans and land, and spiritual grounding through meditative exercises. In light of technologically-enforced severances between humans and spirits, we activate our potential as mediums, and use instruments as conduits for rebuilding connection with the same earth that this conference stands on.



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### 1.1 Séance as Relationality

The séance and Spiritualist movement emerged in the 19th century alongside Animal Magnetism and mesmerism in reaction to industrialism, capitalism, and male-dominated Enlightenment thinking [20]. Spirit Mediums like Helen Duncan gave performances which claimed to pass information directly from the deceased, through their bodies [6]. Like many other mediums who were often women from working-class backgrounds, the séance was an opportunity for transcending gendered norms [11] and engaging with non-christian spiritual practices publicly.

We connect our seance to the spiritualist lineage of mediums, activists, and creative practitioners who look beyond the boundaries of the known [5]. Organisations like the London Spiritualist Alliance [28], and practitioners like Akomolafe [1] and Querejazu [23] seek a third space of knowing-as-not-knowing, as an answer found beyond legibility, academic structure, and hierarchical conceptualisations. We want to connect with this strangeness sonically and collectively.

This séance positions instruments as a conduit for connecting with spirits and the land. Though other work in the field of Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) has used spiritual practices to be critical of notions of progress [14], generating collaborative environments [3], or configuring a design space for spiritual artifacts [17], our work is about viewing instruments as a site for cultural, emotional, and spiritual knowledge [2, 19, 30]. As the NIME community continues to incorporate emerging technosciences in the design of instruments [18, 22], we offer a perspective that further entangles the human with the non-human.



## 2 Technical Notes

To contextualise the séance, it is important to understand the location and its history and how we will add technological entanglements to this environment.

### 2.1 Entities

The séance's form is emergent and will reflect the participants and setting of the day (Section 2.3), but we will focus on engaging with the voices of several entities:

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- The Spiritual. We invoke, listen, and learn from land spirits and their history. Adopting animist practices, we celebrate and learn from the non-human voices that shape our practice and experience [16], from the environment, to the bacteria in our guts, to the voices of the land and its history.
- The Lost. Working with the Wick Woodland (Section 2.2), we focus to repair connections with the earth lost in the making of the human-nature dichotomy. This wood exists in a bounded, liminal space and we attune to its history in this work. We give voice to non-humans - animal, plant, and other beings - that have been silenced or displaced in the wake of land development and extraction.
- The Ineffable. We connect to the abstract, indescribable, and experiential [29], especially those connections and sensations that exist outside of clear conceptual frameworks and struggle to be underpinned in written or spoken language [4]. The ineffable corresponds directly to spiritualist and magical practices, that which can be experienced through music and focused intention.
- The (Un)Controllable. Challenging colonialism and anthropocentric notions of human dominance, we embrace the collaborative, wild, and uncontrollable. We derive inspiration from work with the unpredictability of collaborative bodies [7, 10] and feedback systems in music technology [15, 21, 25].
- The Hybrid. We embody and hybridise ourselves as deeply connected to nature, challenging the anthropocentric and human-nature dichotomy [8, 9]. We turn inward, listening to our bodies and the way they have been shaped by and are connected to the environment, land, and history [26]. The breath, voice, and internal vibrations act as technologies through which we can connect. These shape the collaborative elements of artistic expression.
- The Deviant. We queer our relationship with sound, technology, earth, and connection with other beings. We acknowledge how beings are punished for their deviation from a social norm and endeavour to create space for fluidity and divergence in their honour. As an extension, we explore notions of agency and authorship and how séance as a method democratises music-making as non-performative, accessible [5], and non-binary, without restriction into categories or expectations [11].
- The Playful. We aim for surrealism and removal of the logical and solutionist focus to accept the unexplainable with an open-mind [13, 18]. We reject performative cultures of bodies and musicking [7], recognising that every one of us has sonic creativity and a powerful voice. We let go, allowing our own expressions to emerge or other forces to speak through our creative practice.



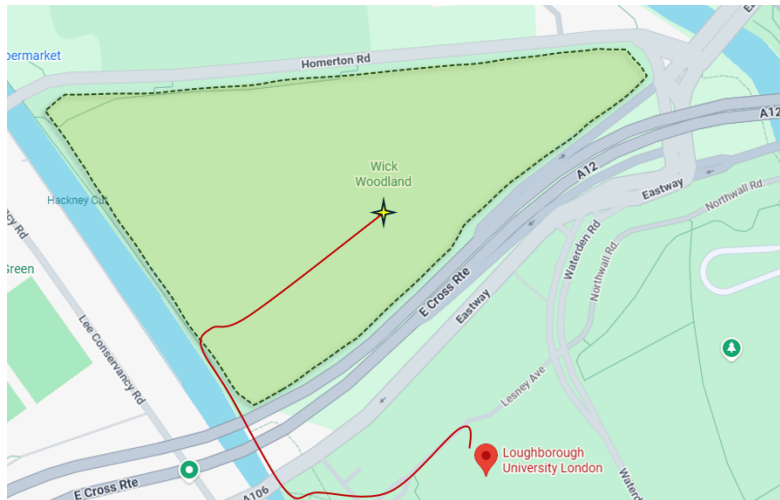


Fig. 1. The séance site (✧) in the Wick Woodland, behind LUL and Here East, and its triangulated constriction between the Hackney Cut, Homerton Road, and the A12/Eastway motorway.



“DECAYING WOOD IS GOOD”

## 2.2 Wick Woodland

The Wick Woodland is a small 8.25 ha (20.39 acres) wooded area north of the Olympic Park in East London. The space is cut in a triangular shape between the Hackney Cut along the Lee Navigation canal to the west, the A12/Eastway motorway to its south, and Homerton Road to its north.

The space, now managed by the Woodland Trust,<sup>1</sup> was created in response to an act of resistance by the local community against the gentrification. Originally, it had been known as Wick Field. In the 1940s it was used as one of the many tank traps along Stratford’s Greenway as a defense against a potential German invasion [27]. Much of this area of East London was heavily bombed during the Blitz. Following WWII until the 1990s, the woodland was mainly used as a playing field until it became of interest to property developers [27]. The community engaged in an informal occupation of the space, utilising tunnels and old bunkers in the area to resist construction. After millions of pounds in policing and removal efforts, the developers eventually abandoned the space and the Wick Woodland was established in 1996.

## 2.3 Presentation Format

The séance will unfold as we interact, however we have considered logistic and technical factors to facilitate this interaction.

**2.3.1 Logistics.** We plan to host the séance on the evening of June 23, 2026 as the conference community will be at LUL for the this evening only during the Opening Reception. On other evenings, the Music Programme will move participants centrally into Shoreditch. The Wick Woodland is a very short walk from the LUL campus (appx. 10 minutes, see Figure 1). Following the reception, expected to close at 20:00, and making use of the longer daylight hours at this time of year in London (sunset at 21:22 on this day with Waxing Crescent Moon, moonset at 23:22), we will begin our séance just before sunset and continue into the evening as desired. There is no closure time on the park and we hope to interact with the fading sounds of the A12 traffic at the end of the day while being mindful of the longboat community on the canal in keeping our volume low. Please note that even though the path is relatively flat and open it is not paved and therefore not entirely wheelchair accessible. It is also essential that we perform the séance outside, instead of the traditional formats. Participant numbers will also be limited to 25 at a time to avoid strain on the area.

After an opening mediation, we will begin performances in which we provide invitations for participation. We will begin using feedback instrument NIMEs, a shruti box, our voices, and movement from our own practice to create sonic symbols and collective language for the local area and local spirits. Choice of instrumentation is personal and artistic, though feedback instruments, voice, and drone aid in guiding the experience through their slow, ritualistic qualities. As participants add their voices or instruments they may like to bring, we will reply to this language in a round, acknowledging iteratively the connections being made.

<sup>1</sup><https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/visiting-woods/woods/wick-woodland/>

**June 23, 2026 (London, UK):** Sun ☼ in Cancer ☾, Moon ☾ in Libra ♎

**2.3.2 Technologies.** The digital technologies and instruments [12, 24] we bring into this space have been formatted to operate on batteries. Although the area is well-lit in the evenings due to the motorway lights, we will bring portable lights to ensure safety and visibility if the séance continues long beyond dusk. In case of light rain, we will secure electronics underneath a table tent and encourage participants to bring raincoats and umbrellas.

### 3 Media Links

Our proposal is supplemented with this 14-minute video discussing the in further detail what a séance means to us, the instruments we're going to perform with, and the political implications of a séance for musical practice.

- Video: <https://youtu.be/QDc7eEwdCbQ>

### 4 Ethical Standards

Our proposal and the work behind it is not directly funded or supported, as it is an addition to our day-to-day work as researchers and artists. We will gather consent of our participants through the process of séance, directly ask if we can record audio of performances, and photography will be limited to the Wick Woodlands and the authors listed so participants are free to engage without being recorded. Though our séance directly involves co-habiting with the environment, we strive to maintain a minimal disturbance to the surrounding wildlife, and ask our participants to critically observe how the Wick Woodlands have been shaped by human occupation. We cite no conflicts of interest.

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“I WISH I COULD FEEL SOMETHING”