



Technology and Magic

Technology and magic are inextricably bound up with each other – despite all efforts to pit them against each other. Historically and systematically.

Sympathies. Historically, the familiar story begins with non-scientific practices of magically controlling the world through prayer, ceremonial practice, and other forms of incantation. However, confronting today's inscrutable technological complexity is not unlike confronting an animated world – and thus we indulge and soothe our devices, partaking in the rituals of their maintenance and use. Not just in robotics or computer modelling, this involves knowing the world through participation and repetition, simulation and similarity, resonance and sympathy.

Media Effects. Technology and magic inhabit the sphere of make-believe or illusion. This includes old and new technologies of staging and producing magic, including the magic of technologies that astonish and amaze and work like magic. Cues and codes, images and texts, buttons and switches mediate between invisible powers and manifest performances, establishing a working order of things.

Iconicity. Image and performance are incarnated in artworks and technical works. The auratic body and authentic material substrate of technical devices is collected and curated, repaired and restored, held sacred in museums. The uniqueness of the body even of mass-produced things can produce a shock of the old which limits and qualifies the claims of the new.

Grand narratives invite critical scrutiny: „Any sufficiently advanced technology will be indistinguishable from magic“ (Arthur C. Clarke)? The disenchantment of the world created the conditions for its re-enchantment? Mastery through calculation is antithetical to participation in the power and agency of things?

The summer school seeks to bring together historical, epistemological, and anthropological approaches. It is neither content to retell, nor merely to deconstruct familiar tropes, but seeks to appreciate how we are ourselves in play when we relate technology and magic. Some of its headings might include “Nature Technologized and Technology Naturalized,” “The Technoscientific Reanimation of Matter,” “Performance and Ritual in Technology and Art,” „Media Technologies for the Production of Wonder.“

The day of arrival is on Sunday, September 18, followed by five days of discussion, guided tours, and a free afternoon, departure on Saturday, September 24. Graduate students present works in progress, faculty members discuss theoretical positions.

The city of Padova offers numerous occasions and historical exemplars to stimulate our discussions. Thus the Summer School is framed by histories of technology and art in Padova.

Padova is a city of the fine arts and the built environment in which they produce their religious or aesthetic effects – it provides the aura of the enshrined work as well as the performance that moves its beholders. How does mechanical work signify magical participation in Giovanni de Dondi's astronomical clock or astrarium, probably the first of its kind in mid-14th century? The summer school will include these and other Padovan dimensions and we will visit some places of the city in search of the magic hidden in the science and in the technological arts.



Faculty

Natascha Adamowsky, *Cultural and Media Studies, Passau*

Jacopo Bonetto, *Archaeology, Padova*

Marcello Ghilardi, *Archaeology, Padova*

Fabio Grigenti, *Philosophy, Padova*

Natalia Nikiforova, *History of Technology, Saint Petersburg*

Alfred Nordmann, *Philosophy, Darmstadt*

Oliver Schlaudt, *Philosophy, Heidelberg, and Cognitive Archaeology, Tübingen*

Astrid Schwarz, *Philosophy and Technoscience Studies, Cottbus*

The Summer School is free of charge, participants are expected to cover the cost for travel, reasonable accommodation will be offered. We invite advanced MA students, PhD candidates and postdocs from philosophy, STS, art history and design theory, and related fields. If you are interested to explore the interplay of magic and technology please describe your motivation and interest (no more than 3 pages) and send it by May 15 to Alfred Nordmann - nordmann@phil.tu-darmstadt.de