

# Shift –Electronic Arts Festival

## Theme 2009: Magic. Tech-Evocations and Assumptions of Paranormal Realities

At the latest since the 19th century, when spiritists and occultists claimed they could send telegraphs to the beyond and take photographs of spirits, a rich interaction has persisted between magic and all recently emerged new media. Technical media are generally a product of rational science, an ingenious, albeit sometimes accidental invention. Yet they seem also to have a touch of the supernatural or wizardry about them. They thus make a perfect projection screen for paranormal associations and magic powers.

Be it with fascination or fear, gleeful expectation or even faith, people even today tend to regard art and new media as magic channels. This begins in everyday life, for example when a computer does something ‘all by itself’.

A renewed interest in magic practices and their history can be observed lately in the art world, perhaps due precisely to the omnipresence of technical communication, and the permanent, excessive demands that this implies. This interest generally indicates not so much a drift towards esoteric vistas but rather, an experimental investigation of interactions between visions of technical omnipotence and playful subversions of an alleged subjectivity and sovereignty.

The theme has a significant **historical component**. Technical media played (alongside spiritual mediums) an important role when spiritism and occultism boomed around 1900. Media technologies were (and still are) used to track down or make visible paranormal phenomena – and they were associated frequently with conscious charlatany: spirit photography, camera obscura and holography.

But this year’s festival will also and above all examine **more up-to-date connections between media and magic**. There are ‘magic’ and evocative, optimistic and pessimistic ways and styles of dealing with one’s relationship to media and technology, to (literary and musical) automata and (industrial) automation, in everyday life and in politics (states, religions, sects). Everyday life confronts us with the magic and monstrosity of the Black Box ‘computer’. That we react with tech-evocations and assume that paranormal realities exist is therefore hardly surprising.

Ultimately there exists a strong **artistic interest in magic practices**. Such interest within artistic circles (particularly since World War II, in the context of totalitarian systems), is often levelled against the role of the artist as a sovereign subject, which is to say, it feeds on scepticism as opposed to a rationalism that harbours the threat of totalitarianism. On the other hand, there exists a strongly personalising tradition: magic visions of the artist’s positive genius, of the artist as a magician or shaman. Furthermore, magic as the content of (neo-) conceptual art-as-research is back on the artistic agenda.