

## Call for Proposals WORKING TITLES #3

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# SPELL CHECK: SPIRITUALISM, SHAMANISM, SORCERY & THE REINCARNATION OF THE OCCULT IN DARK TIMES

A century after the “Age of Reason” & two after the last European witch burning, logic & rationality are under siege. Self-declared shamans have run amok in the US Capitol, scientists face death threats from the public for ideas previously widely accepted & people from all walks of life feel targeted by “witch hunts” for their political or intellectual beliefs. In a time of crisis, change & global diaspora, many have turned to magic as part of what they see as a practice of resistance & care. Some seek to reclaim heritage or explore marginalized Indigenous worldviews & posit their practices as sites of potential resistance to contemporary dilemmas & conflicts. Others view this as “woo”, or some manifestations as part of the divisiveness shaking notions of commonality & even attacking or undermining the possibility of common values & beliefs. In a world unraveling through ecological collapse, social disintegration & the chaos of post-truth politics, examining this phenomenon takes on fresh urgency – & ambiguity. What does it mean for artists & other practitioners to engage with the tensions between mysticism, belief & knowledge? How are some trying to w(r)ench witchcraft(s) to displace or at least decenter sexist, colonial & heteronormative phallogocentric cosmologies? How have others used the ghosts of magic to raise specters of divisive ideologies from their graves?

Among other specificities, the figure of “the witch” has encompassed queered & gendered bodies as sites of resistance in anticapitalist struggles. Mysticism, superstition & magic are resurging in ways both alluring & troubling. Social media trends like *#WitchTok* offer tools for self-empowerment & connection, yet their aesthetics bleed into hyper-capitalist tendencies. Artists have long engaged with the mystical & the

irrational, often at odds with dominant rationalist & secular narratives. But as we navigate a world where the line between truth & fiction blurs, where belief is both a weapon & a refuge, the stakes of this engagement shift. Are these practices pathways to critique, tools for navigating complexity, or escapes into comforting illusions? What does it mean to turn to mysticism as a method in times of crisis? *Can* the mystical be critical? Or does it risk becoming an accomplice to the escapist logic of ultra-religiosity & conspiratorial thinking?

This call seeks contributions exploring the often dismissed notion of artists as magicians & art's potential in subversion &/or the interplay between art & science. In a time of heightened political division, we ask: How can rituals, performativity & witchy practices within practice-based research illuminate resistances, ambivalences & hidden intersections? How can these approaches trouble established frameworks – & how can they fail & lead to further divisions? Can we find real solutions through magical thinking or is this just an escapist fantasy?

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This issue invites critical reflections on the relationship between artistic practice, mysticism & method. How does contemporary art negotiate the tensions between revealing mystic truths & critical fabulations: resisting the status quo & escaping from it? How does this function within broader power structures & how can artists position themselves within – or against – this terrain?

**We are particularly interested in contributions that explore the following:**

- **Mysticism as Method:** How do artistic practices adopt/adapt mystical frameworks? What does it mean to work with magic, ritual, or the supernatural as research?
- **Critiques of dark forces:** How can trends that revisit somatic work play into superstition, cultural critiques, buzzwords & mask anti-progressive agendas? Why do some say they are victims of a witch hunt for not being politically correct?
- **Mysticism as Connection:** How does mysticism offer frameworks for rethinking relationships with non-human worlds – e.g. fungi, microorganisms, animals, plants, or geological formations?

- Technopaganism & Digital Mysticism: How does digital culture reshape contemporary relationships with the mystical & who benefits from it?
- Reclaiming the Sacred: How queer, feminist, or decolonial practices redefining mystical & ritualistic traditions differentiate from conspiratorial thinking?

The call is open to all academic & non-academic practice-based researchers whose field of interest intersects with these themes: artists, care workers, magicians, shamans. By “working titles” we hint at the journal’s main objectives: a platform to present research carried via any practice – from oil paint to anarchist urban plumbing – & to facilitate self-publishing of practice-based working papers. Contributors submit their contributions to a non-blind peer review.

**Types of contributions include:**

- Research papers: scholarly articles on original practice-based research, methods papers, or reviews.
- Perspectives & provocations that unpack existing research topics/provide new perspectives/engage with particular discourses provocatively.
- Visual essays, i.e. image or graphic-based & non-exclusively textual pieces.

Note that general artistic portfolios will be rejected. Written entries should be no more than 4500 words including footnotes & image captions, not including references. Submissions may be in English or German.

**Send initial proposals to:** [workingtitles@gestaltung.uni-weimar.de](mailto:workingtitles@gestaltung.uni-weimar.de) including a 250-word abstract, title and a specification of contribution type (research paper, perspectives & provocations, visual essay), up to 5 keywords & a 100-word biography.

**Proposals may be submitted by 18.02.25, 23:59 CET & will be reviewed by 18.03.25.**

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Ensure your contribution respects our [author & submission guidelines](#).

For more information visit: <https://www.uni-weimar.de/projekte/workingtitles/>.

Questions may be directed to [workingtitles@gestaltung.uni-weimar.de](mailto:workingtitles@gestaltung.uni-weimar.de).

Working Titles is run by a group affiliated with the Ph.D. programme Art & Design at Bauhaus-Universität Weimar.