



# The Magic City: of technorationality and spiritual futures

*2021-2022 [urban interfaces] graduate seminar*

# today's seminar

1. Agenda of this year's seminar series *The Magic City: of technorationality and spiritual futures* + Short curatorial introduction by organizers: what do we consider to be the productive value of 'the magic city'?
2. Brainstorm #1 - introducing and positioning yourselves, doing a 5 minute brainstorm with your neighbor: what does 'magic city' mean to you? Produce a short 3-5 sentence statement by way of introducing yourselves.
3. Brainstorm #2: The potential of 'magic' to inform and shape imaginaries for the future, a "what if?" beyond the rationalized "as is".
4. Takeaways and next sessions



[urban interfaces]



Verena Kämpken



Kim Sommer



Mariana Fried



Cecilia Heil



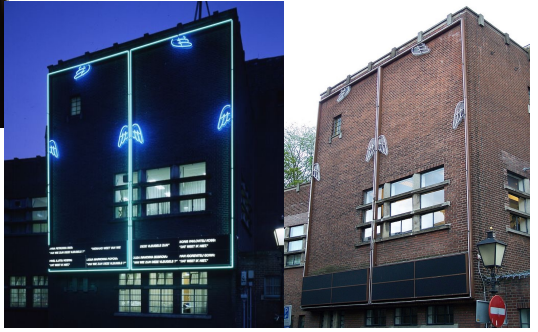
Duan



Ezgi Aktuğ



Olga Efremova



Saskia Soelaksana



Noa A. H. Mes



Oishika Basak



Polyniki Katrantsioti



Sara Brunello



Wenhan Tang



Paula Werdnik



Yirou Shu

# Brainstorm #1 - 5 mins

Brainstorm #1 - introducing and positioning yourselves, doing a 5 minute brainstorm with your neighbor: what does 'magic city' mean to you? Produce a short 3-5 sentence statement by way of introducing yourselves.


**Anne Tebbel** is Professor of Urban Culture & Identity at the Department of Media and Culture Studies. Her specialties include analysis of postmodern society through a perspective of contemporary urban business, science and artistic culture. She has published in large drama, media science, and architecture.

**Michaela Jorg** is an Assistant Professor in New Media Studies, Department of Media and Culture Studies, Utrecht University. Co-founder of the *Interdisciplinary Co-Production for the Study of New Media and Culture*, and works in a research area that includes media, urban culture, theory and play. Currently, Michaela Jorg is lead of a PhD-funded team Culture + Creative Cities project called "Designing for Sustainable, Responsible Smart Cities", a collaboration with Utrecht and other consortium of urban partners.

**Anne Tebbel** is an Assistant Professor Urban Studies at the Department of Media and Culture Studies where she teaches the BA Media and Culture, and introduces contemporary themes from and about stage and film, Arts and Society. Her current research focuses on the dynamics of contemporary socially engaged theatre and performance practices, in particular performance interventions in public space.

**Kees Boorman** is an Assistant Professor of Media and Culture Studies, within research in transdisciplinary research at large in public sociology, urban and philosophy (Urban Urban published book) and the contemporary area. His studies on urbanism, urban morphology, urban culture, urban studies, and theory. He is director of the Urban Culture Program, in addition he is in charge of the Urban Culture Program, Urban Culture, and UPPD 10.


**Mira Cheloni** is a PhD researcher at Transnational Studies, Utrecht University (Netherlands). Her research is focused on subculture art, design, and production, particularly, she is a researcher at the Institute of Utrecht Culture (Utrecht University of Applied Sciences). Her work there involves the politics, social landscape, and (post)colonial and sociological meanings, digital economy, and urban identity.

**Annika Pachatz** is Assistant of the Utrecht Urban Science Institute program at the School of Urban Science Utrecht University. She is coordinator and initiator of the course *Interdisciplinary Project*, as well as co-coordinator of the *Mastering program*. Now in her work at the School of Urban Arts, Annika is an experienced university teacher, academic writing and correspondence the course research projects at University College Utrecht.

**Annika Pachatz** is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Media and Culture Studies, where she teaches courses on media industries, transmedia storytelling, critical theory, cultural analysis, and theory. Her theory has been a member of the *Utrecht Urban Science*, a bridge between young researchers from all Utrecht University faculties, since 2015. She has published scholarly books and articles on science fiction, cultural studies, media theory, and -criticism and popular culture, and urbanism.

**Gert Kester** is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Media and Culture Studies, where he teaches courses on Urban Culture. The urban transdisciplinary field and the transdisciplinary business program of the School of Urban Arts. His research focuses on the dynamics of the transdisciplinary of money and investment and the politics of the politics of money. He is especially interested in the politics of money, urban culture, as well as the dynamics of money.

**Peter de Vries** is currently an Assistant Professor in the Department of Media and Culture Studies at the University of Utrecht, where he teaches history and contemporary literature. His research interests include digital media, and urbanism and theory. He is the co-founder of the *Utrecht Urban Science*, a bridge between young researchers from all Utrecht University faculties, since 2015. He is also the co-founder of the *Utrecht Urban Science*, a bridge between young researchers from all Utrecht University faculties, since 2015.

**Peter de Vries** is a PhD candidate in Urban Studies. For the project "The Urban Science Institute (Utrecht Urban Science)" the analysis of urban culture can make the complex urban and political implications of urbanism visible and tangible. The project aims to explore the ways in which urban and political culture can be used to create a more sustainable and inclusive urban environment.

**Peter de Vries** studies the social and political impact of social media, digital technology, and the urban environment. His research interests include digital media, and urbanism and theory. He is the co-founder of the *Utrecht Urban Science*, a bridge between young researchers from all Utrecht University faculties, since 2015. He is also the co-founder of the *Utrecht Urban Science*, a bridge between young researchers from all Utrecht University faculties, since 2015.

# about [urban interfaces]



<https://www.leoalmanac.org/urban-interfaces>



group started in 2014

 Utrecht University

[urban interfaces] research group at Utrecht University

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URBAN FRAC The [urban interfaces] graduate seminar 2017-2018  
THE RIGHT TO THE CITY: the [urban interfaces] graduate seminar 2018-2019  
URBAN ECOSYSTEMS: The [urban interfaces] graduate seminar 2019-2020  
INTERFACING THE INFORMAL CITY: [urban interfaces] graduate seminar 2020-2021  
The Magic City: [urban interfaces] graduate seminar 2021-2022



# about the seminar: The Magic City?

Point of departure:  
newly Modernist  
techno-driven smart  
city.

Observation #1:  
smart city as form  
of magical thinking  
(yet fully within  
*Technic*: as  
salvation).

Observation #2 new  
academic and artistic  
attention for Magic  
(Bell's 'spectral  
turn').

Vision and normative  
position: necessity  
of search for  
alternative  
perspectives of  
urban futures.  
Taking *Magic*  
seriously.

Aim: explore role of  
media, arts,  
performance for 'magic  
cities' as alternative  
imaginaries for  
*Technic*.

Modern and technical solutions to complex social problems have long configured urban imaginaries. Planners, designers, and policymakers have embraced the notion of the "smart city" to reshape urban life into a gentrified wonderland for the rich. More

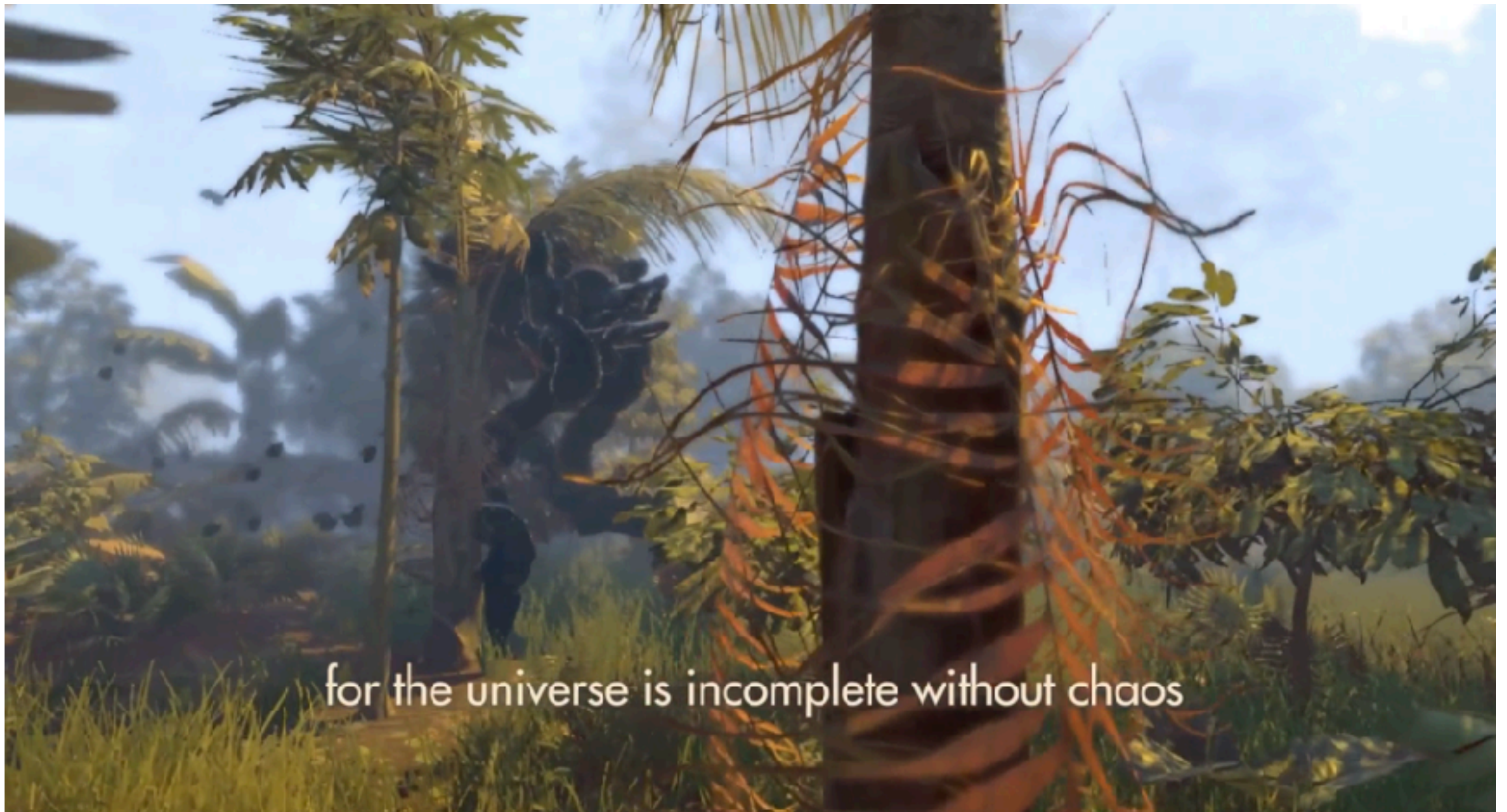
often than not, supposedly 'smart' technologies are presented as simple solutions to wicked problems, making them disappear as if by magic. But as smart cities developed, a growing number of theorists,

activists, and curators have embraced more speculative and imaginative notions of magic, in order to open up a deliberately unreal what-if space for collective fantasizing about urban futures.

Magical thinking in this sense, then, can provide a healthy antidote to Modernist hopes and projections of being able to govern cities by means of (quantified) rational managerialism.

This seminar brings together scholars, artists, and designers who have productively explored these "magical" modes of thinking in their work. In embracing the dreamlike, the mystical, and the irrational as central concepts, the Magic City seminar series inspires us to think about urban life and culture along trajectories that move away from – or reimagine – quantifiable and commodified technological solutions.

Practices of healing and cosmic consciousness are rather approached as alternative ways of knowing that could offer new ways of relating to the planet in distress, and of strengthening urban life as an inclusive, diverse, and imaginative community.



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# Federico Campagna *Technic and Magic: The Reconstruction of Reality* (2018)

Two opposing cosmogonies:

## ALTERNATIVE COSMOGONIES - A DIAGRAM

### TECHNIC

Upper limit: *Ego absconditus*

Hypostasis	Archetypal incarnation
Absolute language	Truth is representation, representation is truth
Measure	Mathematical number
Unit	Piece of information/data
Abstract general entity	Processor
Life as vulnerability	Possibility

Lower limit: Double affirmation

### MAGIC

Upper limit: Double negation

Hypostasis	Archetypal incarnation
The ineffable as life	Miracle
Person	Apollo and the Imam
Symbol	Mythologem
Meaning	Centre
Paradox	Self

Lower limit: *Deus absconditus*



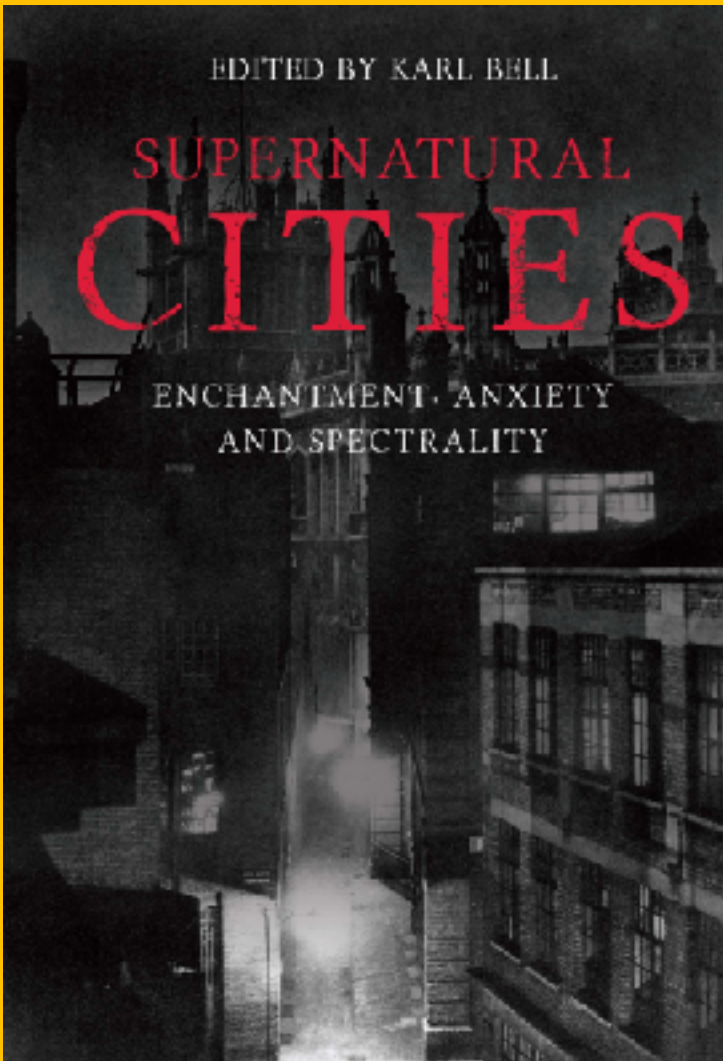
Karl Bell (ed.) *Supernatural Cities: Enchantment, Anxiety and Spectrality* (2019)

Strong connection to urban culture. Exploration of 'magic' in cities.  
Point:

“...recognise the prevalence, importance, and vitality of the supernatural as an intrinsic element of urban cultures in the modern world, intimately and endlessly interwoven into the fabric and experiences of everyday urban existence”

Supernatural underlines 3 important points about urban life:

1. affective dimensions
2. meanings, beliefs, practices
3. cultural differences, against western bias in urban studies (but without the trap of orientalism!)



# Brainstorm #2 - 20 mins

The potential of 'magic' to inform and shape imaginaries for the future, a "what if?" beyond the rationalized "as is". Take your own discussion and case from brainstorm #1 on board!

# Take-aways? Next sessions

- \* ...
- \* ...

**Session #2** Technology and magic – Tuesday 26 April  
2022 15:00 – 17:00

With special guests: Marc Tuters, curator of IMPAKT  
“Weird Gnosis” expo, Telemagic Media Art Lab

**Session #3** Magical Urban Futures – Tuesday 10 May  
2022 14:00 – 17:00 (NOTE: we’re starting 1 hour earlier,  
and ending with drinks!]