



STREAM

S20. Occluded Atmospheres: Esoteric Aesthetics, Night Knowledges, and Sensory Shifts

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DESCRIPTION

Affect theory has long emphasized atmospheres as diffuse yet palpable conditions that shape how bodies feel, move, and relate. Yet not all atmospheres register equally. Some saturate experience so completely that they appear as the background of life itself, while others remain partly hidden—sensed only in the minor registries of experience. Specifically, this stream turns to *esoteric aesthetics* and *night knowledges*—modes of perception oriented toward the subtle, the nocturnal, and the partially hidden in order to register these sensory shifts.

Whereas occulted knowledges are studied and learned, however unconventionally, occluded atmospheres are sensed into and immersive, calling in not only practices and methods such as divination and ritual but also affects and states such as grief, illness, opacity, dreams, confinements, and the boundary lines where proficiency or literacy shift into intuition or illegibility.

To think atmospherically about occlusion is also to ask how certain forces remain difficult to perceive within dominant regimes of knowledge. Atmospheric conditions may be normalized through habit, concealed by infrastructures of power, or rendered unintelligible by epistemologies that privilege clarity, visibility, and measurement. Yet many aesthetic, cultural, and intellectual traditions cultivate ways of sensing atmospheres that exceed these frameworks. *Esoteric aesthetics* and *night knowledges* become salient as expanded calibrations.

Esoteric aesthetics names artistic and cultural practices that register forces often considered intangible, diffuse, or atmospheric: energies, presences, vibrations, tonalities, and other subtleties that move through environments. Across literature, visual art, performance, ritual practice, and speculative

thought, such aesthetics develop forms of attention capable of rendering occluded atmospheres perceptible.

Night knowledges, meanwhile, gesture toward epistemologies that emerge through intuition, sleep, scent, ritual, divination, embodied attunement, and other practices that register worlds beyond the limits of daylight rationality. Rather than treating these themes solely as objects of analysis, this stream approaches them as modes of atmospheric sensing—ways of perceiving and navigating environments saturated with diffuse affective forces.

This stream invites contributions that explore how occluded atmospheres emerge across aesthetic, social, ecological, technological, and political contexts as well as through different methods, including performative, speculative, or practice-based approaches that engage atmospheres sensorially rather than only analytically. What forms of perception arise when attention turns toward what is ambient, partially hidden, or atmospherically diffuse?

Possible lines of inquiry include:

- How do esoteric aesthetics register or render perceptible occluded atmospheres?
- What are night knowledges, and how do they cultivate sensitivity to subtle atmospheric forces?
- How do artists, writers, and cultural practitioners develop forms or methods capable of sensing or transmitting atmospheric intensities?
- What atmospheres become perceptible through experiences of illness, vulnerability, grief, disability, or altered sensory awareness?
- How do ecological, technological, or political conditions produce atmospheres that remain partially hidden or unevenly sensed?
- How might practices such as divination, dreamwork, ritual, or altered perception create atmospheric shifts, and to what end/s?
- What practices of intention, attention, or attunement allow occluded atmospheres to become momentarily legible?
- What forms of nocturnal, cyclical, or non-linear time emerge in practices of atmospheric sensing?

By foregrounding atmospheres that remain subtle, obscured, or difficult to articulate, this stream asks how affect studies might expand its vocabulary for sensing the opaque conditions that shape collective life.