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AFFECT AND ESOTERIC INHUMANISMS

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This stream will focus on the overlaps between theories of affect and esoteric practices. Both affect and magic concern the open-ended becoming of the world as a process of bodily, sensory, and emotional attunement beyond persuasion and demonstration. Where affect denotes the ability to affect or be affected, magic offers techniques for producing changes in the world; where affect signals the production of feeling, magic subsists in the residual feeling of something-happening. Like affect, magic is often denigrated for its alleged anti-intentionalist irrationalism and sparks worries about the erosion of discernment in public discourse. This stream asks how affect and magic map onto and illuminate each other; how we might understand ritual magic as a form of affect theory *avant-la-lettre* and what the return of magic as popular culture tells us about the place of affect in the contemporary, a place that spans the range signaled by "PITS."

Panelists will pursue the meeting of affect and magic through a range of esoteric practices and knowledges: occultism, tarot, haunting, witchcraft and *bruja* feminism, mysticism, and weird speculativisms. Often, when these come up within contemporary humanist and social scientific research, they end up being interpreted as displacement, metaphorization, and allegory. Against this interpretive move, we want to take the esoteric seriously as a vector of material practice, knowledge production, and emergent, queer collectivity in the shadow of Enlightenment epistemes. At a moment when many theoretical currents are turning to advanced technoscience to ground their materialisms, we want to linger on those forms of knowing-doing that exist in fugitive relation to Enlightenment mechanisms of "primitive" accumulation. This includes thinking through queer temporalities that

exceed both the normalizing fictions of state and family, and the forms of affective perception indexed as “haunting” that play such a crucial role in literatures arising from the trans-Atlantic slave trade and settler colonialism in the Americas. Unlike the universalist (read: colonialist) impulse hard-baked into Enlightenment rationality, the esotericisms we seek to explore are linked with inhumanist collectivities.

In this stream, we want to read various forms of esoteric practice through and against affect theory as a way of attuning to alternatives to Enlightenment subjectivity and humanist politics. And we wonder, collectively, how these practices may hold the capacity to animate inhumanist futures detached from modes of colonial, capitalist, heterosexist, and anthropocentric capture. We invite papers that take up questions such as:

- What affects attend (our) investments in esoteric practice in academic spaces?
- How do we understand and work through/with the ways we may be made to feel shame and embarrassment for believing in, practicing, or just taking seriously esoteric knowledges?
- How might making public our esoteric commitments reconfigure how we practice academic labor?
- What kinds of methods are required to think through contemporary esoteric knowledges in relation to earlier forms of witchcraft, sorcery, magic, etc.?
- How do we think shifting relations between politics and esoterisms?
- How might discourses of queer temporalities help us understand the ways such historical engagement is saturated and motivated by affect?