



# Artificial darkness : an obscure history of modern art and media



Elcott, Noam M. Chicago, 2016

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Delving deep into the modern artifice of manufactured darkness, Elcott (art history and archaeology, Columbia Univ.) mines the mechanisms of constructed blackness and technologies of the invisible that developed in the late-19th and early-20th centuries into new means of expression and ambience in the visual and performing arts. From Etienne-Jules Marey's light traps and the photographic darkroom to projection technologies such as Pepper's ghost and the films of Georges Méliès, from the immersive atmospheres of Wagner's opera house at Bayreuth to Oskar Schlemmer's abstract dance, Elcott examines sites of production and reception in a complex of histories involving screens, images, illusions, and environments dependent on the made dark. Consider, for example, Marey's dark screen—a ten-meter deep light trap that backed a black clad figure outlined with thin light strips as a method for photographically marking movement in two dimensions—with its complement, the immersive illusion of space on the illuminated screens of the darkened theaters of cinema. In a brief coda the author touches on the contemporary, including Hiroshi Sugimoto's feature-length photographs of theater interiors and the stealth nanotube technology of vantablack, a military-grade pigment.

Summing Up: Highly recommended. Upper-division undergraduates through faculty; students in technical programs; professionals.

Reviewer: [E. Baden](#), Warren Wilson College

Recommendation: Highly recommended

Readership Level: Lower-division Undergraduates, Upper-division Undergraduates, Graduate Students, Researchers/Faculty, Two-Year Technical Program Students, Professionals/Practitioners

Interdisciplinary Subjects:

Subject: [Humanities - Art & Architecture](#)

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