

MUS 555, Topics in 20th Century Music – Music, Modernism, Flesh
Instructor: Stephen Smith | Monday, 2pm – 4:40pm

In recent decades, scholars working in a number of domains have developed notions of flesh in order to examine relations of power and life in modernity. These notions differ in important ways, reflecting the various fields from which they emerge and the work they are called upon to do—and yet, they converge in designating a stratum of human life in which ordinary distinctions between individuals and collectivities are either suspended or reconfigured, a domain that is paradoxically produced by power in various forms (political, economic, symbolic, material, etc.) *and* posited as primordial or originary. From Black Studies, to discourses on biopolitics, psychoanalysis, aesthetics, and phenomenology, thinkers have called upon notions of flesh to examine an expansive array of modern themes, including formations of race, constructions of the human, relations between states and the lives of their populations, the possibility of imagining utopian futures, and the role of art in disclosing or shaping the conditions of fleshy life.

This seminar will study some of the principal texts in which contemporary notions of flesh have been developed, including works by Hortense Spillers, Alexander Weheliye, Eric Santner, Roberto Esposito, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. We will examine work in music studies that has taken up these notions in various ways. And we will consider case studies that can help us to build new connections between conceptions of flesh and histories of music and sound. Since the notions of flesh under consideration in this seminar are all centrally concerned with modernity, we will take various kinds of modernism (conceived capaciously) as the sites of our study. Requirements will include attendance, weekly participation in seminar discussions, regular reading responses, in-class presentations, and a final research paper.

This course is primarily intended for MA and PhD students, and it fulfills the Elective Group 2 requirement for students in the MA or PhD Critical Studies track. With the permission of the instructor, interested MM or DMA students may enroll in the course, which fulfills the Elective Group 1 requirement.

3 credits