

**MUS 555: Topics in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Music: Musical Modernism: Empire and Earth**  
**Instructor: Stephen Smith | Thursday, 3:30pm – 6:20pm**

In recent decades, scholars working in a wide range of disciplines have examined how modern colonialism and imperialism have shaped the representation, conception, and experience of nature, along with the material conditions of the natural world itself. Some thinkers have shown how modern notions of nature played prominent roles in worldviews that facilitated the expropriation and enslavement of non-European peoples, along with the seizure of colonized lands. Others have studied how colonial industry and trade reshaped the face of the earth through extraction and exploitation. Still others have considered the myriad visions of nature that emerged as responses to these historical conditions. Created by artists, philosophers, scientists and others, in colonized spaces and in European metropolises, such visions have sometimes harmonized with colonialism, sometimes resisted it, sometimes sought new shapes of life in its interstices, and sometimes imagined what might arise in its wake. These are only some possibilities among many others; the literatures are rich.

This seminar connects investigations of what nature becomes in colonial modernity with the study of music and sound, broadly conceived. It will be shaped by questions like the following: How might musical practice, as well as thought about music and sound, have been shaped by modern transformations of nature? Might inquiry that begins with music and sound generate its own ways of studying such transformations, yielding historical knowledge that is harder to obtain (if not simply unavailable) from other disciplinary perspectives? And what does it mean to be a modernist when faced with what modernity makes of nature?

Our work will be framed by expansive notions of modernity and modernism. Some case studies will be drawn from 20<sup>th</sup>-century Western classical music, while others will range widely in space and time. The seminar will be structured such that some of its materials will be dictated by students' own research interests. Requirements will include attendance, weekly participation in seminar discussions, regular reading responses, in-class presentations, and a final research paper.

*This seminar is primarily intended for MA and PhD students. However, interested MM or DMA students may enroll with permission from Professor Smith. Interested MMs must also contact the Graduate Program Director for approval. For DMA students, this course fulfills the Elective Group 1 requirement. For students in the MA/PhD in Critical Music Studies track, it satisfies the Elective Group 2 requirement.*

*3 credits*