The Network: Interconnection from the *corpus mysticum* to the blockchain.

This course in Intellectual Traditions considers network imagery from antiquity to the twenty-first century. “The network” may feel synonymous with the internet, but fantasies of interconnection over distance are far older than Facebook. We will begin by turning our collective eye to Christianity, whose notion of the *corpus mysticum* (“mystical body”) describes both Christ’s miraculous body and the group of believers constituted by that body. We will proceed to trace what many have understood as the modern secularization of the network through technologies such as the printing press, the railway, and the computer. We will also turn our attention to the foundational role that textiles and women have played in our understanding. In taking up the digital and contemporary, we will consider not just the rise of social media (both generally and in specific iterations such as “Black Twitter”), but also of decentralized ledgers such as Bitcoin and Ethereum.

Our work will be interdisciplinary by nature: over the semester, we will analyze a variety of objects, including Latin poetry, medieval illuminations, seventeenth-century texts on telepathy, epistolary novels, and cryptocurrency white papers. Reading historical expressions of the network alongside the theoretical attempts that were made to understand them, we will seek to describe our increasingly interconnected present through the past that produced it. A sign of spiritual connection and dystopian surveillance, of meaningful contact and signal lost amongst the noise, the network remains a singular figure for our hopes and fears about what it means to communicate.