**Course Title:** Mimesis in Modernity

**Course Instructor:** John Vanderheide (Department of English and Cultural Studies, Huron University College)

**Course Term:** Fall preferably

**Rationale:**
The core theme of mimesis allows a wide-ranging survey of modern theoretical-critical writings, covering important figures, historical schools and periods from the beginning of the twentieth century to the present. In their renewed interest in mimesis, the writers we will study address a number of key domains of theoretical-critical inquiry: aesthetics, history, ontology and (identity) politics. This course will provide students with an opportunity to read in a wide variety of theoretical-critical discourses and to develop their interdisciplinarity further.

**Course Description:**
This course focuses upon the critical and theoretical revival in modernity of the ancient idea of *mimesis* (and its various cognates imitation, copy, reproduction, representation, realism, becoming similar, becoming other, etc.).

We will study a variety of writers from distinct schools and periods of modern intellectual history who have all made their own autonomous or semiautonomous uses of the idea. These figures represent groups such as The Frankfurt School, and cultural periods such as The Harlem Renaissance and May ’68. And their writings span the discourses of Marxism, psychoanalysis, critical race theory, gender and sexuality studies, poststructuralism, postcolonialism, cultural anthropology and speculative realism.

Since among these writers there is no one common usage of (or interest in) the idea of mimesis, we will focus rather on the particular philosophical, cultural and political problems that prompted each to adopt and adapt ideas of mimesis in the first place. In some cases, these problems prompt a reformulation of mimesis as a workable concept in some domain of inquiry, aesthetic, political or otherwise. In other cases, they prompt a critique of mimesis as ideology, false problem, or inadequate solution.

As our readings will show, mimesis can signal many things: whether aesthetically, as a meditation on realism, or the technological reproduction of art; ontologically, as a meditation on the meaning of desire and its contagion; or politically, as an antiessentialist meditation on the formation and maintenance of subjectivity and identity. In studying the modern usages of this ancient concept, it is hoped that students will create new connections among these prevalent domains of modern theoretical inquiry.
Possible primary readings, categorized and alphabetized:

Mimesis in The Frankfurt School before and after the Shoah
Adorno, Theodore. *Aesthetic Theory* (selections)
Adorno, Theodore and Max Horkheimer. *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (selections)
Auerbach. *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (selections)

Mimesis before and after The Harlem Renaissance
Hurston, Zora Neale. “Characteristics of Negro Expression”
Jones, LeRoi (Amiri Baraka). *Blues People* (selections)

Mimesis in French Thought before and after May ‘68
Caillois, Roger. “Mimicry and Legendary Psychaesthenia”
Deleuze, Gilles. *Cinema 1 & Cinema 2* (selections)
Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (selections)
Derrida, Jacques. “Economimesis”
Girard, René. *Violence and the Sacred* (selections)
Irigaray, Luce. *The Sex Which is Not One* (selections)

Mimesis in Post-French, Post-Frankfurt Thought
Agamben, Giorgio. *Homo Sacer* (selections)
Bhabha, Homi. “Of Mimicry and Man”
Brassier, Ray. *Nihil Unbound* (selections)
Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble* (selections)
Chow, Rey. “Sacrifice, Mimesis, and the Theorizing of Victimhood”
Taussig, Michael. *Mimesis and Alterity*

Possible Schedule:

Week 1: Introduction to the course
Weeks 2-4: Mimesis and the Frankfurt School
Week 5-6: Mimesis and the Harlem Renaissance
Week 7-10: Mimesis and Modern French Thought
Weeks 11-13: Mimesis and Post-French, Post-Frankfurt Thought