

Theory and Criticism 9500A

Instructor: John Vanderheide

Office: A203 (Huron University College)

Office Hours: Thursdays 11:30-12:30 or by appt.

Classes: Fridays 10:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m.

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 in the U.S. and May '68 in France. And their writings span the discourses of Marxism, psychoanalysis, critical race theory, gender and sexuality studies, poststructuralism, postcolonialism, philosophical 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.

Course Materials

All course readings will be provided to students in pdf form or photocopy. For those who wish print copies of larger texts, the following have been ordered and are available for purchase at UWO Bookstore:

- Adorno, Theodore. *Aesthetic Theory*
- Adorno, Theodore and Max Horkheimer. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble*.
- Chow, Rey. *The Protestant Ethnic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.
- Gates, Jr. Henry Louis. *The Signifying Monkey*
- Girard, René. *Violence and The Sacred*
- Irigaray, Luce. *This Sex Which Is Not One*
- Taussig, Michael. *Mimesis and Alterity*

Method of Evaluation

Attendance/Participation

Weight: 10%

Due: Ongoing

Description: A reflection of attendance, preparedness and participation in seminar discussions. If a student misses more than 2 classes without documented illness or compassionate grounds, they will forfeit this portion of the course grade.

Short Essay (Frankfurt School, College of Sociology, Early Psychoanalysis)

Weight: 20%

Due: October 5, 2018

Length: 5-8 pages

Description: In this short essay, students will take up one or more of the selected thinkers from the first five weeks of class, examining and/or applying their corresponding philosophical, aesthetic, anthropological or psychoanalytic usages of mimesis (Benjamin, Adorno, Adorno and Horkheimer, Auerbach, Caillois, Lacan).

Seminar

Weight: 30%

Due: Ongoing (Weeks 6-13)

Length: 60 minutes

Description: The seminar will consist of a critical engagement with the given text under discussion in the given week. Students must turn in an informally written version of the seminar the following week as well as any PowerPoint presentation (if used). Failure to deliver the seminar on the due date will result in an automatic 10% deduction. At the beginning of term, students will select week of seminar.

Research Paper

Weight: 40%

Due: December 17, 2018

Length: 20-25 pages

Description: The research paper must take up one or more of the texts discussed in the course, and have the idea of mimesis as an integral component. Students may propose a research paper on philosophical, aesthetic, anthropological or psychoanalytic topics not directly addressed in the course material or class. All topics need to be approved by the instructor in advance of the due date.

Statement on Academic Offences

Scholastic offenses are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site:

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf

Policy on Incompletes

A grade of Incomplete will be granted only in consultation with the director of the Centre.

Class Schedule:

Week 1 (Sept 7): Walter Benjamin

1. "On Language as Such and On The Language of Man" (Benjamin, pdf)
2. "Fate and Character" (Benjamin, pdf)
3. "On Astrology" (Benjamin, pdf)
4. "Doctrine of the Similar" (Benjamin, pdf)
5. "On The Mimetic Faculty" (Benjamin, pdf)
6. "Problems in the Sociology of Language" (Benjamin, pdf)
7. "Consciousness-Raising or Redemptive Criticism—The Contemporaneity of Walter Benjamin" (Habermas, pdf)
8. "Benjamin, Wittgenstein, and Philosophical Anthropology: A Reevaluation of the Mimetic Faculty" (Ogden, pdf)

Week 2 (Sept 14): Walter Benjamin

1. "The Work of Art in The Age of Its Technological Reproducibility" (Second Version) (Benjamin, pdf)
2. "Beauty and Semblance" (Benjamin, pdf)
3. "On Semblance" (Benjamin, pdf)
4. "The Knowledge That The First Material On Which The Mimetic Faculty Tested Itself" (Benjamin, pdf)
5. "The Significance of Beautiful Semblance" (Benjamin, pdf)
6. "Theory of Distraction" (Benjamin, pdf)
7. "Walter Benjamin's Philosophy of Critical Experience: From The Romantic Artwork To The Disillusioning of Mimesis" (Ross, pdf)

Week 3 (Sept 21): Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer, Erich Auerbach

1. *Dialectic of Enlightenment* ("Excursus I: Odysseus or Myth and Enlightenment," "Elements of Anti-Semitism: Limits of Enlightenment") (Adorno and Horkheimer, pdf available)
2. "Odysseus' Scar" (Auerbach, pdf)
3. "The *Thanatos* of Enlightenment" (Brassier, pdf)

Week 4 (Sept 28): Adorno, Auerbach

1. *Aesthetic Theory* ("Toward A Theory of the Artwork" and other selections) (Adorno, pdfs available)
2. *Mimesis* ("Odysseus' Scar," "The Brown Stocking")
3. "Aesthetic Truth as the Mimesis of False Consciousness in Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*" (Ross, pdf)

Week 5 (Oct 5): Roger Caillois, Jacques Lacan

1. "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia" (Caillois, pdf)

2. "The Mirror Stage as Formative of The Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience" (Lacan pdf)
3. "What is a Picture?" (Lacan pdf)
4. "Artist—Sorcerers: Mimicry, Magic and Hysteria" (Lomas)
5. "The College of Sociology and the Institute of Social Research" (Weingrad pdf)

FALL READING BREAK (OCT 8-12)

Week 6 (Oct 19): Jacques Derrida

1. "Economimesis" (Derrida, pdf)
2. "The Theatre of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation" (Derrida, pdf)
3. "Kant's Sunshine" (Klein, pdf)

Week 7 (Oct 26): Luce Irigaray

1. *The Sex Which Is Not One* ("The Power of Discourse and The Subordination of The Feminine," "Questions") (Irigaray, pdf available)
2. *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* ("The Invisible of The Flesh") (Irigaray, pdf available)
3. "The Diabolic Strategy of Mimesis" (Kozel, pdf)
4. "Irigaray's Mimicry and The Problem of Essentialism" (Xu, pdf available)

Week 8 (Nov 2): Judith Butler

1. *Gender Trouble* ("Subversive Bodily Acts") (Butler, pdf available)
2. "Imitation and Gender Insubordination" (Butler, pdfs available)
3. *Bodies That Matter* ("Gender is Burning") (Butler, pdf available)

Week 9 (Nov 9): René Girard

1. *Violence and The Sacred* ("From Mimetic Desire to The Monstrous Double") (Girard, pdf available)
2. "Mimesis and Sexuality" (Girard, pdf)
3. "Sacrifice, Mimesis, and the Theorizing of Victimhood" (Chow, pdf)

Week 10 (Nov 16): Michael Taussig

1. *Mimesis and Alterity* (Chapters 1-5) (Taussig, pdf available)
2. "Postcolonialism, Anthropology, and the Magic of Mimesis" (Huggan)

Week 11 (Nov 23): Zora Neale Hurston, Henry Louis Gates, Jr.

1. "Characteristics of Negro Expression" (Hurston, pdf)
2. *The Signifying Monkey* ("A Myth of Origins," "Zora Neale Hurston and the Speakerly Text") (Gates)

Week 12 (Nov 30): Homi Bhabha, Derek Walcott

1. "The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry?" (Walcott, pdf)
2. "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse" (Bhabha, pdf)

Week 13 (Dec. 7): Rey Chow

1. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* ("The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism," "Keeping Them in Their Place: Coercive Mimeticism and Cross-Ethnic Representation") (Chow)