

UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK

Summer examinations 2017/18

Literary and Cultural Theory - FINALISTS

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Time allowed: Two hours  
Seen Examination

Answer TWO questions, ONE from Section A and ONE from Section B. Do not repeat material from your answer in Section A in your answer in Section B.

Do not substantially repeat material from assessed or unassessed essays, or between exam answers.

Read carefully the instructions on the answer book and make sure that the particulars required are entered fully on each answer book used.

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**Section A:** Answer ONE question.

1. Foucault concedes in *Discipline and Punish* (1975) that there has been a certain 'reduction in penal severity in the last 200 years', a certain 'diminution of intensity' (p. 16). For him this has nothing to do with justice or law becoming more humane. What is gained by Foucault's insistence that, rather than focusing on 'progress' or 'regression', we should identify instead a change in the social logic of punishment? What is lost by this insistence?

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2. Discuss the complexities and contradictions that attend the idea of 'free time' as Adorno discusses it in his essay of that title.

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3. 'In western Europe today, the capitalist exploitation of film obstructs the human being's legitimate claim to being reproduced. The claim is also obstructed, incidentally, by unemployment, which excludes large masses from production – the process in which their primary entitlement to be reproduced would lie. Under these circumstances, the film industry has an overriding interest in stimulating the involvement of the masses through illusionary displays and ambiguous speculations. To this end it has set in motion an immense publicity machine, in the service of which it has placed the careers and love lives of the stars; it has organized polls; it has held beauty contests. All this in order to distort and corrupt the original and justified interest of the masses in film – an interest in understanding themselves and therefore their class. Thus, the same is true of film capital in particular as of fascism in general: a compelling urge toward new social opportunities is being clandestinely exploited in the interests of a property-owning minority' (Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility', 34). Discuss Benjamin's analysis of film and the film industry in this passage in connection with his remarks on the aestheticising of politics and the politicising of art.

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Continued

4. 'Capital is dead labour which, vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks. The time during which the worker works is the time during which the capitalist consumes the labour-power he has bought from him. If the worker consumes his disposable time for himself, he robs the capitalist' (Marx, 'The Working Day', *Capital* Vol. 1, p. 342). Discuss Marx's use of rhetorical strategies (e.g., his use here of the trope of vampirism) in his chapter on 'The Working Day'.

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5. Which of the two parts of Mike Davis' essay, 'Who Will Build the Ark?' – the part entitled 'Pessimism of the Intellect' or the part entitled 'Optimism of the Imagination' – do you feel has the greater force? Explain your answer.

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6. '[N]ot all labor takes the form of wage-labor' (Haug, 'The "Four-in-One Perspective"', p. 119). How does Haug use this observation to ground her 'Manifesto for a more just life'?

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**Section B: Answer ONE question.**

1. 'Violence, above all environmental violence, needs to be seen – and deeply considered – as a contest not only over space, or bodies, or labor, or resources, but also over time' (Nixon, *Slow Violence*). 'The only historian capable of fanning the spark of hope in the past is the one who is firmly convinced that even the dead will not be safe from the enemy if he is victorious' (Benjamin, 'On the Concept of History'). Discuss Nixon's presentation of time and slow violence in light of Benjamin's concept of history.

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2. 'Mastering or intervening actively in the production of volatility... entails manipulation of taste and opinion, either through being a fashion leader or by so saturating the market with images as to shape the volatility to particular ends. This means, in either case, the construction of new sign systems and imagery, which is itself an important aspect of the postmodern condition – one that needs to be considered from several different angles. To begin with, advertising and media images... have come to play a very much more integrative role in cultural practices and now assume a much greater importance in the growth dynamics of capitalism. Advertising, moreover, is no longer built around the idea of informing or promoting in the ordinary sense, but is increasingly geared to manipulating desires and tastes through images that may or may not have anything to do with the product to be sold... If we stripped modern advertising of direct reference to the three themes of money, sex, and power there would be very little left. Furthermore, images have, in a sense, themselves become commodities. This phenomenon has led Baudrillard... to argue that Marx's analysis of commodity production is outdated because capitalism is now predominantly concerned with the production of signs, images, and sign systems rather than with commodities themselves. The transition he points to is important, though there are in fact no serious difficulties in extending Marx's theory of commodity production to cope with it' (Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, p. 287). Discuss, with reference to ANY THREE theorists you have read this year.

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3. Several of the theorists we have read in this module foreground personal experience in different ways as a category or dimension of critical practice. Referring to AT LEAST TWO such theorists, discuss how the personal is an important category of analysis in their work, a place or reference, or point of departure for their arguments. What is useful about the resort to the personal? What are the limitations or pitfalls of this move?

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4. Write an essay in which you place Horkheimer and Adorno's concept of 'the culture industry' in dialogue with the work of ANY TWO additional theorists you have read this year.

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5. Discuss the status of the 'subject' or the 'individual', with reference to the work of ANY THREE theorists you have read this year.

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6. How do you understand the relationship between 'modernity' and aesthetic 'modernism'? Discuss, with reference to ANY TWO theorists you have read this year.

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**(End)**