

UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK

Summer examinations 2017-18

Explorations in Critical Theory and Cultural Studies

Time allowed: Two hours
Seen Examination

Answer TWO questions, ONE from Section A and ONE from 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 on each answer book used.

Section A: Answer ONE question.

1. 'Wrong life cannot be lived rightly' (Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, p. 39). Discuss.

2. 'The only philosophy which can be responsibly practiced in the face of despair is the attempt to contemplate all things as they would present themselves from the standpoint of redemption' (Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, p. 247). What meaning can we give to this evocation of 'redemption' in Adorno's work?

3. 'This latest mutation in space – postmodern hyperspace – has finally succeeded in transcending the capacities of the individual human body to locate itself, to organize its immediate surrounds perceptually, and cognitively to map its position in a mappable external world' (Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 52). Write an essay on the idea of 'cognitive mapping' as Jameson develops it in his 'Postmodernism' essay.

4. Discuss the work done by the concept of the 'Third World' in Jameson's thinking about postmodernity.

5. '[T]he trouble with close reading (in all of its incarnations, from the new criticism to deconstruction) is that it necessarily depends on an extremely small canon. This may have become an unconscious and invisible premise by now, but it is an iron one nevertheless: you invest so much in individual texts *only* if you think that very few of them really matter. Otherwise, it doesn't make sense. And if you want to look beyond the canon (and of course, world literature will do so: it would be absurd if it didn't!) close reading will not do it. It's not designed to do it, it's designed to do the opposite. At bottom, it's a theological exercise – very solemn treatment of very few texts taken very seriously – whereas what we really need is a little pact with the devil: we know how to read texts, now let's learn how *not* to read them. Distant reading: where distance... *is a condition of knowledge*: it allows you to focus on units

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that are much smaller or much larger than the text: devices, themes, tropes – or genres and systems. And if, between the very small and the very large, the text itself disappears, well, it is one of those cases when one can justifiably say, Less is more. If we want to understand the system in its entirety, we must accept losing something. We always pay a price for theoretical knowledge: reality is infinitely rich; concepts are abstract, are poor. But it's precisely this "poverty" that makes it possible to handle them, and therefore to know. This is why less is actually more' (Moretti, 'Conjectures on World Literature', pp. 57-58). Discuss.

6. 'The tree describes the passage from unity to diversity: one tree, with many branches: from Indo-European, to dozens of different languages. The wave is the opposite: it observes uniformity engulfing an initial diversity: Hollywood films conquering one market after another (or English swallowing language after language). Trees need geographical *discontinuity* in order to branch off from each other (languages must first be separated in space, just like animal species); waves dislike barriers, and thrive on geographical *continuity* (from the viewpoint of a wave, the ideal world is a pond). Trees and branches are what nation-states cling to; waves are what markets do... And as world culture oscillates between the two mechanisms, its products are inevitably composite ones. Compromises, as in Jameson's law. That's why the law works: because it intuitively captures the intersection of the two mechanisms. Think of the modern novel: certainly a wave... but a wave that runs into the branches of local traditions, and is always significantly transformed by them' (Moretti, 'Conjectures on World Literature', p. 67). Tree? Or Wave? Or both? Which of these approaches to literature is likely to yield the best results, in your view?
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7. 'The habitus is not only a structuring structure, which organizes practices and the perception of practices, but also a structured structure: the principle of division into logical classes which organizes the perception of the social world is itself the product of internalization of the division into social classes' (Bourdieu, *Distinction*, p. 170).

'As a system of practice-generating schemes which expresses systematically the necessity and freedom inherent in its class condition and the difference constituting that position, the habitus apprehends differences between conditions, which it grasps in the form of differences between classified, classifying practices (products of other habitus), in accordance with principles of differentiation which, being themselves the product of these differences, are objectively attuned to them and therefore tend to perceive them as natural' (Bourdieu, *Distinction*, p. 172).

How do you understand the Bourdieusian concept of *habitus*?

8. 'Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier' (Bourdieu, *Distinction*, p. 6). Discuss.

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Section B: Answer ONE question.

9. Examine and compare the theories of intellectuals and intellectual practice to be found in Adorno and Bourdieu.

10. 'A beginning is made [when we grasp]... the once-famous names no longer as characters larger than life or great souls of one kind or another, but rather – non- and anti-anthropomorphically – as *careers*, that is to say as objective situations in which an ambitious young artist around the turn of the century could see the objective possibility of turning himself into the “greatest painter” (or poet or novelist or composer) “of the age.” That objective possibility is now given, not in subjective talent as such or some inner richness or inspiration, but rather in strategies of well-nigh military character, based on superiority of technique and terrain, assessment of the counterforces, a shrewd maximization of one’s own specific and idiosyncratic resources. This approach to “genius,” however, which we now associate with the name of Pierre Bourdieu, should be sharply distinguished from a debunking or demystifying *ressentiment* like what Tolstoy seems to have felt about Shakespeare, and, *mutatis mutandis*, about the role of “great men” generally in history. Despite Tolstoy, I think we still do admire the great generals (along with their counterparts, the great artists), but the admiration has been displaced from their innate subjectivity to their historical flair, their capacity to assess the “current situation” and to evaluate its potential permutation system on the spot. This is, it seems to me, a properly postmodern revision in biographical historiography, which characteristically substitutes the horizontal for the vertical, space for time, system for depth’ (Jameson, ‘Secondary Elaborations’, pp. 306-07). What happens to the Romantic idea of ‘genius’ in the work of ANY TWO of the theorists you have read this year?

11. Is Jameson’s understanding of ‘Third-World Literature in the Age of Multinational Capitalism’ compatible with the theory of ‘narrative diffusion’ advanced by Moretti in his various writings since the mid-1990s?

12. '[T]he literature around us is now unmistakably a planetary system. The question is not really *what* we should do: the question is *how*. What does it mean, studying world literature. How do we do it?' (Moretti, 'Conjectures on World Literature', p. 54). Compare the literary critical methodologies of ANY TWO of the theorists you have read this year.

13. '[F]orms are the abstract of social relationships'. This formulation (by the Brazilian theorist, Roberto Schwarz) is often cited by Moretti. Focusing on ANY TWO of the theorists you have read this year, explain why they privilege *form*, rather than *content*, as the locus of the historicity of literary works.

(End)