

## **M.A. Exam Questions 2009**

### **Two-hour question in Rhetoric & Public Culture**

The pre-modern origins of rhetorical theory—from Plato, Isocrates, and Aristotle to Cicero—address a range of considerations about the political purpose and value, genres and forms, and modes of production of persuasive discourse in public forums, including venues of democratic contestation and deliberation. From that time forward, these formative notions have been framed and reframed according to changing cultural assumptions, intellectual orientations, and political formations. In the contemporary climate of post-structural and postmodern social theory, rhetoric has been adapted by theorists and critics such as Kenneth Burke, Chaim Perelman, Judith Butler, and others to address questions about democracy and rhetorical culture, political style, publics and public spheres, issues of identity, social movements, and the role of criticism in social change. One might say that there has been a shift in rhetorical sensibilities but also a continuity of thought about the nature of rhetorical practice. The question, then, is how might the rich repertoire of pre-modern rhetorical thought contribute substantially to critiquing productively contemporary democratic culture and practice? You should draw substantively from relevant sources on the M.A. reading list to address this question with theoretical sophistication, critical purpose, and a particular problematic of democratic culture in mind.

### **Two-hour question in Film & Media Studies**

Representation—the production of meaning through images, language and discourse—occupies a central role in media studies. What do media scholars mean when they refer to “the politics of representation?” Discuss how media scholars have interrogated the politics of representation using any three of the following categories: race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and nationality. Please provide specific examples from the readings to substantiate your answer.

### **Two-hour question for Performance & Ethnography**

Ethnographers have been concerned with linking what have typically been considered microlevel exchanges (e.g., conversations, bounded performances, ritual events) to macrolevel processes (e.g., relationships of power and authority, organizations of space and time, conceptions of history and ideology, or even ways of understanding the public sphere itself). Drawing on a range of readings from the performance-ethnography list, discuss specific ways in which the study of performance can bridge and even challenge the micro/macro distinction. How, in other words, do performances both respond to and help to shape larger social realities?

### **One-hour question for Rhetoric & Public Culture and Film & Media Studies**

Film/media theory and rhetorical theory share a critical interest in visual culture but work from different perspectives and intellectual traditions with different critical categories and purposes. Drawing from sources on the M.A. reading list, address the following question: Where visual culture intersects with image politics, what are the scholarly contributions that a media/film scholar might aim to make in comparison and contrast to the contributions a rhetorical scholar might aim to make? Develop your answer with reference to a particular intersection between visual culture and image politics but with the larger purpose of generalizing beyond your specific example.

### **One-hour question in Rhetoric & Public Culture and Performance & Ethnography**

Both rhetorical and performance studies, as distinct but related projects, engage ritual as a key category of cultural production but do so from differing centers of interest. Performance studies scholars and rhetorical scholars also turn to ethnographies, albeit in different ways, to shed light on cultural practices. With reference to ritual, discuss how performance studies scholars and rhetorical scholars might employ ethnography in ways that converge with and diverge from the central interests of their respective fields. How do these convergences and divergences open up or restrict your theoretical understandings of ritual as rhetorical, performative moments? In other words, what kinds of scholarly knowledge about ritual does each approach to ethnography seek to produce? What kinds of cultural critique does each seek to produce? How might their differences be complementary?

### **One-hour question in Film & Media Studies and Performance & Ethnography**

Ethnography is increasingly being taken up within media studies. All too often, however, ethnography is considered reductively as “method” (e.g., interviews, participant observation techniques). Referring to at least one reading from the performance/ethnography list and one reading from the media list, discuss how you might develop a critical ethnographic approach to media studies that carries ethnography beyond method. Areas you might consider include (but are not limited to):

- participant selection
- interactions and power dynamics between researcher and participants
- narrations of the dialogic encounter
- political subjectivities of researchers