QUESTION BANK

MAJOR GENERAL QUESTIONS

 "World politics consists of a great variety of interactions in which actors   communicate with the intention to influence other actors. The effectiveness of this interaction depends largely on the quality, credibility and efficiency of the transborder movement of information (Taylor, p.57)". Discuss.

What do the concepts of "hegemony" and "public sphere" contribute to understanding contemporary "cultural imperialism"? Be sure to define the concepts and support your discussion with examples.

The content of communications media are often described and analysed as "texts". Does this characterisation adequately describe media artifacts? Are narrative and genre theories from other disciplines such as literary studies suitable for studying media, or are other models more appropriate to the investigation of media in general or with respect to specific media?

In what ways has the impact of television as a central cultural agent been altered or displaced by the emergence of new technologies of communication?

Describe the core characteristics of the "Toronto" school of communication, and indicate the ways in which contemporary theorists both share these traits and depart from them. Are differences the result of historical transformation?

While some cultural theorists take a positive view of the proliferation of new technologies and of their integration into capitalist society, others offer cautionary comments or more desperate warnings. The criticisms often have had to do with the belief that technologies affect our bodies. Develop these positions, with attention to ways in which the relationship between the body and technology has been theorized. How would you articulate your own position in this debate?

If you were to design a survey course focussing on the body in cultural theory, which theorists and readings would you choose and why? How would you structure and develop the course?

Culture and media studies of identity and subjectivity have challenged unifying or essentializing notions within media representations as highly selective, ideologically shaped portrayals of the social order. Discuss the theoretical roots of this critique across theories of subjectivity and identity-formation, and consider whether recent approaches to subjectivity, such as cosmopolitanism, transnationalism and hybridity, offer any new perspectives on the subject.

How did communication and cultural studies literature address the concept of culture as it related to subjectivity and cultural policy under conditions of modernity? How is this changing under

conditions of late or postmodernity? In your answer consider the intersections and divergences within British Cultural Studies, Foucauldian Cultural Studies and Critical Multicultural Studies.

Some scholars have suggested that under conditions of neoliberalism, Canadian cultural policy has ceased to be a viable field of study. Do you agree or disagree? What theoretical and political presumptions underlay this position and how would you defend or refute them?

The dichotomy between political economy and cultural studies approaches has been continually disavowed, yet, it continually resurfaces in the scholarly literature. Does the rearticulation of culture as a 'resource' in any way change the terms of this debate, and if so, how?

Compare the manner in which Harold Innis and Marshall McLuhan understand the role of media in the formation of culture.

Freud's definition of the unconscious refers to individual psychic structures and forces that determine the individual's action and personality. The linguist Ferdinand de Saussure also has a conception of the unconscious, one in which the unconscious acts as the relationship that determines language; this is later developed in an explicitly Freudian vein by Lacan and his followers. In Benjamin's concept of the unconscious, return is implied in the dynamic of dialectical images. For Benjamin, the unconscious is the site where the individual's thought processes find a symbolic home. As a result, alienation is a fundamentally unconscious phenomenon. Discuss the similarities and the differences between these three models of the unconscious and their relevance to contemporary cultural studies.

The approaches of political studies, and in particular political economy on the one hand; and cultural studies on the other have often been posed as being at odds with one another, especially in their conceptual and methodological intents. Compare and contrast the two approaches, delineating the dominant terms of the 'debate.' Consider the ways in which a combination of political economy and cultural studies best serves as a means to study city spaces.

Situate Donna Haraway's pivotal Cyborg Manifesto in relation to other postmodern critiques of modern humanism and talk about how her more recent work on human-animal relations engages with and extends (is more politically prescient than) concerns of 1989.

Compare and contrast the ideas and approach of Latour and Heidegger, inter alios, on the question concerning technology taking into consideration the social conditions and intellectual foundations which influenced their thinking.

With reference to the principal themes, debates, and theoretical and/or methodological issues, define "cultural studies" as an object of study and articulate the importance of gender within the field.

What does an examination of scientific theories of gender difference bring to our understanding of gender in cultural studies?

What are the unique contributions of, and key debates within, communication studies in the analysis of globalization?

Survey and discuss the changing relationship between identity and place within globalization debates. If "the local" is a product of globalization itself, what are the theoretical and political challenges of rooting an analysis of communication and culture in a local context?

There are tendencies within discourses of technology and culture to claim either that technology is a neutral tool, or that it is an independent and powerful cause of cultural change. Discuss and critically assess at least two major positions on the question of technology that provide alternative critical frameworks for understanding the relationship between technological change and socio-cultural transformation.

What are the risks and rewards of theories that use a relatively linear historical approach to the development and dissemination of forms of media technology versus those that involve a more genealogical and/or non-liner approach to technological development? How do such debates resonate in terms of the study of a specific realm of media technology (e.g., audio, visual, or print technology)?

What is the relationship between "communication" and "culture"? Define the terms and explore their relationship, with special attention to political communication.

"Media theory" is a sub-set of communication theory with its own distinctive set of problematics. What are the main debates and controversies in media theory today? (If you wish, you may focus on political communication.)

Gender and sexuality studies have renewed tensions in theorizing embodiment. To what extent have these critical perspectives refined Communication and Cultural Studies scholarship?

You are asked to deliver a lecture in an advanced undergraduate course in communication studies. The topic is the contribution of cultural studies approaches and political economy approaches to the study of communication and culture. Summarize the main points you would make. Identify specific thinkers as exemplars of each choice and justify your choices.

How useful is the concept of narrative as an organizing principle for the study of communication and culture? Give examples of insights that can be derived from the concept.

In the study of communication and culture, what methodological and theoretical issues divide those who advocate a political economy approach from those who defend a discourse analysis approach?

Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the various theories of media audience agency. What are the major contributions of Marxian and Critical Theory to our understanding of cultural meaning-making. What have been the major criticisms of this tradition from the standpoint of post-structuralist and postmodern theory?

Is there a distinctively Canadian approach to cultural studies? What have been the major contributions of Canadian theorists? How might the Canadian approach differ from that of American cultural theory?

The idea of diaspora was traditionally associated with the idea of a forced displacement followed by a strong emotional connection to a specific homeland. How has the idea of diaspora evolved in

the social science and humanities literatures? Is it now too general a concept to be useful for consideration of communications patterns and cultural meanings and practices? If not, what dimensions of the concept still have heuristic value and why? Answer using examples.

Communications research often seems divided between those concerned with structural relations and technological form on the one hand, and analysis of symbolic content of media artifacts on the other. To what degree does this bifurcation signal a fundamental incommensurability in approaches, or does this historical split mask ideological conflicts that are potentially subject to reconciliation?

Modernity is often portrayed as engendering a breach in communitarian relations. Media are often viewed as either initiating or exacerbating this fracture, or the instruments through which a reconstruction of human sociality might be undertaken. Do the authors you've studied hold out the prospect of some sort of social solidarity via media, or view media as distorting or militating against the possibility of authentic relations?

How has cultural policy in Canada been used to manage dissent? What role have various cultural agencies played in this process? How might such practices have affected artistic and cultural freedom in Canada?

Why has public ownership been such an important instrument in the development of Canadian radio and television? Why is the CBC/SRC not referred to at home or abroad as "state radio?"

MAJOR SPECIFIC COMPREHENSIVE QUESTIONS

International trade regimes have forced nation states to address intellectual property as an economic, rather than a cultural policy issue. Explore this proposition and consider what implications this might have for the ways in which cultural studies approaches the study of commodities and their circulation.

How does pleasure and emotion problematize or expand the notion of the public sphere vis a vis the cinematic experience? How might this change in different public spheres (as differentiated by gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, language, religion, class, etc). Discuss at least two examples from your bibliography.

In what ways have postmodern ideas on the construction of subjectivity challenged and/or reinforced modernist thinking on race and gender?

Roland Barthes'"Mythology" is a semiotic study of cultural artifacts, which breaks their aesthetic shell to explain their ideological content. This theory had a huge impact on the study of culture, becoming one of the canonical texts of Cultural Studies. Jean Baudrillard, a contemporary of Barthes, also developed a foundational approach to the study of cultural objects (System of Objects, Towards a Political Economy of the Sign, Symbolic Exchange and Death). His political economy explains how the objects we exchange are devoid of anything but meaning, thus the dynamic is only one of simulation. Compare and criticize the two approaches to signs that have grown out of these two positions.

Policy makers are attracted to the idea of the creative class and new work structures and styles as an argument for increased support for culture and communications. Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of this argument.

Prior to the 1980s, standard political science textbooks paid scant attention to the media as political institutions or to communication processes. Today, most textbooks have at least a chapter on the media and political communication. What accounts for this shift? What are the main ideas presented in these texts with regard to the media and political communication?

The concepts of public sphere, civic competence and public opinion are often discussed in contemporary scholarly discourse as important aspects of democracy and active citizenship. What are the main elements of this discourse? How useful have these concepts proved to be in advancing our understanding of democracy?

Describe and discuss the various approaches to theorizing labour in communication and culture, along with their strengths and weaknesses. What is missing from these discussions? Is it possible to speak of a "labour theory of communication"?

Summarize the changing role of communication and culture in the production of Canadian nationhood. How, and to what extent, has their role changed in a transnational media environment?

Much of the theorizing about communication in non-Western societies has been informed by the concept of "modernization." Describe this model of development and the role of communication in

it. In general terms, outline the criticisms that caused this model to all out of favour. How have concepts of "development communications" been modified to respond to these criticisms?

How has the concept of the virtual or virtuality challenged theories of identity and embodiment?

How does research on identities and cybercultures challenge understandings of nature and technology in Cultural Studies research?

Explain what is meant by the argument that "there is no meaning outside of representation", making reference to the works of Hall, Lacan and Althusser.

Discuss how the medical model of disability and the medicalization of social phenomena inform health policy formation and communication to influence the lives of disabled persons. Include an explanation of how efficiency rhetoric as expressed by health administrators, service providers and policy may be particularly problematic for persons who live with impairments.

Over the last two decades many theorists in social science and the humanities have celebrated or bemoaned the 'death' of the nation state and its sovereignty. More recently, scholars have become attentive to the need to theorize the increasing mobility of people, ideas, and goods. This area of studies has been loosely grouped under the rubric of transnationalism. What implications does this scholarship have for the field of communications and cultural studies? Does it challenge or transform any of the central tenets of the discipline (in the case of communication) or the interdisciplinary field (in the case of cultural studies)? Answer this question by focusing on issues of subjectivity, ideology, or hegemony.

It has been argued that transnationalism should be studied, not as a concept, but as a field of practice. What specific cultural practices should be given priority in the field of transnational culture and why? Is a general answer to this question possible? Answer this question by focusing upon issues of subjectivity, ideology, or hegemony.

De Certeau maintains that "A migrational, or metaphorical, city slips into the clear text of the planned and readable city" (93). How do "ordinary practitioners of the city," such as de Certeau's walkers and Benjamin's flâneurs, write and/or write against the planned and readable city? To what extent are such metaphors of inscription relevant to understanding urban experience in a digital era?

What are the main areas of theoretical concern that arise from the development of global media corporations and the emergence of a global media system?

Gerard Filion, among others, has argued that Canadian cultural policy, in its attempt to promote a pan-Canadian cultural identity, has in fact been a major contributor to the development of Quebecois nationalism over the past half century. Assess this argument, giving specific examples, considering both "high" culture and popular culture. Be sure to include references to relevant theoretical perspectives.

Please answer one of the following three questions, making reference to theorists such as P. Bourdieu and M. Foucault, as well as disability studies scholars such as M. Oliver, M. Priestly and feminists such as J. Morris. You should draw upon examples related to disability, impairment and home support as explored in the independent reading course. However, you may also wish to

provide a discussion related to the ways that impairment, disability, homelessness and culture intersect in ways relevant to your
thesis project.

MINOR QUESTIONS

Samuel Huntington's writings on the clash of civilizations are widely discussed. His central arguments could be seen as an application of theories of cultural identity to world politics. Discuss his ideas regarding the clash of civilizations in these terms. Do you agree his assumption that the West's universalist pretensions increasingly bring it into conflict with other civilizations? What role do the media and popular culture play in this model?

To what extent are youth in non-Western countries becoming part of a globalized youth culture? To what extent is this culture "inflected" or "localized" in non-Western cultures? What forms are cultural resistance taking? Do current theories provide adequate explanations for these developments.

What is the relationship between media technology and form? Are there specific (perhaps ontological) characteristics of media that determine their social form?

Do what are described as "new media" technologies entail "new theory" to account for their possible effects?

Structural linguistics and semiotics focus on abstracted systems of signs that circulate in the socio-cultural realm. French feminists responded to prevailing structuralist models by proposing new conceptions of signification that recuperate the lived body. Discuss these theoretical contributions and comment on some of the ways in which dance scholars have taken them up.

What materials would you use to teach an introductory Cultural Policy Theory course geared toward first-year graduate students? Specifically, why would you choose those materials and how would you organize them for study? Discuss in terms of various schools of thought and areas of debate.

Neoliberal discourse positions culture as a resource for socio-political and economic amelioration. Explore and evaluate the conditions of neoliberalism that have repositioned culture and the arts, and the ways in which arts and cultural policies, institutional structures and practices, and creative production seek legitimacy through economic, social and political utility.

Governments have historically turned to cultural policies as one means of creating and/or facilitating particular social imaginaries, and of managing public institutions and practices related to them. Since the 1990's state cultural policies have articulated "citizenship" as a particular social imaginary, aimed at supporting nation-based democracy. How have "social inclusion" and "social cohesion" cultural policy approaches contributed to imaginaries of national citizenship? Discuss in reference to top-down vs bottom-up theories of citizenship formation/expression.

To what extent might international indigenous claims be considered 'cultural' rights claims within the human rights framework under international law? What would be gained and what would be lost (for indigenous peoples and for others) in framing indigenous rights in this way?

 In what ways does postcolonial critique enable scholarship to move beyond a critique of Eurocentric historical narrative to offer alternative frameworks for considering the relationship between law and indigenous or 'traditional' social, cultural, political and economic systems? Does

this critique compromise the phenomena of 'rights' as a vehicle for achieving social justice? If so, why, and if not, why not?

Liberal cultural pluralism, multiculturalism (as theory and as policy), and transnationalism afford different perspectives upon cultural identity and nation-building. What implications does this have for the way we consider "cultural rights" and their provenance?

For Sergei Eisenstein the Cinema provides the perfect dialectical art form for combining art and science. Similarly, Walter Benjamin understands the cinema in terms of its capacity to create new perceptual modalities. Truth according to Benjamin is attained through the 'the death of intention'. Compare Eisenstein's dialectical materialism with Benjamin's theory of dialectical images. Pay particular attention to their different concepts of history. With this in mind, consider how each of them responded to the surrealist project.

Discuss the impact of new information technologies in the creation of a digital world and on the rise of a digital culture.

Where is digital culture located and how have digital technologies transformed the spaces and places of everyday life?

How do the food objects of industrialized agriculture themselves represent an institutional management of risk? What kinds of political subjects are constituted in their production and consumption?

How do official discourses on food enable or disable more vernacular or holistic understandings of food as cultural artifact?

 In Gender Trouble (1991) Judith Butler put forward the notion that gender is a performance and in her analysis she references Michael Foucault's interest in the relationship between sexuality and institutionalized power. Is Butler's contention that gender is performative applicable to masculinity and dance? In what ways might one apply Butler's theories to the study of dance and masculinity?

What is the relationship between dance, gender and performance in a communications and cultural studies context.

A recent call for papers on the question of "culture" included as possible topics the following list: "subculture studies; youth media production; hip hop in Canada; sound art and community radio; sampling and appropriation; recycling and repurposing; copyright/copyleft/open source/creative commons; YouTube, Facebook, Twitter; self-publishing; artist-run collectives; fine arts as research-creation; knitting clubs; thrifting; database and interactive narratives and media; UbuWeb; mobile technologies." Following this, how is one to understand the concept of "culture"? What are the limitations and possibilities of this kind of definition of culture for radical politics?

Ideology has been a key site of debate in cultural theory. With reference to specific writers listed in your bibliography, discuss the dimensions and key elements of this debate.

Marx's base/superstructure metaphor has been used by political economists to foreground process of economic production in an understanding of media and culture. How has this metaphor been taken up and contested by cultural theorists?

According to John Stokes, the literature at the turn of the last century is inherently interdisciplinary, "preoccupied by the relations between high and popular culture, one medium and another, art and life." Evaluate Stokes's definition with reference to works on the list.

How have feminist scholars of science and technology addressed the topic of the body as it pertains to such discourses as virtual realities, cyberspaces, genetic modification, space travel or artificial intelligence? What critiques and alternatives do they suggest?

What can the cyborg and other monstrous figures teach us about the boundaries of technological, human and organic existence? Discuss the ways some of the science and technology theorists engage with such liminal beings.

In Understanding Media, McLuhan argued that all technologies are prosthetic extensions of our own bodies. In his argument about what he terms the "Narcissus narcosis," he suggested that the prosthetic effects of technology bring about an attendant numbing of the correlated sense organs. Discuss this metaphor of numbing and the medical models McLuhan was drawing on to construct his ideas. Referring to several of your theorists, discuss the way the debate around pain and numbness illuminates broader arguments about postmodernity and technoliving.

With the popularity of representations of the self in virtual space, how might those who produce or participate in virtual spaces deal with the representation of difference along race, gender and other lines, without resorting to a shallow spectrum of stereotypes or identity tourism of the type that Nakamura traces? As a larger question, how can we explore a corpus that is not a totality or closed system, but also avoid accessorizing identity?

What are the challenges that governments face when developing policies relating to intellectual property in a time when creative works are both industry commodities and artifacts of cultural expression? Answer this question from a Canadian perspective.

One of the central concerns of contemporary media scholars is the ongoing trend toward the concentration of media ownership. What forms of media activism have proven to be most adept and successful at challenging this trend?

How do recent transformations in communications and media technologies invoke new modes of spatial experience? In your answer, elaborate in terms of critical scholarship on technology, space and place.

How would you theorize alternative or oppositional practice in the media production of space and place? Ground this discussion in relevant debates in critical media theory with respect to concepts of space and place.

How do auditory practices within the last century complicate the notion of 'music', and its distinction from 'silence', 'noise', and 'sound'? How are such categories ideologically driven? What are the implications for critical analysis of such distinctions—should they be rejected unconditionally or do they have a strategic value for the understanding of sound as a socio-cultural issue?

How have cultural studies' theoretical perspectives of technology, habitus, commodity, spatiality and temporality been transformed by the research on video games. Choose three of the concepts (technology, habitus, commodity, spatiality and temporality) to answer this question.

In his critical philosophy of technology, Langdon Winner maintains that technologies (such as computing, telephones, etc.) should be considered "forms of life". Arguing against the shortcomings of cause-effect assessments of these technologies, he posits an approach that helps us go beyond the more traditional study of impacts and side effects. As Winner observes, once introduced, the new worlds inevitably created by technologies can scarcely be thinkable without them. The puzzle for him is that "in our times...we so willingly sleepwalk through the process of reconstituting the conditions of human existence," a condition he refers to as "technological somnambulism." By means of a case study, discuss the implications of Winner's re-conceptualization of technology.

Underlying the debates on online gender identities is the assumption that identity construction free from   'real life' constraints is possible in cyberspace. Given the anonymity of online interaction, it is also assumed that egalitarian participation across gender and status is also a possibility. In the first case, identity is the issue; in the second, access. Discuss both these aspects of the en-gendering capacity of new technologies in light of current research and theory in both these areas.

Has cultural policy in Canada and Quebec sought to transform the social order or to replicate it? Why and how?

Clearly, then, the merger of governmentality and taste finds cultural policy dedicated to producing subjects via the formation of repeatable styles of conduct, either at the level of the individual or the public (Miller & Yudice, Cultural Policy, p.12). Discuss, in light of the Canadian experience.

Cyberspace (specifically the World Wide Web and the Internet) has been theorized as an environment capable of fostering new forms of community and/or reconfiguring existing practices of community (and the concomitant practices around identity and the body). With reference to the major scholarly positions on the nature of community and identity in cyberspace, explore the extent to which cyberspace does and does not affect the nature and practice of community and identity. In responding to this question, consider changes in the technologies of cyberspace (and associated technologies such as cell phones, web cams etc.). To what extent do early theorizations of cyberspace need to be re-considered in the present age of wireless technologies and increasingly hybrid spaces where the electronic meets the material? Where possible, include specific examples of technological practice in addition to relevant theoretical and historical material.

Pointing to such elements as prosthetic enhancements, disembodied consciousness, mobile identities, simulacra, and virtual realities, digital technologies have often been accused of being disembodying and dematerialized. Drawing on the writings of at least three theorists, discuss how this claim is or is not justified? If it is helpful, use examples from recent art works or films.

The content of communications media are often described and analyzed as "texts." Situate this approach historically. Is it an adequate way to describe media artifacts? Does such an approach allow for distinctions between word-based machines and image-based media?

Discuss the new in the expression 'new media'. Can it be argued that the circumstances surrounding the emergence of digital technologies for example, are truly new—i.e. represent a rupture with what has come before? In what way? With the constant and exponential changes in information technologies that represent global media, how can we distinguish between the new and the old (since everything is new)?

Choose two methodologically distinct approaches in the field of political economy and discuss concretely how they have been applied in communication research. How do each of these approaches illuminate the relationship between theory and method in the political economy tradition?

The concept of power is at the core of a cultural approach to communication. How are forms of control and empowerment enabled by communication networks such as the internet and the world wide web?

What is new about new media?

According to Ursula Franklin nature is not "just one more infrastructure in the real world

What part does the notion of 'experience' play in the methodology of feminist theory? In what ways does the inclusion of this concept, along with phenomenologies of embodiment, become a political act in itself?

If you were to construct an undergraduate course in Latin American cinema, what theoretical sources would you draw on? What theories and historical processes would constitute the syllabus overview? What rationale would underpin your synthesis of your research material into a comprehensible, dynamic and relevant historical overview? What audio-visual materials would be sourced for presentation? What written materials would be sourced for reading by students? What pedagogical philosophy would underpin the course?

What do Harold Innis' conceptions of space and time in 'The Bias of Communication' contribute to a critical understanding of the relations between print culture and network society?

Compare and contrast the use of the concept of frames in the social movement and social marketing literature.

Explain Louis Althusser's conceptualization of the relation of the subject and ideology. What does it tell us about our relationship to representation (broadly conceived) and our everyday conduct? If possible, speculate upon the potential benefits or limitations of this concept of ideology for an understanding of social movements.

What does Lacanian psychoanalytical theory have to offer an understanding of nationalism and national identity? In particular, what is the relevance (and what might be the limits) of Lacanian categories such as fantasy, Real, and jouissance to a theory of nationalism and national identity-formation?

Henry Jenkins in "Convergence Culture" suggests that "convergence is a word that manages to describe technological, industrial, cultural, and social changes depending on who's is speaking and what they think they are talking about." Should convergence be understood primarily as a

technological process bringing together multiple media functions within the same devices or does convergence represent a cultural shift that encourages consumers to seek out new information and make connections among dispersed media content?

Film studies has historically been an interdisciplinary endeavor filled with impressionist criticism and prescriptive theories that drew on a variety fields in sociology, pyschology, aesthetics and philosophy. Semiotic and psychoanalytic theories in the seventies and eighties challenged this lack of systematic study by focussing on texts, ideology and subjectivity. Situate and discuss the emergence of spectatorship as an area of study within the discipline and with respect to the concerns of Classical (Bazin) and Contemporary film theory (Metz, Baudry, Mulvey and others).

New information and communication technologies have created unprecedented opportunities for surveying individuals within society. Discuss how the emergence of technologically mediated surveillance regimes affect our daily lives. With regard to the Canadian context, how do issues of privacy and government regulation come into play? How do new forms of surveillance relate to social control and what impact might they have on democracy?

Discuss the role and the impact of Freud's theory of the unconscious and primary process thinking on the following avant-garde art movements: Dada, Surrealism, Abstract Expressionism, including Dada and Surrealist avant-garde cinema and the lyrical form in experimental cinema.

How have theorists conceptualized the role of film and other forms of visual culture in the production and experience of urban space? Discuss the relation between image and city with reference to the writings of at least three theorists.

Outline the ideas and practices underlying the distinction between administrative / institutional audience research and critical communication research. Consider both philosophical and methodological issues. Discuss the utility of these approaches in understanding the history of Canadian broadcasting and current issues. (Note that Berland has suggested that the distinction does not apply as well to Canada as to the U.S.)