

17 July 96

Race, Culture, and the Production of Knowledge
Comprehensive Area 3 for Monika Gagnon
Supervisor: Roy Miki, Department of English

Please answer two questions. You are at liberty to take issue with or to qualify the statements made in the questions you've chosen.

1. "Theories of race that do not account for its systemic role in the formation of dominant social and political relations often perpetuate the racial hierarchies they purport to undo." Discuss the implications of this statement and propose anti-racist strategies to avoid the reproduction of existing modes of thinking race.

2. a) For many writers and artists of colour, theoretical approaches to the effects of imperialism, colonialism, and oppression have to be connected to the textuality of the art or literary work. Discuss, in this context, the importance of what has been called "border writing" as a means of resistance and transformation.

OR

b) "For writers such as Trinh T. Minh-ha, Teresa Hak Kyung Cha, and Gloria Anzaldua, textual production functions as a strategic mode of undermining hegemonic boundaries of identity, history, and nation." Discuss the significance of this statement for devising a critical methodology appropriate for texts by writers of colour.

3. As Gayatri Spivak and other cultural theorists have cautioned, the effects of imperialism continue long after the imperial regime has disappeared. In what ways does this "imperialism" continue its historical legacy? What can be done in theoretical and/or creative terms to defuse its powers?

4. "The politics of identity, the politics of difference, ethnic particularism, cultural pluralism, multiculturalism—as these terms proliferate both inside and outside the academy, there is the temptation of producing 'a jargon of the minorities'. Faced with major demographic shifts, educational, media, and governmental agencies both in the North and the South suffer crises of administrative and institutional 'representability'. Their response to this situation is either to generate anxiety around the threat to the canon, the national community, or the 'common culture', or to 'capitalize' on the changes by commodifying minority cultures into new disciplines and programs. Beyond the academy, and often in tension with it, there is a crisis of representation within minority communities around the knowledges that circulate in their name, and the 'aid' agencies that are set up to legitimate their disadvantaged existence. Such circumstances may obfuscate our understanding of the profound changes that have occurred in our experience of contemporary cultural conflicts or the terms in which cultural consensus is negotiated amongst emergent or marginalized populations." (Homi Bhabha, "Frontlines/Borderposts," in *Displacements* 269)

Using Homi Bhabha's statement as a point of departure, discuss the crisis of representation inside and outside the academy. Draw on the work of two or more writers and theorists on your reading list who offer strategies for circumventing the kind of obfuscation Bhabha warns against.

Comprehensive questions for Monika Gagnon

"Interpreting the Indian Act"

Gail Valaskakis, Concordia University

March 21, 1996

1. How does the Indian Act contribute to a process in which Native Canadian identities are constructed?
2. The representation of Indian women has long been constructed in stereotypical images of the Indian princess and the squaw. How does Section 12.1.b of the Indian Act relate to the cultural formation of these representations?
3. To what extent and in what ways does the Indian Act work to protect Native Canadian culture?
4. The "dilemma of difference" asserts that both the acknowledgement and the denial of difference perpetuate inequality. How does the Indian Act work to confirm or deny this dilemma?
5. In what ways does the Indian Act work to construct Native Canadian resistance to the hegemony it sustains?
6. Gerald Alfred has said that the Canadian government attempts to control Native people through the management of tribal membership and land. How do the historical transformations of the Indian Act work to sustain or oppose this hegemony?
7. How is the representation of the Indian related to the dominant culture's interpretation of the law embodied in the Indian Act?

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March 25, 1996

To: Monika Gagnon
From: Alison Beale

Re: Comprehensive exams

Attached are the questions from Gail Valaskakis and me. You should answer two questions from each of us, in essay form, and submit your answers to Neena Shahani by 2 p.m., Friday March 29. Your essays should be double spaced, and include footnotes and bibliography in the consistent style of your choice.

Best of luck,
Alison

Area: Travel Narratives, Cultural Migration and the Representation of Nature

1. Show how one or more of the works of art for Sanctuary plays with mimesis and the manipulation of space to reveal the non-neutrality of "observation" in geography. How successful is this strategy, in this particular work or works? How does it compare with a similar critique carried out in more conventional academic form?

2. If "nature" is revealed to be produced as a discourse, both in the critical work of cultural geographers and others, and in artists' work, which aspects of the construction of nature are best communicated by academic work on the one hand and by artistic work on the other?

3. Travel narratives and the artistic representation of exotic others are old cultural forms and can be found in many cultural traditions. Discuss the extent to which the new interest in this area involves a reassessment of an historical segment of "Western" culture, and extent to which it allows "non-Western" traditions and innovations to be recognized.

4. Discuss the problems and opportunities of working on a topic which some might argue requires a foundation in several areas of the arts, literature, literary theory, geography, history, etc. To what extent is this a fair requirement? Using your own study of this topic as an example, how can we overcome the "problem" of disciplinarity in addressing a topic from an interdisciplinary perspective?

5. Taking the work of either Edward Said or Gloria Anzaldúa as an example, show how this work has migrated, how it has been represented, and how its progress through the worlds of the arts and academia can be constructed as a travel narrative, one in which the traveler and the traveled space are transformed.

n.b. It would be preferred if you would answer 1 or 2, and 3,4, or 5. All the questions can be questioned- that is, to answer the problems they address you should feel free to make the case for a different emphasis or turn of phrase in the question.

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