Critical Theory Midterm Questions

The midterm will consist of some (3-4) of these questions, of my choice. It is worth 20% of the final grade. You have 75 minutes to write; plan for about 15-20 minutes of writing per question. I reserve the right to include a question that is not in this list.

Theory

1. What is structuralism? How is semiotics based in structuralism, and how does it now differ? Why is anthropology (historically) more likely to use structuralist analysis, and cultural studies more likely to use semiotic analysis?

2. How would Marx and Freud respond to Matthew Arnold’s definition of culture? What definition might they offer in response?

3. In what ways can we say that culture is a text? What does this imply, and what would the other options (or metaphors) be?

4. What does it mean to “denaturalize” a cultural experience? How does critical theory denaturalize a television show or movie?


Analysis & Application

6. Analyze the Absolut Vodka website (http://absolut-ads.absolut.com/) using the semiotic tools we have developed in class. How can we understand the signifiers present here? What critical issues come to light in this analysis? NOTE: the site requires that you be of legal drinking age to enter. Please let me know if you cannot meet this requirement, and I will find a different site for you.

7. Using the techniques developed in class, analyze the two Calvin Klein ads located at http://pegasus.cc.ucf.edu/~janzb/ckads.htm

8. How does critical theory help to understand blond(e)ness? Be explicit in your analysis about the kinds of questions that might be asked.

9. George Bush, in his explanation of why terrorists commit terrorist acts, said “They don’t love freedom like we do”. With explicit reference to the class and/or the texts, identify at least three relevant questions a critical theorist might ask about this example of social explanation.