UIUC Department of History
Graduate Preliminary Examination
European Cultural History

April 2014

Directions: Please choose one question from each of the following three categories and answer in essay form. Be sure that your essays have a clear line of argument and engage with both the relevant history and historiography. Discuss specific scholars and texts. The time available for the examination is eight hours.

Part One: What Is Cultural History?

1. Cultural History Past and Present: Write a critical genealogy of cultural history from the Renaissance to the present, making sure to bring out what is distinctive about the subjects, methods, claims, style, audience, and reception of the major works involved. What operative models and theories of culture underpin the various works of history that you discuss? Include in your narrative any relevant contextual information about authors and texts.

2. War, Culture, and Society: In the past few decades, the historical study of European warfare has been transformed from its former emphasis on great leaders and major battles into a new focus on the social and cultural aspects of war. Write an essay describing the recent social and cultural historiography of war in Europe. What sorts of topics, sources, methods, arguments, and insights are distinctive of these new historical approaches? Which books and articles in this field do you find most compelling and illuminating? Conversely, do you discern any limitations to “the cultural turn” in military history? Finally, what future directions might the specifically cultural study of war undertake in your judgment?

Part Two: Early Modern Art History

3. Art Patronage: How did artistic patronage change in Italy from the Renaissance to the Baroque periods? Comment on the uses of painting, sculpture and architecture for such patrons as Lorenzo the Magnificent and Louis XIV (and the French Royal Academy), as well as Urban VIII (among other powerful popes). How do relationships between patrons and painters change? Comment on the role of private patronage, the art market, and the religious orders.

4. Renaissance and Baroque: What does it mean to say that Baroque Art served the "Age of Grandeur"? How does patronage in this age relate to the shaping of authority, either monarchical, papal, or bourgeois? For the Renaissance, can we speak of the art of reason? Is
the Renaissance a rebirth or revival of art, or is the notion of “revival” merely a threadbare historical construct? How does the work of art relate to (borrowing from Burkhardt) the "state as a work of art?" What does this have to do with the rise of art history as a critical discipline? How do we see the exercise of power through art? Is there such a thing as a “Jesuit Style” in painting, sculpture and architecture, especially in Rome? Did the Jesuits appropriate pre-existing styles or did they in effect invent the baroque?

Part Three: Periods in Modern European Cultural History:

5. French Art of the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Century: The late eighteenth and early nineteenth century was the most tumultuous period in the history of France with momentous ramifications for the wider European world. The long and extraordinary biography of the artist Jacques Louis David intersected with a remarkable number of historical events and personalities from this period. Craft a wide-ranging essay that discusses David as a chronicler of French history during the pre-revolutionary, revolutionary, and Napoleonic eras. How was David’s protean career embedded in French historical events? How do David’s changes over time in the subject matter he selects, the human qualities he depicts, the patrons he serves, and the aesthetic strategies he deploys relate to the changing historical circumstances of his day? And how does his evolving creative output reflect the artistic, social, and political environment of the time? Finally, what information and insights can the general historian (and the history student) learn from David’s paintings? Please cover the artist’s entire career from the 1780s to the 1820s.

6. The Fin de siècle and Modernism: The astonishing half century between the 1870s and the advent of World War One witnessed several intellectual revolutions in science, philosophy, and psychology as well as countless new artistic movements in painting, poetry, prose, music, drama, and dance. Some cultural historians have claimed that the fin de siècle was the most creative and transformative period in European history since the Renaissance. Others have asserted that “the birth of the modern” itself takes place during this relatively short span of time. Do you agree with these bold characterizations? From your reading, what were the principal cultural and intellectual achievements of the fin-de-siècle years? Does the period hold together with a single, integrated identity, akin to earlier epochs of European cultural history, or are you more struck by its internal complexity and fragmentation? How are the London, Paris, and Vienna variants of fin-de-siècle culture similar and different? In your essay, be sure to cite the major interpretations of this era advanced by the pertinent historians on your reading list.