



THE SCHOOL OF CRITICISM AND THEORY

PROSPECTUS

2019 SUMMER SESSION
JUNE 16 - JULY 25



CORNELL UNIVERSITY

<http://sct.cornell.edu>

Director's Welcome



Hent de Vries

*Paulette Goddard
Professor of the
Humanities; Professor
of Religious Studies,
German, and Com-
parative Literature;
Affiliated Professor of
Philosophy, New York
University*

Thank you for your interest in the School of Criticism and Theory (SCT). Since its founding in 1976, SCT has been a summer institute offering an innovative program of study focused on key conceptual issues and current debates across the humanities and social sciences. SCT is sponsored by a consortium of some thirty major American and foreign universities and is currently in the process of establishing further international partnerships. Initially based at the University of California-Irvine, the program has over the years been hosted by Northwestern University, Dartmouth College, and Cornell University, where it has been housed since 1997, in the beautiful A.D. White House, home to Cornell's Society for the Humanities. Its current location in Ithaca offers participants, faculty, and visitors the natural beauty of New York's Finger Lakes region, the vibrancy and cultural richness of a large college town, and the resources of an Ivy League university, including its outstanding library, to which all participants and faculty are given access during their stay at the summer institute.

Every summer, SCT assembles eight distinguished faculty for four six-week and four one-week seminars. It also admits between eighty and a hundred participants (advanced graduate students, postdoctoral fellows, and junior faculty), who sign up for one of the longer seminars and actively participate in all other events (mini-seminars, public lectures, and colloquia around precirculated faculty papers). The

intensive format of the summer institute enables participants to forge lifelong intellectual friendships as well as strong connections with the group of faculty and other visitors, which often include members of SCT's distinguished group of Senior Fellows. In addition to the seminars, lectures, and colloquia, SCT hosts an impressive amount of receptions and social events in which participants have the chance to interact more informally with each other and with the faculty, senior fellows, visitors, and the Cornell academic community.

From its inception, SCT has played an important role as an annual scholarly and intellectual platform on which the drama of the somewhat fruitless theory wars and the questionable virtue of vain polemics is resolutely sidestepped. Instead a climate of rigorous investigations and courteous debate of "themes out of school," as Stanley Cavell once aptly called them, is both widely honored and consistently fostered. In the best tradition of critical and comparative studies across a wide variety of historical and literary fields as well as empirical and visual disciplines, the School invites thinkers who cherish the life of the mind, the force of the better argument, and the courage of imagination, while never forgetting the concrete political responsibilities that more abstract reflections entail. Beyond the infatuation with identities and cultures, national literatures and cosmopolitanisms, humanisms and antihumanisms, old and new historicisms and their opposing structuralisms, close or distant reading, mind or matter, beings and things, SCT seeks out forms of undogmatic inquiry into modes and moods of genuine thinking and practice that are both analytical and constructive, meditative and deeply engaged.

In this prospectus, you will find all relevant information about the coming year's summer session, the application process and existing possibilities for financial aid, and living arrangements.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, consisting of a series of loops and strokes that form the name 'Hent de Vries'.

Hent de Vries



Niklaus Largier, *Sidney and Margaret Ancker Professor of German and Comparative Literature, University of California, Berkeley*
“Figures of Possibility: Figuration, Imagination, and the Phenomenology of Rhetorical Effects”

This seminar will take Erich Auerbach’s notion of *figura*, elaborated mainly in his 1938 essay with the same title, as a starting point for a broader inquiry into notions of figure, figuration, and the specific productivity of figural practices in creating aesthetic, perceptual, and cognitive spheres of experience. At its core the seminar will focus on the understanding of the capacity of figure and figuration in deploying ‘plastic’ effects, i.e., in the shaping of and the experimentation with sensual, affective, and cognitive landscapes. In order to pursue this path of inquiry, we will explore notions of figural effects based on manuals of rhetoric, forms and theories of spiritual exercises, as well as romantic, expressionist, and surrealist poetry. As many of these texts suggest, an inquiry into the practices of figuration also entails a discussion of some aspects of the history of theories of the imagination (from Aristotle to Vico, Walter Benjamin, and Michel Foucault). Working on the basis of a complex tension between hermeneutical and non-hermeneutical practices of reading, the seminar will engage the question of how we can think of the productivity of figures in terms of a phenomenology of rhetorical effects that engages perception and imagination critically and produces sensual, affective, and cognitive spheres of experimentation. The discussion will be based on texts ranging from Aristotle and the Latin rhetoricians to examples of spiritual exercises (both in religious and philosophical contexts); prayer and poetry; and a selection of texts by Robert Musil, Erich Auerbach, Walter Benjamin, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, and possibly others.



Beebe Lake Dam, Cornell University Campus



Alexander G. Weheliye, *Professor of African American Studies, Northwestern University*
“Black Life”

This course will look at the relationship between Blackness and different concepts of life to highlight how Black life functions as a constitutive ontological limit for the workings of modern humanity. To that end, we will study texts from such recent fields as new materialism, animal studies, disability studies, and affect theory in tandem with writings from a variety of Black Studies approaches in order to ascertain how they might fruitfully speak to each other. We will pay particular attention to the complex ways gender and sexuality function in the barring of Black flesh from the category of the human-as-Man, while also as providing the conditions of possibility for alternate ways of inhabiting the world.

“One of the most enriching intellectual experiences of my academic life.”

Karine Côté-Boucher, York University

“SCT is the quintessential academic experience, challenging and rewarding on both the intellectual and social levels. The connections I made during the session will stay with me for the rest of my life, and my thinking has become profoundly more complex and nuanced as a result of my encounters with the faculty and my fellow participants.”

T.J. West III, Syracuse University



Libe Slope, Cornell University Campus



Cathy Caruth, *Frank H. T. Rhodes Professor of Humane Letters, Cornell University*
"Rethinking Trauma Theory"

This seminar will serve as an introduction to trauma theory as it emerged and remerged in the 19th and 20th centuries as well as a rethinking of its fundamental terms in light of new theoretical developments and global perspectives. We will revisit some of the foundational writings of psychoanalytic writing on trauma in order to explore the relations among inscription, erasure and history as they arise from these texts and as they point toward later writing on historical erasure and collective trauma in socio-political contexts. An underlying thread of the seminar will involve the entanglement of trauma and technologies of the psyche, memory and the archive, as well as of media and spectacle. The second part of the seminar reconsiders trauma around the problem of address and the possibility of new forms of address in the testimonial context. What kinds of address may emerge at the site of erasure? Emphasis will be placed on the ways in which the language(s) of trauma in different writers and different contexts put pressure on the continuity of the concept. Texts include (but are not limited to) writings by Sigmund Freud, Jean Laplanche, Jacques Derrida, Shoshana Felman, Francoise Davoine, Jean-Francoise Lyotard, Robjert Jay Lifton, Claire Nouvet, Hannah Arendt, Antjie Krog, and Fethi Benslama, as well as films by Nouri Bouzid, Samuel Moaz and Tafik Abu Wael. We may also consider testimonies from a variety of contemporary sources.



Ithaca Farmers Market, Steamboat Landing Pavilion

"The School of Criticism and Theory offers the chance for a broad, stimulating summer experience within the idyllic setting of Ithaca's natural beauty. The curriculum is exceptionally well-conceived, well-structured, and well-implemented for young scholars."

John Welsh, Harvard University

"SCT was a tremendous experience. It provided precisely the cure of mind and body I needed to complement my duties as a faculty member."

Anne Birien, James Madison University



The Commons, Downtown Ithaca



Linda Martín Alcoff, *Professor of Philosophy, Hunter College and CUNY Graduate Center*
“Decolonizing Epistemology”

There is a widespread skepticism about many sorts of knowledge claims today, and this skepticism has been promoted from both the right and the left. The skepticism is largely based on the realization that knowledge is always connected to power. But there is uncertainty about what follows from this: is it still ‘knowledge’?

The decolonial epistemology project accepts the connection of knowledge and power but then moves to a different set of questions that are organized in two overall components: (1) to critique existing theories and practices concerning knowledge for the ways in which these theories and practices may be supporting the colonial structure of knowledge, and (2) to develop new reconstructed norms for improved knowing practices without reinscribing colonial relationships. To advance this project, decolonial work in epistemology must address the following:

1. Do social identities matter for knowledge claims? How, exactly?
2. How is ignorance socially produced, and what is the solution?
3. Should we continue to use concepts like ‘rationality’ and ‘reason’?
4. How can science be done in a decolonial way?
5. How do we empower traditional and indigenous knowledges?

Such a project benefits epistemology as a whole. In exploring the ways in which the disenfranchised have been epistemically discredited, we can develop new insights and theories about the general nature of knowledge and of knowers. This project also benefits every community that is struggling for democracy and justice against the forces of capitalism, imperialism, and technocracy.

Thus, the question of knowledge, and of who has knowledge, of what kinds of character traits and motivations will best assist knowing, and of how knowledge claims should be assessed, is key to social change. As Boaventura de Sousa Santos puts it, “there is no global social justice without global cognitive justice.”

2019 Mini-Seminars



Dale Jamieson, *Professor of Environmental Studies and Philosophy, Affiliated Professor of Law, Affiliated Professor of Medical Ethics, New York University*
“Love in a World of Skepticism and Irony”

The philosopher/novelist Iris Murdoch said it best: “[L]ove (properly understood) does make the world go round.” But what exactly do these words mean, especially in a world of skepticism and irony? Drawing on the work of Murdoch, as well as Simone Weil, and contemporary analytic philosophers such as Harry Frankfurt, I offer the rudiments of a proper understanding of love, and sympathetically engage with the skeptics and ironists. Here is a spoiler about where we will come out:

“We can be ethical only in relation to something we can see, feel, understand, love, or otherwise have faith in.”

These words by the American environmentalist, Aldo Leopold, are profoundly important for contemporary social movements. Love is not all we need, but it is hard to see how we can go on without it.



Rahel Jaeggi, *Professor for Social Philosophy; Director of the Center for Humanities and Social Change, Humboldt University, Berlin; 2018/19 Fellow, Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton*
"Crisis, Critique, and Materialism"

Crises are omnipresent. Whether it is the crisis of capitalism and democracy, the so-called "refugee crisis" or the ecological crisis — and this is just a selection of countless, bigger and smaller, real or imagined crises that concern us — the level of crisis awareness is rising.

Back on the agenda is also the concept of crisis itself, a concept that has figured prominently in critical theory beginning with Hegel and Marx. The concept of crisis as an interpretative scheme which describes and evaluates, as well as analyses and criticizes social dynamics has become prominent again.

But then: What is at stake when we address events and dynamics in the social field as crises? Not only can it be controversial, if (and for whom) something is a crisis, as one can see with the "refugee Crisis" or the "financial Crisis." Crisis is a theoretical framework that implies ambitious theses concerning the logic of social transformations, the erosion of social institutions and practices and the normative dynamics of forms of life. So, if there is a revival of crisis theories: Does it make sense to bring the concept (back) into play? What is its use for criticism? What is its normative and analytical surplus vis-à-vis other strategies for social critique?

The minicourse will explore concepts of crisis and concepts of critique while addressing a whole set of connected questions:

1. Event vs. structure. To call something a crisis means to point out an escalation, a threatening situation which has worsened in such a way that a decision seems inevitable or even needs to be forced. But then: How are we to make sense of the fact that at the same time crises can have a long duration and can exist in a state of latency?
2. Constructed vs. real: Crises seem to be objective and subjective, "given" and "made" at the same time.
3. Crisis vs. conflict. Whether something can rightfully be called a crisis or not is not only decided by the attitude and perspectives of the actors involved. At the same time: If a crisis is not experienced or regarded as such (at least in the long run) then it isn't a crisis. Crises therefore need to be actualized, they need to be transformed into a conflict. Conversely, social actors must respond to the structural dimension of a given crisis in order for the conflict to count as a crisis.
4. The fourth set of questions concerns the normative character of what functions here as "crisis" or "problem" – and thus, the prospect of a crisis oriented immanent critique.

The very question of whether some social situation is crisis-driven at all is bound up with a certain understanding of the aim and telos, the normative implications of a certain form of life as it has historically evolved. The very idea of a crisis critique then takes its starting point from the prone and dysfunctional character of the social order in question. Normatively shaped dysfunctionalities, the fact that social practices erode in contradictory reactions that can no longer be made up for, is the "rock bottom" for a certain kind of critique, an immanent crisis critique of forms of life.



Daphne Brooks, *Professor of African-American Studies, Theater Studies, American Studies, and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, Yale University*
"Black Sound & The Archive"

This seminar considers the relationship between the history and significance of African-American sonic practices and the nature of archives. In both a post-Derridean world which takes seriously the ongoing violence of the archive and, likewise, in our present-day scholarly universe which is thrillingly shaped by the pathbreaking advances of Hartman, Griffin, Moten, Edwards and others who each assert both the perils as well as the radical potentiality of blackness as an archival phenomenon, the move toward interrogating African-American sonic forms as counter-archival strategy is urgent and compelling. Predicated upon the presumption that opacity, obscurity, precarity, and fugitivity inform paradoxical conditions of possibility for black expressive cultures, the seminar aims to interrogate a range of historical case studies and rare material objects that offer generative conundrums about radical sociality and ways of theorizing black aesthetic genius and avant-garde poetics cultivated in contestation of captivity and Jim Crow modernity. Our attention will be three-fold: participants will focus on excavating and exploring the archival texts of early, modern, postmodern, as well as contemporary African-American culture workers who have innovated sonic cultural forms that resonate as dense historical palimpsests (e.g. sheet music, documented performances, and/or recordings of artists such as Blind Tom, Duke Ellington, Nina Simone, Cecile McLorin Salvant, Rhiannon Giddens, etc.). Group members will, likewise, interrogate materials culled from the archives of musicians, themselves, (such as Simone, Mary Lou Williams) as well as record labels (e.g. "race records" behemoth Paramount Records) that convey competing narratives about the politics of collecting, preservation tactics, and racial capitalism's entanglements with documentation and ephemerality in popular music culture. Our third rail of emphasis will be that of loss and absence in black sonic archives. What are the critical methodologies we might innovate and utilize when figures and recordings elude "capture" and legibility in the archive? What experimental forms of writing, research, and critical analysis might we develop to address these challenges?



Robert Brandom, *Distinguished Professor, University of Pittsburgh; Fellow, American Academy of Arts and Sciences*
"Hegel and the Hermeneutics of Magnanimity"

Kant taught us that we discursive creatures live, and move, and have our being in a normative space. Hegel taught us two subsequent lessons that can appear to be in tension: that normative statuses are social statuses instituted by practical attitudes of mutual recognition, and that acculturation (*Bildung*), by which each of us comes into this normative space, requires acknowledging the authority of traditional norms over idiosyncratic attitudes. For him, the characteristically modern genre of understanding is a reductive naturalism that, when addressed to culture, takes the form of genealogy. Genealogy dissolves norms into attitudes. His term for the pathological aspect of the metaphysics of normativity genealogy expresses is "alienation." Genealogy falsifies the process of negotiation between norms and the attitudes that both institute and answer to those norms, because it misconstrues the significance of the historical contingency of those attitudes. The way forward Hegel articulates focuses on language, as the model of a kind of normativity that can move us beyond the alienated modern ideal of independence (focused on the authority of attitudes) to the genuine expressive freedom (acknowledging a correlative responsibility to norms) that shows up as implicit in it. Exploiting, as his alternative to genealogy, a distinctive novel conception of rationalizing recollection, he offers a radical semantics with an edifying intent. It invites us to transcend modernity by replacing the alienated genealogical hermeneutics of suspicion with a rationally recollective hermeneutics of magnanimity that is at once tradition-affirming and tradition-transforming.

2019 Visiting Guest Lecturers



Jimena Canales, *Faculty, Graduate College, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign*
“Science and the History of Nonexistent Things”



David Damrosch, *Ernest Bernbaum Professor of Comparative Literature; Director, Institute for World Literature, Harvard University*
“World Literature in a Post-postcolonial Age: Problems of Language, Culture, and Politics”



Ankhi Mukherjee, *Professor of English and World Literatures and Tutorial Fellow, Oxford University*
“The Poverty of Philosophy”



Catharine Stimpson
University Professor and Dean Emerita of the Graduate School of Arts and Science, New York University
“Decorum, Due Process, and Dereliction: Some Reflections on Title IX”



Arts Quad, Cornell University Campus

Eligibility

Faculty and advanced graduate students of literature, the arts, the humanities, the related social sciences and professional studies are invited to apply. There are openings for approximately 90 participants.

Tuition

Tuition for the summer program is \$3,000 (a below-cost figure made possible by a Cornell University subsidy).

The School of Criticism and Theory at Cornell has established an aid program to encourage institutional support of participants. The Matching Funds program guarantees that the School of Criticism and Theory will reduce by \$300 the tuition fee for any participant whose own institution will provide \$300 or more in support of his/her study. We encourage you to ask your dean or other responsible administrative officer whether it would be possible for your school to provide funding for tuition (\$2,700 after the \$300 reduction) or additional assistance for room and board. Any applicant requesting a Matching Funds reduction must obtain a written statement from the home institution affirming that financial support has been committed for the applicant. This letter must be received by February 1st.

In addition, there are a limited number of partial tuition scholarships available for participants with special financial needs. If you are a U.S. citizen requesting financial aid, please submit page one of your income tax return for 2017. Non-U.S. citizens should send a detailed description of their financial situation. Financial aid awards will be announced at the same time as notice of admission.

Advance Course Registration

To enable the School to plan the summer schedule, prospective participants must indicate on the online application form which of the six-week courses they wish to attend in order of preference. Upon admission to the School, participants will be notified of their course assignment; acceptance of the offer of admission to the School will constitute acceptance of that course assignment. All participants are enrolled in each of the mini-seminars.

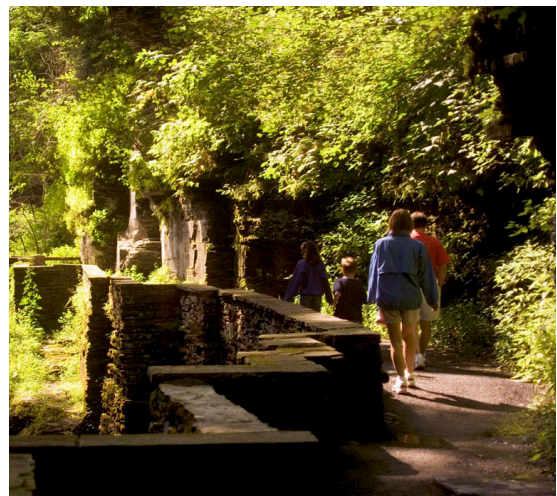
Accommodations

For those participants who bring families or prefer to live off-campus, the Off-Campus Living Office at Cornell can provide a listing of summer rentals and sublets. The phone number for the Housing Office is 607-255-2310 and the website is <https://ccengagement.cornell.edu/off-campus-living>.

Many participants prefer to take advantage of on-campus housing which provides an opportunity for intellectual interaction within the group. Information about on-campus and off-campus housing will be distributed to all admitted participants in the spring.

"SCT was a reminder of why I had joined academia in the first place, to become part of a dynamic intellectual community committed to the exchange of ideas."

Jennifer Spitzer, Ithaca College



Beebe Lake Trail, Cornell University Campus

Library Facilities

Cornell University has one of the largest university libraries, with extensive collections in specialized fields. Participants will find that their research needs will be more than adequately answered by the library's resources. Participants will be issued library cards giving them full use of all university libraries. They will also be able to access the Cornell time-sharing computing system at various locations.

Recreation Facilities

Cornell University has a variety of indoor and outdoor recreational facilities that will be available for the SCT participants' use. Facility rates vary. Information will be available at registration.

Instructions for Applying

Applicants must submit all application materials online. The online application for the 2019 summer session will be available by November 1, 2018. The application deadline is February 1, 2019, and admissions decisions are announced in March.

Applicants will be asked to submit the following materials:

1. An application form.
2. A statement of no more than two pages describing current scholarly interests and plans and how the School of Criticism and Theory might further those interests and plans. The statement should include information about courses taken and/or taught in criticism and theory.
3. A current curriculum vitae.
4. A sample of recent writing.
5. A transcript (for current graduate students).

As part of the application process, applicants will be asked to request confidential letters of recommendation from two referees, who should send the letters directly to the application site.

Acceptances and Deposits

Applicants who have been admitted will have ten days from the date of notification in which to submit a non-refundable \$200 deposit against tuition in order to hold their place in the School. The remainder of tuition is due on May 15, 2019.

Contact Information

For application and program information:
<http://sct.cornell.edu/>

e-mail: sctcornell-mailbox@cornell.edu
phone: 607-255-9276

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A.D. White House Garden, site of SCT receptions

Cornell University reserves the right to change without notice any statement in this information packet concerning, but not limited to, rules, policies, tuition, fees, curricula, and courses.



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