

# In Theory



CORNELL UNIVERSITY  
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## A Word from the Director



**Amanda Anderson**

*Andrew W. Mellon  
Professor of Humanities  
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Brown University*

How might we assess and deepen the contemporary turn to affect through a re-reading of certain foundational philosophical texts on mood, emotion, and passion? How can we extend the debates over feminism, sexuality, and postcolonialities so as to better capture the specificity of place as well as the historical transformations of globalizing capital, migration, and ecological change? What might it mean to elaborate a "queer technics," to explore our ongoing relation to technology, techne, practices, and poetics from the perspective of a queer questioning? Is it possible to establish, within the context of global

understanding of religion, relations among traditional theologies of the miracle, modern philosophies of the event, and contemporary media theories of the special effect?

These questions and more were taken up in the six-week seminars of the 2012 session of the SCT, serving as the basis for extended discussion both within seminars and beyond—in the lecture hall, in the colloquium auditorium, and at the many social events that contribute to the richness of the SCT experience. The six-week faculty, John Brenkman (CUNY Graduate Center and Baruch College), Ania Loomba (University of Pennsylvania), Amy Villarejo (Cornell University), and Hent de Vries (Johns Hopkins University), participated with great energy in the intellectual and social life of the session, and I am very grateful to them all for making the 2012 program so vibrant and successful. Their core seminars were amplified by a thought-provoking set of mini-seminars and public lectures addressing

theories of "the commons" (Lauren Berlant), the treatment of trauma in W.G. Sebald (Dominick LaCapra), reason and unreason (Ray Brassier), latency and mood after 1945 (Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht), realism and revolution (Rei Terada), trauma and human rights in Ariel Dorfman's *Death and the Maiden* (Cathy Caruth), and the language of lyric (Jonathan Culler).

I invite you to read the participant essays that follow, which individually and collectively provide a vivid sense of last summer's experience. They capture the range and intensity of the intellectual life at SCT and convey the distinctive characters of individual seminars as well as the spontaneous relationships and dialogues that developed outside of formal settings. As in previous years, we had a large and interesting mix of participants: we welcomed participants from 63 institutions of higher learning, including 19 institutions outside of the U.S. We are also continuing to draw participants from a diverse range of intellectual disciplines. While SCT has historically had a strong number of participants in literature, we attract participants each year from a range of humanities and social sciences disciplines. In 2012 we had representation from the fields of history, political science, philosophy, rhetoric, American studies, art history, creative writing, and theater. We publicize the program through a number of channels, but more than anything else we rely on word of mouth and hope that alumni will recommend the program to potentially interested colleagues. As in the past, we also continue to benefit from well-established relationships with many leading institutions that sponsor participants annually.

## ANNUAL SCT RECEPTION AT MLA

The annual SCT reception at the MLA will be held on Saturday, January 5th, from 7:00-8:15pm in the Independence East Ballroom at the Sheraton Boston Hotel. SCT is joined by the American Comparative Literature Association in sponsoring this well-attended event. Past or potential SCT participants have the chance to meet and mingle, and the SCT and ACLA groups share many interests. Former and future SCT faculty tend to stop by and the food and conversation make the event something to which former attendees look forward. We hope to see you!

## SCT ALUMNI NETWORK

Please help us keep in touch with SCT alumni. If you did not receive this newsletter at your current mailing address or if you would like to receive future mailings electronically, please send your updated contact information to Alice Cho, Program Coordinator, [sctcornell-mailbox@cornell.edu](mailto:sctcornell-mailbox@cornell.edu).

Please visit our website at <http://sct.arts.cornell.edu> and subscribe to our electronic events mailing list, or find us on Facebook. We look forward to hearing from you.

Please take note of the line-up for 2013, listed on the following page. Full information about the upcoming session and the SCT can be found on our website (<http://sct.arts.cornell.edu/>).

2013 Summer Session  
June 16 - July 26

### 2013 Faculty 6-Week Seminars

#### Ian Baucom

Director, Franklin Humanities Institute and Professor of English, Duke University  
"Postcolonial Studies in the Era of the Anthropocene"

#### Jane Bennett

Professor of Political Science,  
Johns Hopkins University  
"A Political Ecology of Things"

#### Michael Bérubé

Director, Institute for the Arts and Humanities, Pennsylvania State University  
"Narrative, Intellectual Disability, and the Boundaries of the Human"

#### Julia Reinhard Lupton

Professor of English and Comparative Literature, University of California, Irvine  
"Dwelling | Telling | Selling: Contemporary Design Topographies"

### Mini-Seminars

#### Akeel Bilgrami

Johnsonian Professor of Philosophy and Global Thought, Columbia University  
"Agency, Alienation, and the Democratic Mentality"

#### Rita Felski

William R. Kenan, Jr., Professor of English, University of Virginia  
"Critique and the Hermeneutics of Suspicion"

#### Catherine Malabou

Professor at the Center For Modern European Philosophy, Kingston University  
"Emotional Life in a Neurobiological Age: On Wonder"

#### Achille Mbembe

Research Professor in History and Politics, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg  
"Fanon and the Subject of Emancipation"

Applications from faculty members and advanced graduate students at universities worldwide will be reviewed beginning February 1, 2013.

For online application and program information:

<http://sct.arts.cornell.edu/>

# Reflections on SCT 2012

I didn't know what to expect from a course entitled "Queer Technics." Given the strategically broad semantic reach of both terms, I was intrigued by their juxtaposition, and eager to learn just what about technology was queer and what about queerness was technological. Amy Villarejo's course proved to be a Haraway cyborg, a boundary-blurring chimera in which we were encouraged to think about the interstitial, the hybrid, the trans, and becoming in relation to the body, technology, history, and poiesis. Both queerness and technology became enabling modes of thinking otherwise, of thinking the non-normative, the non-human, the assemblage, the animal, the insect, the future, the utopian.

As participants of SCT, we inhabited an idyllic Ithaca landscape with breathtaking views while being immersed in discussions of ecological catastrophe, precarity, and survival. Crisis was a dominant theme of SCT this summer, and the crisis in the humanities loomed particularly large. Given the focus on crisis, what was most sustaining about Queer Technics was its emphasis on hope, hope in the Blochian sense of a venturing beyond. For Bloch, hope discloses a potential for rearranging the world out of the stuff of the everyday: the present offers anticipatory illuminations of a future that might be otherwise. Rather than brood over the threat of technological catastrophe, the participants of Queer Technics were able to think deeply about who we were in relation to technology—technology, not as something we master or that masters us, but as constitutive of who and what we are. Conceding that technology might express a desire for something that will ultimately harm us, we thought primarily about technology as disclosing a potential for thinking and living otherwise.

Villarejo opened our first meeting by evoking Kant's question, *what may I hope?* This question haunted all subsequent discussion of queer theory, as we found ourselves buffeted by tensions within the field. We articulated our hopes and longings in relation to our queerness, our feminism, our scholarship, our activism, and our pedagogy. We were challenged to think about what we mean when we talk about "queer," and whether the term can ever be divorced from gay and lesbian subject positions. We thought about shifting the terms of analysis from

*queer to queering*, from noun to verb, so that rather than pointing to objects as queer we would be forced to think about queering as a reading practice or mode of theorizing in which we ourselves are implicated. We ended the final class imagining what a queer pedagogy might look like, as a kind of intimacy and mentorship, a form of identification or disclosure, and an epistemology that is as much about unknowing as knowing, or as Judith Peraino suggests, a curiosity about and questioning of what is.

Some of the highlights of Queer Technics for me were: situating the cyborgian femininity of reality-star Heidi Montag in relation to an originary technicity of the body, while trying to guard against a romanticization of the so-called natural body; thinking about transexuality as analogous both to filmic cuts and to elective amputation; being inspired by José Muñoz and Jill Dolan to share our own stories of belonging in relation to punk music, gay clubs, and women's folk music; and thinking through my own queerness and the ongoing relevance of feminism to my work, particularly as several of my students have denied feminism's relevance in our time.

I'm still trying to wrap my head around how meaningful SCT was to me. The looks of sadness on the face of my classmates during the final week testified to the extent to which the experience was world altering. The seminar was a safe place to present ideas, to debate, to register confusion, to ask questions, to offer personal stories, and to process our experience of SCT. This class has reshaped my conception of what can be done in the classroom, particularly when you entrust students, however different their backgrounds, to find ways to engage each other. Amy Villarejo's guiding hand and carefully chosen and always astute interventions created an exciting space of intellectual collaboration. From day one, the level of discourse in seminar was consistently high and I was amazed at the diversity of knowledges and archives brought to bear on our discussions. The participants were generous—circulating articles and videos, organizing film viewings and outings. Debate, conversation, and intense feelings of all kinds were pursued outside the classroom at the Tuesday receptions, at campus lunch spots, at local bars, and at each other's apartments.

My summer at SCT marked a crucial transition for me as a scholar, as I had just completed the Ph.D. and was about to embark on my first academic job. The rigors of the dissertation and the job market had taken their toll, and I was looking to SCT to crack open the narrow intellectual space to which I had been confined for months. For the first time in years I was immersed in new intellectual projects and conversations; 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. Immersed as we were in very real discussions of academic crisis, we were constantly reminded of how vital the humanities are. I left SCT with a renewed sense of purpose and a greater excitement about reentering the classroom as an instructor, having been able to experience once again the pleasures of being a student.

Jennifer Spitzer  
Harvard University



*Participants at the SCT registration picnic, A.D. White House garden*

In Britain, where I live, public debate often runs along the most literal lines of causality. Sample problem: did the 2011 London riots have a political basis? Sample answer: no, because the rioters themselves said so. The SCT this year offered a refuge from this tyranny of cause and effect. In Hent de Vries's seminar, "Miracles, Events, Effects," we studied miracles as effects apparently *without* causes, as improbable and impossible interruptions of the status quo. Our investigation, as de Vries made quite clear, was not an aversion from contemporary reality, a retreat into a self-contained theological kingdom. It was an expedition, instead, through an expansive intellectual terrain, cutting across ethics, phenomenology, magic, and poetry.

For Whitman, amongst others, the only real wonder is the standing miracle of our existence in any given moment. This summer, in Ithaca, suggested that old Walt was right. To take part in the SCT is to see the University as it was meant to be seen. From the outside this may read like hyperbole. Granted, the beauty of the Cornell campus is outstanding by any standards. Amanda Anderson, Alice Cho, and the rest of the team are extraordinarily welcoming and generous in their assistance. The roster of faculty is always exceptional in its intellectual weight and prestige. But the seminars and seminar rooms must look more or less familiar to visitors from Baltimore, Mumbai, Melbourne, or elsewhere. More or less. For the SCT reminds us that miracles are not necessarily accompanied by blinding lights, monstrous manifestations, and special effects. Sometimes they are simply a matter of

seeing our surroundings in a different perspective.

Difficult to determine then, what precisely makes the SCT so special. It may be the fact that no paper is required of the participants, leaving them time to work through the connection between the readings and their own research. It may be the structure of the schedule, in which intensive six-week seminars are balanced with plenary public lectures and colloquia. It may, in the end, be the time spent thinking on the long, long walk up the hill.

**"For the SCT reminds us that miracles are not necessarily accompanied by blinding lights, monstrous manifestations, and special effects. Sometimes they are simply a matter of seeing our surroundings in a different perspective."**

Talk about miracles always threatens to resolve into nonsense like this. For many, especially those outside the academic humanities, the same might be said about literary theory. The SCT resists this narrative, of course. But only up to a point. Because sometimes nonsense, or what appears to many to be so, needs to be talked through. Miracles are nonsensical because they are paradoxical. Because they must exceed precedent and expectation, it ought to be impossible to develop a theory of miracles. At the same time, some form of taxonomy is essential—how else to recognize them when they take place? Strong critical thinking must also risk being taken for nonsense, or else it risks nothing at all.

This, for me at least, is the wager that governs attendance at the School of Criticism and Theory. Take the chance that some of what you read and hear may at first be strange to you. Concede that its direct applicability to your own research may not always be immediately apparent. Accept, finally, that it is possible, and occasionally necessary, to manufacture a miracle for yourself.

Christopher Trigg  
Independent Scholar

**W**hat is SCT to me? Borrowing from Henry James, I would say it's the house of criticism and theory with "not one window, but a million." "Dissimilar in shape and size," the windows of the SCT are also different from James's windows as they are "not mere holes in a dead wall, disconnected, perched aloft"; instead, they are openings into the richness and complexity of literary theory from Plato to the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as well as openings into the inspiring critical tools characterizing a wide range of disciplines in the humanities.

And yet, when I applied for the SCT, I was excited not only about attending seminars and being a student again, but also about finally having some time for the projects that had remained unfinished during the year. For an assistant professor, such an academic break, I thought, would mean valuable time to get some writing done or simply refuel with new readings, new ideas, and new ventures for the year to come.

A couple of weeks before I landed in

Ithaca, I met, on two different occasions on the conference circuit, two SCT alumni, now associate professors. During the usual conference chit-chat—teaching loads, courses, articles, possible collaborations—summer plans came up, and I mentioned I was going to spend my summer in Ithaca at the SCT. My new acquaintances reacted similarly—they paused for a moment, changed countenance, smiled, and asked with unmistakable envy: "SCT? Really?" I couldn't grasp exactly what was so distinctive about the summer school from the enthusiastic stories and vivid memories that followed in our respective conversations, but it became clear to me that this was going to be a miraculous place.

When I arrived at Cornell, I had, as mentioned above, a healthy to-do list for the weeks to come. I thought I had made the perfect choice for my summer—this was the place to get work done. And work I did but not exactly as planned.

The welcoming reception was only the first in a long list of great surprises SCT had to offer. The A.D. White House, with its elegant salons and beautiful garden,

was to host our social activities for the following weeks. Amanda Anderson with the school faculty was there to meet us in a most welcoming and friendly way. The perfect host for both intellectual and social events, she was well familiar with names and affiliations of over 80 participants. Together with the resourceful program assistant, Alice Cho, she would enable during the weeks to come any initiative the participants had—from weekly film workshops organized by the students and work-in-progress seminars (wonderfully coordinated by fellow participant Kate Morris) to group get-togethers over lunch at A.D. White House.

Activities started right away on week one: readings, seminars, two public lectures, the first weekly reception, and an impressive opening party. Before I had even recovered from jet lag, the seminar I was in, "Feminisms and Postcolonialities," got going. The readings which were the topic of our first meeting convinced me that my placement in this seminar was a very felicitous event, though neither feminism nor postcolonialism were my research or teaching interests. Besides the richness and variety of subjects the seminar offered (religious, legal, ethical,



SCT faculty with participants. Clockwise from top left: John Brenkman (right); Ania Loomba (right); Hent de Vries (right); Amy Villarejo (right); Amanda Anderson (center).

and environmental issues related to gender in a wide variety of geographical or historical contexts), Ania Loomba's passion and dedication to the topics discussed was absolutely contagious. She masterfully orchestrated heated debates that lasted long after the class was over and which got all of us engaged, from the young graduate students to the more mature associate professors attending her seminar. Our backgrounds (English, Spanish, comparative literature, political science, American studies, gender studies, media studies) and countries of origin (China, Czech Republic, Ecuador, India, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Poland, Romania, Saudi Arabia, Taiwan, US) varied widely, but we all soon realized that we had to be well-prepared, as a colleague nicely put it, to "argue with Ania."

Ania Loomba's great scholarly expertise was matched by her teaching pedagogy and her genuine interest to make us talk, listen to us, and engage with our comments, ideas, or queries. She was a "push button" encyclopedia, coming up right away with crystal clear mini-lectures on any topic or concept one of us was not exactly familiar with or happened to ask about. The lively (and often heated)

debates, as well as the challenging questions about method, theory, politics, activism and their convergences, made me realize that had I taken Ania Loomba's seminar during graduate school, I would have definitely taken up feminism or the European Renaissance myself.

While a house of theory in itself, the Feminisms and Postcolonialities seminar was just one of the windows the SCT opened for us. The plenary lectures, mini-seminars, and faculty colloquia, all with a distinct structure and format (as well as a healthy amount of weekly readings) were all followed by very engaged Q&A sessions and became the common ground for week-long discussions among participants as well as ice-breakers when socializing with new faculty or colleagues.

Ray Brassier's mini-seminar managed to clarify Winfred Sellars's theories even for those of us who were least acquainted with analytical philosophy. Lauren Berlant put forth her cutting-edge view about the "affects of the commons," while also taking all audience queries about her previous work. The faculty colloquia provided the participants the opportunity

to read the faculty's work in progress and discuss it. The breadth and depth of the talks and subsequent questions were mesmerizing: from nihilism and belief in contemporary European thought, ethereal queers, and religious canons and their post secular challenges to maritime modernity.

The complexity and variety of activities supported by the openness and engagement of the SCT faculty and invited speakers constantly expand one's horizons and challenge one's views, inviting one to explore other angles and other paths with each and every formal or informal talk one has there. The whole atmosphere creates the sense of an ideal but also very real academic community, which responds to a wide range of needs—from the graduate student looking for an informed bibliography on a certain subject or feedback on an early dissertation chapter, to the tenured assistant professor in search of academic dialogue beyond the boundaries of home institutions, formal conferences or talks.

Ioana Luca  
National Taiwan Normal University



SCT participants enjoy a picnic at Taughannock Falls State Park

**M**ood is not, at first, some inner state of mind which then, afterwards, dyes and tinges the world. Mood is always already there, as an essential aspect of our experience of the world. Mood has always already opened the world to us. With this Heideggerian introduction, the tone was set for a six-week inquiry into "Philosophy of the Passions, Rhetorics of Affect" with John Brenkman, whose admirable ability to make abstruse theories crystal clear kept the seminar room from growing hazy. Among many other things, it thus became clear how Heidegger's philosophy of moods can be combined with Nietzsche's theory of artistic production: if mood has already opened the world to us, then this may be what the artist senses and transforms when he, according to Nietzsche, transforms a felt "musical mood" into a "metaphorical dream image."

If this is so, we might ask what mood permeated the 2012 School of Criticism and Theory and what dream image that mood produces. The first image that comes to my mind is that of a bubble. First of all, SCT is a small detached world of its own, saturated with evolving ideas, vibrating with critical questions, and maintained by a dedicated crew of extraordinarily friendly program coordinators. Not only does the beautiful hilltop campus of Cornell University

appear, at least to a European, as a detached world of its own. SCT also creates a unique atmosphere inside this world, a stimulating 'antropical climate' as another philosopher from our seminar, namely Peter Sloterdijk, would say.

Coming from Europe, this was the ideal introduction to American academia. Not only were the abundance of seminars, mini-seminars, lectures, colloquia, and working groups of an extraordinarily high quality. One also entered into a sphere where social networks and new friendships developed spontaneously because all participants had left their ordinary relations to build up new ones. SCT thus offered an excellent opportunity to meet colleagues who work on similar projects at universities in Hong Kong or Zurich, Rio or New York. I had very rewarding encounters with colleagues outside the classroom, some impulsive and unexpected, others organized around discussion of each other's work in progress.

Before anyone jumps to conclusions about the detached bubble-like character of SCT, it must be said that, like bubbles, SCT is only separated from the surrounding reality by a transparent film which makes it possible for the inhabitants of the bubble to observe reality at a necessary distance. In other words, SCT may pull you out of your ordinary academic mole-existence, place you in an intellectual

bubble, and blow you to a higher level of abstraction, but only in order to offer you a wider outlook. Far from being a self-sufficient ivory tower, SCT is a vantage point from which cultural patterns are being charted and future challenges observed. Under discussion this year was, for instance, the future of the humanities, the role of religion in contemporary societies, the impact of technology on our lives, and so on.

**"SCT thus offered an excellent opportunity to meet colleagues who work on similar projects at universities in Hong Kong or Zurich, Rio or New York."**

To conclude, a final aspect of the bubble-character of SCT is that, although it is solid enough to make up a world of its own, it is by definition temporary. It belongs to the conditions of possibility of all bubbles that they burst sooner or later. Nonetheless, your stay in the bubble is likely to stay in you. Before I went to SCT a friend of mine, who had been to SCT a few years earlier, wrote to me that it was on her top 5 list of the happiest days of her life. I could not agree more.

Dennis Meyhoff Brink  
University of Copenhagen



SCT faculty and participants enjoy weekly receptions in the A.D. White House garden. Left: Rei Terada (center).

If you would have asked me last fall whether I'd be a student at SCT this summer, feeling like fortune was against me, I would've answered with an unhappy "unlikely." Although I had looked forward to the program long before my days as a graduate student—after all, this is what grad school was supposed to be, I thought, a time when you can spend six weeks in the gorges of Ithaca reading criticism and theory!—I initially was discouraged about my chances of attending in the very near future; I was an eager first year student, still knee deep in coursework and still feeling pulled by the different streams and methodologies where I could develop my research interests. Moreover, I figured, I'm a classicist: my days of rigorous engagement in the world of theory seemed ever so distant, buried in my stacks of papers and notes from my days as an English undergraduate. But at that time, despite being immersed in a field that I worried at times would loosen my ties to the world of criticism and theory, to which my previous studies in English held me so close, and despite my anxiety that a summer might be better spent brushing up on Latin and learning German, my enthusiasm to pursue a larger literary and critical framework in which I could design a plan for my interests prevailed. After all, I've never been a "classic" classicist, and as I read John Brenkman's course description in

SCT's 2012 brochure, I knew this was my year to go.

At first it was strangely difficult to articulate to my department why exactly this was the summer at SCT for me. The topics in the seminar title, *philosophy of passions, rhetorics of affect*, were all ideas I could see so clearly underlying the pages of my recent seminar papers, presentations, proposals, and even highlighted notes of interest. But I had not, in my recent academic work, been engaging with Heidegger or Eliot nor could I find the Greek or Latin term equivalent to "affect." Yet I kept insisting that this was the place where I could find the means to investigate the aesthetic and emotional tensions in ancient philosophical and rhetorical texts, a topic that had been haunting my work in Classics thus far.

In the end, Aristotle and Plato were involved even in this syllabus. But they were not alone: rather they stood amidst centuries worth of authors—philosophers, political theorists, poets—arranged under three subheadings, which allowed our seminar to cover varied terrains of literature and philosophy with a comforting feeling of continuity and a sense of direction. Thought, language, affect: this triad of elements bound our readings together while our class discussions rearranged their configuration each week—a type of class

discussion generally imagined as an ideal in a graduate student's world, where over twenty students from various disciplines can ask different questions and give their own answers, all to the same theme.

Promoting this type of healthy classroom environment were John Brenkman's insightful preambles and insistence on close readings, as well as his ability to take us through Heidegger in a way that made us both grateful and envious of his ability to analyze German philosophy.

In our orientation session on the first day of SCT, Amanda Anderson reminded us that what made the six weeks here unparalleled in its type of intellectual experience was its existence as a space outside of our own departmental politics and practices. I've emphasized thus far my position as a classicist at SCT precisely for this reason. SCT, for me, was a very particular intellectual experience, to which I brought a series of ideas and interests, developed in my own field of study and within my own departmental dynamics, but with which there came along anxieties and hesitations as to which direction I could take them and what type of scholar I wanted to be. As a student in a broad department like Classics, I have the choice to pursue a literary, historical, archeological or philosophical stream. And while these boundaries are always encouraged to be broken even by my own department, it was the ongoing discussions at SCT—the type that started in seminars only to be picked up at lectures and then reexamined and restructured through the colloquia—it was these discussions which allowed me to develop a series of new questions surrounding my research in hopes for answers that could fluidly cross the very boundaries which were previously a source of anxiety. Furthermore, my own research aside, SCT and especially our seminar put theory into practice for me: I began to reimagine my future as an instructor of classics and literature, from the possibility of supplementing Plato with the poems of Shelley and the philosophy of Heidegger to encouraging students of Homer to experience the rage of Achilles alongside the psychopolitical investigation of Sloterdijk. So as I continue with my teaching, I hope that not only I but also future students of literary studies will have a summer at SCT for which to be grateful.

Ava Shirazi  
Stanford University



SCT Reception in the A.D. White House garden

In applying to the School of Criticism and Theory, there had been, certainly, all kinds of eagerness on my part to step out of my regular spaces and lean into the orbit of new people and ideas. I'd also luxuriated in the thought of getting my fill of hiking and swimming and vegetable grilling, all my favorite summer things that I don't have time for most summers, in a setting as heavenly as Ithaca. And I'd wanted to see what difference it might make for my quality of work and life in general if, for the first time in over two years, I were to have a nice, expertly curated syllabus of texts and lectures instead of an overflowing ragbag of dissertation research in front of me. That there was a particular archive housed in Cornell's Kroch Library that I'd been wanting to get my hands on for ages was a big part of the attraction, too. I fantasized about the things I might find in this archive and about how its surprises might synchronize with all the other revelations I'd be bound to have over the course of the six-week program.

As it turned out, I would make no time at all for archival research until nearly the end of those six weeks. In her initial SCT introduction and welcoming remarks to participants, Director Amanda Anderson had described what we were in for as basically "a six-week conference," predicting that we would "*really* look forward" to our weekends. This all turned out to be accurate, and in between the intellectual thrills and rigors of heavy reading, seminars, lectures, and colloquia were woven some of the most beautiful and adventuresome weekends of my life. My new friends and I never wanted to leave Ithaca. Lucky enough to have some flexibility, I decided to extend my stay—not just because I loved the place but because I needed to go find wondrous stuff in that archive.

"SERIOUSNESS HAS LIGHTNESS." It was the best bit of marginalia I could have ever hoped to find in a musty edition of Emily Dickinson's *Collected Poems* that had once belonged to the writer Laura (Riding) Jackson. An alumna of Cornell who would end up renouncing poetry in 1941 after half a lifetime of devoting herself to it, (Riding) Jackson spent the latter decades of the twentieth century polemicizing militantly not only against poetry but against all manner of criticism and theory—discourse she broadly derided as "Modern Fiction"—as she believed the accelerating professionalization of literary, social, and political thought she was witnessing

would only further drive apart the needs, concerns, and desires of living creatures on earth. A Spinozist at heart (Spinoza was, in fact, the only philosopher for whom she ever explicitly expressed any enthusiasm), (Riding) Jackson charged her contemporaries with valorizing the "argument of an endless variety," this bespeaking a "trend" whose spuriousness and perverseness, in her view, had been instantiated not by modernity, or by postmodernity, but by those very first moments in which "human beings... comprehended that they were human beings, and not dogs, deer, bear, baboon, snakes, ostrich, creatures of the sea, things of winged life." Criticism and theory only intensified the tragedy and further discredited any "religious...will to think, to be, with truth."

For several months, I'd been dwelling on the pragmatics of seriousness—not merely an affect or trait of "serious" individuals but a central, if ever sprawling, question of religious importance—and had been thinking about it as a trope and ethos for that tentative, not-yet very meaningful thing we dub post-postmodernism. And yet, I would confess, I had not once in my life taken *religion itself* very seriously. I'd instead read religiosity as a ruse or awkward symbolic substitute for the "real" critique I was always wanting my writers to be making—although recently I'd also become uncomfortable with this default in my thinking. Shortly before applying to SCT, I came across two essays by Hent de Vries, one beautifully illuminating the question of "Seriousness and Sincerity" through readings of Derrida, Stanley Cavell, and J. L. Austin, the other gesturing, in the end, to how "Miracles, Media, and Multitudes in Saint Augustine" might have everything to do with the kind of seriousness I was after. If de Vries was going to be at SCT offering a seminar entitled "Miracles, Events, Effects," it was the seminar I knew I needed to take.

We started with Whitman—"Why, who makes much of a miracle?" asks the first line of a poem that would help get our conversation started—and proceeded with readings in the classic debates (Augustine, Aquinas, Hume), in contemporary theories of the political event (Arendt, Badiou, Nusseibeh), and in recent scholarship on the history and philosophy of miracle belief. An explanation from one scholar, David Weddle, struck a particular chord: "To acknowledge an event as having religious significance...is not a theoretical exercise

but a practical commitment." Here I thought not only of the practical effects of (Riding) Jackson's seriousness, but of the wager made by Harold Rosenberg in his 1961 essay "Revolution and the Concept of Beauty": "The artist who engages himself with angels or stained glass windows may produce innovations as devastating as a new cosmos in plexiglass." Yet as Rosenberg would add, more challengingly (one might say apocalyptically), "With the Academy as his sole alternative, the contemporary artist must either find his way to the frontiers of art or cease being an artist."

While those of us at SCT were not likely to cease being critics and theorists or accept that it was absolutely necessary to do so, we did, at the very least, gain lasting insight and humility in pushing ourselves—and in observing how others can push each other!—to the frontiers of our habits, beliefs, and languages. Spinoza, as I learned, argued that the miracle of radical thought and action, if it was going to be of any use, would need to be perceived as potentially emergent within any context, as potentially bearing *any* character on the behalf of potentially *any* creature. A quickened attentiveness to the formal unpredictability of miracles and a fidelity to the practical, contingent demands that events put upon us—it is perhaps in just this way that seriousness *must* have lightness.

Andrea Actis  
Brown University



SCT participants at weekly colloquium

I spent a great six weeks in Ithaca at the SCT program. Some heavy duty reading, numerous lectures and seminars, but also a lot of socializing and conversing – these were the main features of the summer. The six-week session involved attending one seminar which met twice in the week and, in addition, weekly public lectures, mini-seminars and colloquia. It was interspersed with evening social events including faculty and participants, occasional trips to the gorges and waterfalls, and even one regional wine tour. “Gorgeous Ithaca” was made even more delightful through the careful planning and orchestration of SCT events.

The felicity of upstate New York was complemented by the intensive structure of the SCT program itself. Some chief features deserve mention. The question of situating one's work *in relation* to the profession at large was a running theme of SCT over the summer. It was signaled by the SCT Director Amanda Anderson's opening lecture for the program. “The Literary Futures Market” analyzed the futurity of humanistic learning and the “value” of literary studies relative to the vicissitudes and pressures of the market generally. Other participants after the lecture elaborated on the globalizing of the US-corporate model of higher education, the changes in “public” education in other parts of the world, as well as the transnational migrations of graduate student labor populations.

Conversely, this meant that critical “theory” and philosophy, the core issues at stake at SCT, dovetailed into broader discussions of history, sociality, and contemporary global and national politics. Several presenters expounded on these relations – Lauren Berlant in her exploration of “creative commons” in contemporary North America, Hent de Vries in his discussion of “religion” in multicultural Europe, and Rei Terada who illustrated the dialectics of “revolution/restoration” marking the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The presenters and their audience grappled with the interpretation of dynamic social realities through the equally shifting vocabulary of “theory.” An emerging consensus, though contested at multiple registers, emphasized the need to analyze these problems through a transnational and “global” framework, while drawing from discrete, particular local examples and being mindful of *difference*.

In Ania Loomba's seminar, “Feminisms and Postcolonialities,” perhaps the most passionate debate was on the limits of subjective agency. Which are the subjective forms that empower, and are all kinds of agency defensible? These issues were discussed at length, and not only because of their relevance to the fields of postcolonial studies and/or feminism. More generally, these issues prompted the participants to self-critically explore the political/theoretical implications of their own work. Such an expansive approach was undoubtedly made possible by the unique space afforded by the SCT program.

What made SCT such a salutary experience, in my opinion, was the range of positions and investments one came across. In the “Feminisms and Postcolonialities” seminar, for instance, we had colleagues who either worked or had previously worked in the Czech Republic, Ecuador, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Poland, Romania, Saudi Arabia, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, and the US, a truly impressive spread given the class size of 18. Additionally, the academic specializations were equally diverse, ranging from American

literature, British and Commonwealth literature, Spanish and Hispanic literature to TV, media and film studies, political science and cultural studies. The life and academic experiences from different parts of the world, and the disciplinary expertise(s) that each person brought to the classroom, contributed to the “thick” cosmopolitanism and interdisciplinary spirit. For me, it enabled a very enriching learning process, wider in *scope* from the learning opportunities provided by graduate coursework.

Both in her seminar, which included material from 1980s British socialist-feminism to contemporary Asian queer theory, and in her public lecture and colloquium, Ania Loomba called for extending conventional boundaries of conceptualization. Providing such cases as the internationalist networks of mid-twentieth-century Communist women activists in India as well as Indian Ocean modernity and early modern maritime routes, Loomba drew attention in her presentations to the overlaps and interconnections between different regions of the world. Her scholarship demonstrated the value of attending to the *multiple* modalities of modernization and globalization, rather than only canonical or Eurocentric parameters of history or “theory.” The other equally fruitful avenue of dialogue was the interaction of theoretical categories and on-the-ground organizing, which was richly informed by the perspectives of several colleagues working in (and on) different parts of the world.

The close interaction between inspirational faculty members, and equally engaged graduate students, made SCT a remarkable personal experience for me. Many of my colleagues agreed with me, as we were bidding farewell after the final day of classes, that our time together constituted a memorable intellectual experience enabling the forging of friendships and solidarities that would surely continue and evolve beyond the summer of 2012. Finally, my thanks go to the SCT support staff, whose constant and tireless efforts helped us to function smoothly as a tightly-knit community of scholars.

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Closing Faculty Panel



SCT Public Lectures (Top from left to right: Jonathan Culler, Cathy Caruth, Ray Brassier; Middle from left to center: Amanda Anderson, Lauren Berlant; Bottom from left to center: Dominick LaCapra, Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht; Bottom right: SCT Participants)

**F**or our last “Queer Technics” seminar, Amy Villarejo asked seminar participants to write a short paragraph addressing key preoccupations of our six weeks of reading and discussion. I was paralyzed; the task induced displacement activities. Seminar readings, discussions, even arguments, not to mention the varied public lectures, colloquia and mini-seminars had, over the preceding weeks, all challenged me to think in productive ways about my own methodologies and, preeminently, the constitution of my archive: what it is that I study, and how. But to distill this into a paragraph, to attempt to pull together the threads of so many experiences, so many conversations in seminar or during well-catered receptions on long summer evenings in the beautiful A.D. White House garden, so many engaging question-and-answer sessions after lectures, seemed impossible.

In seminars alone we had thought deeply about temporality and technology in relation to film, photography, performance, and literature; we engaged throughout with questions of representation and sexuality, with the energies of somatechnics (“the mutually generative relation between bodies of flesh, bodies and knowledge, and bodies politic,” in a definition by Nikki Sullivan and Susan Stryker, the latter a visitor to one of our seminars); we set Heidegger in dialogue with Haraway, Benjamin with Bloch, Derrida with DeLanda, Stiegler with Sobchack. We watched a film about gleaning and thought of ourselves as intellectual gleaners (my favorite gleaning was the information that before his conversion Louis Farrakhan had been a calypso singer who enjoyed great success with a song about celebrity transsexual Christine Jorgensen). We even discussed bees and brittlestars in relation to media and the nature of metaphor.

Then it occurred to me—in the shower of my sub-let apartment—that if I could not produce a paragraph I could at least settle on a word. Drawing attention to the site of this thought is not to over-share, but to note that there is something about the material conditions of my having thought thus, then, that renders the thought (and the word)

contingent, which is to say provisional but also—crucially—related to a *particular* experience and *particular* historical conditions: my body, in a particular shower, in a particular apartment. This insistence on context and contingency bore (and bears) the marks of the kind of work we had undertaken in our seminar, work that challenged us all—scholars of literatures in a number of languages, of Chinese and of European history, of art, film, gender studies, political science, psychoanalysis, sociology—to contemplate the relationship between theory and embodiment, to think how theory might matter to real bodies in particular times and places.

I had expected that my six weeks in Ithaca would consolidate a recent turn in my work from print cultures and History-of-the-Book scholarship to queer theory, that I would be required to read texts I knew I should have done—*in theory*—but hadn’t, or hadn’t for some time, or hadn’t adequately processed. This would, the narrative had gone, support and advance the use of queer theory’s engagement



SCT Final Banquet (Top: SCT Participants; Bottom left: SCT Six-Week Faculty; Bottom right: SCT Participant Presentation)

with futurity in my own work on post-apartheid South African literatures and culture. Little could I have expected that—in practice—I would learn so much, in particular *about* practice: the practice of teaching and of research, of seminar management, of fearless but collegial questioning, of generous mentoring, and about theory as praxis. The key thread here is matter and materiality; if I was discovering new lines of flight, I was discovering, too, the strands of continuity amongst aspects of my own work.

And so to return to my word-in-lieu-of-a-paragraph (and my thought in the shower): I settled on “object,” but heard as noun and verb in the imperative. If we agreed collectively on anything in that month and a half of seminars it was that, as scholars with an investment in thinking queerly, we ought to be suspicious of nouns—hence “to queer,” rather than “queer” as appellation. *Object* in all of its grammatical possibility suggested our or my direct or indirect object or objects (my texts and my archive; but also my intention, my hope), and hence

perhaps Lacan’s *objet petit a* and the question of desire and disappointment, also of translation or the insistence on non-translation, sustaining the objective possibility of impossibility that was also in the air in many lectures’ and (other) seminars’ engagements with skepticism, nihilism, or revolution. To intend *object* as imperative (“hey, you, I OBJECT!”), to suggest such activity as my object, my *objective*, seemed to capture well my sense that some of the most memorable moments of my SCT experience had involved all of these senses of the word. There were, in so many of our readings and gatherings, eloquent calls-to-action (in relation to the academy, and the commons), engaged discussions of the ethics attendant on being thinkers who acknowledge that bodies of theory can matter to real bodies, interventions that pushed speakers to think more about context (to historicize; not to generalize). There were debates, too, about what we do with objects of study: how does the aesthetic generate theory; what work do examples do when used analogically versus allegorically?

*Objects* of study can generate (and to object involves) praxis—theory in practice. To theorize about, to engage in research as scholars of the politics of queer possibility, of queer poetics and poiesis (theory and practice conjoined once more), was, we all learned, to engage in an ultimately hopeful endeavor. Or as Cornell anthropologist Hiro Miyazaki writes in one of the seminar readings Villarejo set in week 1 (from a study of the dispossessed Suvaou people of Fiji): “hope is a method of knowledge formation, academic and otherwise.” Six weeks in Ithaca gave me many moments of hopefulness: I made extraordinary friends; I found space, seven years into a faculty position, to think and to argue without the pressure of writing or publication; I found models for a theoretically sophisticated yet politically engaged pedagogy. I cannot thank my new friends and colleagues enough, or recommend the experience more highly.

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SCT participants and faculty at Taughannock Falls