The School of Criticism & Theory
A.D. White House
27 East Avenue
Cornell University
Ithaca, NY 14853

THE SCHOOL OF CRITICISM AND THEORY
PROSPECTUS
2016 SUMMER SESSION
JUNE 19 - JULY 29

CORNELL UNIVERSITY
http://sct.cornell.edu
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, fellows, 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 the better argument, and the courage of imagination, while never forgetting the concrete political responsibilities that more abstract reflections entail. Beyond the infatuation with the best ways of the world around them, 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.

**Director’s Welcome**

Hent de Vries  
Russ Family  
Professor in the Humanities and Philosophy, Director of The Humanities Center, Johns Hopkins University

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**2016 Six-Week Seminars**

**Branka Arsić**, Professor of English and Comparative Literature, and Faculty Affiliate, Institute for Comparative Literature and Society, Columbia University  
“Material Life: Vitalism From Spinoza to Deleuze”

Vitalism has been an unstable term throughout the history of philosophy and science; from Aristotle to Claude Bernard diverse and often contradictory meanings have been attributed to it. This course will, however, leave much of that rich history aside—especially the varieties of it in Ancient Greek philosophy, and in the Medieval and Renaissance eras—in order to focus on the vitalist philosophies that emerged with Spinoza at the beginning of modernity in response to Descartes’s mechanist understanding of matter (as inert and moved by immaterial forces different from it), and which persist today in the thinking of such authors as Gilles Deleuze or Quentin Meillassoux. Such philosophies explore matter as indistinguishable from life, interpreting it as both germinal and formative: beings emerge out of the ocean of agitated matter that gives them form and to which they return, as if reimmersing into unmodified, impersonal, and infinite life. However, although the authors we will be interested in share some version of the major faith that matter is inherently dynamic and vitalized, their accounts of just what that means often differ considerably. They sometimes appear in the form of cosmologies that understand the earth as sensuous and even, in the case of Fechner and Deleuze, composed of little brains; at other times they render vegetal life capable of perception and inherently sensuous, and end up discussing modalities of vegetal happiness (as is the case with Poe), or consider the organic and inorganic to be composed of the continuous flow of qualia. The course will explore a variety of theories that propose life as material but our interest will be less in cosmological than ethical and ecological questions. We will want to know the consequences of such accounts of matter for our understanding of the human; we will inquire into what counts as personhood for those authors, as well as what kind of ethics and politics they formulate on the basis of their materialist ontologies. In other words, we will try to understand Deleuze’s claim that vitalist philosophy is “imperative.”

Readings will include selections from philosophical texts by Spinoza, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Henry Bergson, William James, Charles Sanders Pierce, Gilles Deleuze, and Quentin Meillassoux, scientific treatises by Lamarck, Xavier Bichat, Jacob Bigelow, and Charles Darwin, and literary texts by Edgar Allan Poe, Herman Melville, Walt Whitman, and Emily Dickinson.

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Beebe Lake Dam, Cornell University Campus
The ‘Machiavellian moment’ described by J.G.A. Pocock in his 1975 book of that name identifies those moments of crisis in the life of a polity when political actors struggle to reactivate the *vita activa* of the ancients to create a new political order or to revitalize an existing order fallen into corruption. While Pocock intended to provide a strictly historical account of republican ideology stretching from ancient Athens, to Renaissance Florence, to Oliver Cromwell’s England, to colonial America, his portrayal of ‘civic humanism’ found contemporary resonances in American political debate in the 1980s and 1990s. Even more surprisingly, both Pocock’s idea and Machiavelli himself have had a fascinating and consequential impact on the course of radical thinking. Radicalism’s Machiavellian moment came with the protracted crisis and collapse of Marxism. Entering uncharted territory, radical theorists faced new questions. In light of the failure of the twentieth-century’s revolutionary experiments, as well as its own entanglements with those experiments, how could theory understand its past and imagine its future? What vision could supplant the dimming of utopia? And who or what would replace the privileged agent of revolutionary change once post-Fordist capitalism and neoliberal globalization fragmented the social world beyond recognition? Such questions have frequently led theorists to swing between melancholy and mania, but they have also provoked innovative and rigorous attempts to rethink the project of radical politics as radical democracy. Uniting historical and contemporary perspectives, this seminar will explore these questions through two approaches. On the one hand, we will consider radicalism’s Machiavellian moment with the strict prooftexts. On the other hand, in the spirit of Pocock’s account, we will free ourselves from the proper name Machiavelli to consider the project of radical democracy as an effort to recover and/or reinvent an activist and transformative conception of politics. Readings in this section may include selections from Claude Lefort, Cornelius Castoriadis, Hannah Arendt, Jacques Rancière, Wendy Brown, Judith Butler, Slavoj Žižek, Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe, Simon Critchley, Susan Buck-Morss, and David Graeber. Wherever possible, we will bring our theoretical discussion into dialogue with contemporary phenomena of protest, ranging from the Occupy movement to the politics of human rights.

**W. J. T. Mitchell, Gaylord Donnelley Distinguished Service Professor, English and Art History, University of Chicago; Editor, Critical Inquiry**

Seeing Madness: Insanity, Media, and Visual Culture

This seminar will put into question every term in its title. What is madness? What has it been in a history that is coeval with the emergence of human culture and society in the first place? With language, media, and image-making? What does it mean to see madness, to observe and represent it bodily (especially facial) expression, either directly or by way of media such as painting and sculpture, photography and cinema? How is the fascination with seeing and hearing madness in certain forms of performance (e.g., opera) to be squared with the aversion that mental illness produces when directly encountered? What are the invisible forms of madness, and how are they mediated? Is there madness “below” the human, in the world of primates? What happens to the image of madness when it is medicalized and juridically renamed “insanity”? What is the point of using non-technical, vernacular terms such as “madness” and “folly” rather than scientifically legitimated concepts such as mental illness, psychosis/neurosis, thought and mood disorders, hysteria, paranoia, mania, dementia, depression, bipolar disorder, anxiety, schizotypal personality, multiple personality, and schizophrenia? What are we to make of the binaries and “borderline” metaphors that structure the discourse of madness? Rationality/irrationality; wisdom/folly; health/sickness; order/disorder; sanity/insanity; normality/abnormality, and (above all) suffering and creativity? What is the relation between the socio-political construction of madness, and its status as bodily, medical condition? Why does madness itself bifurcate into the polarities in the *Phaedrus*: a madness of the body, emotions, and sensorium (love, fury, passion, delusion) and a prophetic or divine madness that produces insights beyond reason? What is the relation between individual and collective madness? Is madness, as Gustave Le Bon argued, contagious? Was Nietzsche correct in saying that “insanity in individuals is somewhat rare—but in groups, parties, nations, and epochs, it is the rule”? What is the significance of the recurrent figure of “sovereign madness,” epitomized by the mad king and the figure of “pure reason” (philosopher and mathematician)?

Foucault’s History of Madness, will of course be a central text, but I would urge participants to read his very early book, *Mental Illness and Psychiatry* and his much later *Psychiatric Power*. Why does Foucault say that “someday we will no longer know what madness was”? We will delve into three classics of the “anti-psychiatry” movement, Erving Goffman, Thomas Szasz, and R. D. Laing, and consider what the emergent field of disability studies can teach us about mental illness. Other readings will include Shoshana Feldman on literature and madness, Georges Didi-Huberman on photography and hysteria, and Sander Gilman on visual images of madness. Films studied will include Hitchcock’s Spellbound, Bergman’s Persona, Wiseman’sTiticut Follies, Wiene’s Cabinet of Dr. Caligari, Kinugasa’s Page of Madness, Frankenheimer’s Manchurian Candidate, Litvak’s The Snake Pit, Scorcese’s Shutter Island, Fuller’s Shock Corridor, Jean Rouche’s Les matres fous, and Adam Curtis’s, The Trap. A more complete filmography and bibliography will be pre-circulated to members of the seminar.

**Warren Breckman, Rose Family Endowed Term Professor of History, University of Pennsylvania**

“The Machiavellian Moment of Radical Democracy”

“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 Welch, Harvard University

Ithaca Farmers Market, Steamboat Landing Pavilion

Photo © Ellen Esrock

“The School of Criticism and Theory

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Prospectus 5
The seminar will first look at various psychoanalytic approaches to secrets. We will particularly look at the way Sigmund Freud, Nicholas Abraham, Maria Torok, and Jacques Lacan theorized secrets in their work. We will look both at individual secrets and family secrets as well as at a broader symbolic meaning of secrets as something that holds social structures together. Works of literature (Edgar Allen Poe, Henry James, O’Henry, Kazuo Ishiguro) will help us to analyze the nature of secrets as social bonds.

Psychoanalysis perceives secrets as something we do not hide only from others, but primarily from ourselves. And Lacan even mysteriously pointed out that people do not have passion for knowledge but rather passion for ignorance. Keeping secrets is also an important milestone in the process of socialization—the point at which a child becomes capable of hiding something from the parents marks an important step in the process of separation. At that moment the child also can be assured that he or she is not constantly controlled by others.

If for subjectivity it is essential to have the perception that the Other does not know everything about us, how does the society of surveillance affect the subject? In times when our lives are more and more under constant control, ignorance seems to be a way of trying to secure the fantasy of not being constantly observed. The seminar will question in which way secrets go hand in hand with ignorance. We will first try to formulate what the difference is between ignorance, denial, and negation. Then we will look at the dilemmas related to truth-telling and confession. Here the work of Michel Foucault will be one of the points of reference.

The course will further question: How is it that we can tell so much about ourselves, and in the process hide things? What is the relationship between telling all and keeping secrets? Also, how has this all changed in the digital age? What is the confessional dimension of the process hide things? What is the relationship between telling all and keeping secrets?

The premise of the course will, however, be to explore the right to keep secrets from oneself, the right to remain ignorant of our own secrets and traumas. And especially, the right of being left alone by the state and corporate surveillance apparatuses.

**The Right to Ignorance: Psychoanalysis and Secrets in Times of Surveillance**

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Matthew Engelke, Professor of Anthropology, London School of Economics and Political Science
“Africa and the Secular”

Why is almost none of the critical theory concerned with the secular ever addressed in relation to sub-Saharan Africa? It’s notable not least given the extent to which other post-colonial regions, such as North Africa and South Asia, are central to such discussions. We can’t say critical theorists are ignoring Africanists’ work; indeed, looking at the Africanist literature in any depth makes it clear that there is not, and has never been, a field of “secular studies.” Africanists don’t talk about the secular, at least explicitly. Does it matter? Taking such questions and observations as a point of departure, and considering them in relation to a range of classic and contemporary ethnographic cases, this mini-seminar explores some of the key terms in current debates about the secular: immanence, the mundane, critique, doubt. In doing so, we’ll call for further considerations of how (and whether) to figure the Africanist canon in relation to the terms of critical theory.

Diana Sorensen, Dean of Arts and Humanities and James F. Rothenberg Professor of Romance Languages and Literatures and of Comparative Literature, Harvard University
“Geographic Imaginaries for the 21st Century: Mobility, Materiality, and the Production of Knowledge”

This mini-seminar will explore the possibilities of ushering in a new geographic consciousness that enables us to transcend static taxonomies of space such as area studies or nation states. Instead, the goal is to think not only transnationally, but also in terms of a multi-centered world of circuits in motion. I hope the mini-seminar will allow us to work out relational models that are not wedded to stability and sedentarism, but that privilege circulation and exchange as constitutive of cultural processes and identity formations. We will explore existing concepts of regional coherence, and then speculate on the possibilities of models predicated on circulation. The lectures will draw on specific case studies as examples of the conceptual power of the mobility paradigm.

“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 2013 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

Rainbow over Arts Quad, Cornell University Campus

2016 Visiting Guest Lecturers

Homi Bhabha, Anne F. Rothenberg Professor of the Humanities, Department of English; Director, Mahindra Humanities Center; Senior Advisor on the Humanities to the President and Provost, Harvard University
“The Quest for Security and Questions of Cultural Form”

Marjorie Levinson, F.L. Huetwell Professor, Department of English, University of Michigan
“Parsing the Frost: Growth of a Poet’s Sentence in ‘Frost at Midnight’”

Timothy Murray, Professor of Comparative Literature and English; Director, Society for the Humanities; Curator, Rose Goldsen Archive of New Media, Cornell University
“Aesthetic Remix: Medial Architectonics, East and West”

A.D. White House, 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 2014. 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 http://dos.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 2016 summer session will be available by December 1, 2015. The application deadline is February 1, 2016, 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, 2016.

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.