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.

Hent de Vries
Emily Apter, Professor of French and Comparative Literature; Chair, Department of Comparative Literature, New York University
“Thinking in Untranslatables: Revisiting the Gender/Genre Problem”

Drawing on Barbara Cassin and Etienne Balibar’s critical praxis of “philosophizing in languages,” this seminar will experiment with “theorizing in untranslatables,” looking closely at how key terms of gender theory shift culturally and politically across languages, or resist translation. Session topics will foreground the relation among difference, differences, différance, and sexual difference; definitions of sexual difference in feminism and trans theory; new ontologies of the subject in relation to gender trauma, sexual violence, and wounded subjectivity. Derrida’s essays on the concept of Geschlecht – a term referring to sex, genre, gender, species, race, kind, the human and the nonhuman – will orient discussion of the response to the neuter status of Heideggerian Dasein. We will then move to Catherine Malabou’s reading of Heidegger and Derrida, focusing on her notions of plasticity, difference-changing, and “epigenetics” post-deconstruction. We will also attend carefully to Alexander Weheliye’s Deleuze-inflected notion of “racialized assemblages” (developed in Habeas Viscus).

A central concern of the seminar will be to put critical pressure on gender/genre distinctions (as in the weird question of “what genre are you?”) in the context of contemporary pronoun wars, including the politics of how to call or name difference in the workplace and the academy. We will address some of the issues and challenges around gender-inclusive language, ‘microaggression’ (itself a problematic term), and ‘safe spaces’ in university classroom teaching. A question posed throughout: How do the politics of safe space and gender pronouns intersect with other struggles against systemic exclusions?
Faisal Devji, Reader in History and Fellow of St. Antony’s College, University of Oxford

“Humanity”

From a moral ideal and a juridical or demographic abstraction only a century ago, humanity has become a solidly empirical fact in our own day. Assuming a kind of posthumous reality in the wake of Cold War fears about atomic annihilation, or contemporary ones about climate change, it is now the subject of everyday struggles and experiences around the world.

In this course we will look at the way in which humanity has come to constitute both a subject and object of modern thought globally. From debates over war, genocide and human rights, to those about colonialism, totalitarianism and terrorism, to say nothing of race, gender, and cyborg life, we will study the making of humanity in the work of some important philosophers, historians, and anthropologists.

Course readings include texts by Martin Heidegger on the death of God and Jacques Derrida on that of man; Carl Schmitt on the laws of war and Hannah Arendt on lawless wars; Donna Haraway on the man-machine and Adi Ophir on the terrorist-humanitarian; Achille Mbembe on animality and Talal Asad on inhumanity.

“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

“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

“The SCT combines a relentless schedule of events with a pervasive spirit of conviviality.”

Martin Moraw, Brandeis University

The Commons, Downtown Ithaca

Rainbow over Arts Quad, Cornell University Campus
The concept of religion has recently become an object of strong critique. As numerous studies have argued, the very concept comes from a particular reading of a particular tradition, and the attempt to build a field of study based upon such a restricted concept has resulted in, at best, a highly ethnocentric body of knowledge and, at worst, an implicitly imperialistic one. This seminar attempts to respond to such critiques by arguing that instead of rejecting the concept, we need to resurrect it by building upon the indigenous understandings that emerged in other traditions to develop a more cosmopolitan vision. We will explore the implications of such an approach by rethinking our understandings of ritual, belief, and religion in general from a cosmopolitan and comparative perspective. Readings will include Talal Asad, Tomoko Masuzawa, Hent de Vries, and Veena Das.
Carolyn Rouse, Professor and Chair of Anthropology and Director of the Program in African Studies, Princeton University
“The Case Against Reparations: A Radical Rethinking of Social Justice in the 21st Century”

In June 2014, celebrated social critic Ta-Nehisi Coates published a persuasive article entitled “The Case for Reparations.” In The Atlantic he argues that, “Until we reckon with our compounding moral debts, America will never be whole.” But, what metrics are used to quantify a moral debt? And what does it mean for a country to be whole? Repairing the past through debt repayment is a seductive concept, but reparations rely on the myth of singularity or the philosopher in Plato’s cave who unlike all others is able to comprehend an eternal truth. Ethnographic studies of reparative social justice movements, however, complicate truth claims. For example, the designation of perpetrators and victims, who owes vs. who is owed the debt, is never easy. Using the failures of international donor aid and development as a case study, this course considers successive attempts at reparations from colonialism (a reparation for slavery) to now indigenous and sovereignty movements that attempt to link rights to allodial land titles and/or forms of cultural citizenship. This course challenges contemporary calls for reparations by engaging the question of what it means to be human, conceived anthropologically and philosophically, in the 21st century. Given climate change and increasing global inequalities this course develops tools for reconsidering the relationship between land, labor, anthropon pragmata (human affairs), and social justice.
Philipppe Descola, Chair, Anthropology of Nature, Collège de France; Director of Studies, École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales
“Ontological Plurality as Anthropological Critique”

From Tylor’s famous dictum that “the science of culture is a reformers’ science” to Lévi-Strauss’ qualification of ethnology as a “science révolutionnaire” there has been a long-standing trend among anthropologists to view their discipline as a critical instrument with which to look back at their own society. The reason for this is obvious and predates the emergence of anthropology as a science: observing the institutions of other people, the purpose they serve and the values they carry is a powerful reminder that one’s own institutions are historically contingent and may not be the best to ensure the kind of world we aspire to live in. However, the methodological relativism of anthropology, and the political consequences it implies, has been carried through only half-way. For the way we think about institutions, ours and those of other people, is still completely dependent upon the concepts that the Enlightenment has bequeathed to the social sciences to qualify reflexively Europe’s own destiny: society, nature, history, economics, politics, art, religion, etc. These concepts are anything but universal; they are the products of a very specific ontological mapping which other forms of collectives elsewhere did not share (and which quite a few persist in not sharing). Criticism thus does not mean reflexivity alone, it requires a complete revision of the concepts through which we describe and analyze the shared worlds of humans and non-humans so that they may problematize ontological pluralism more aptly and thus provide more efficient intellectual tools to bring about new forms of cosmopolitics.

Shoshana Felman, Robert Woodruff Distinguished Professor of Comparative Literature and French, Emory University; Thomas E. Donnelly Professor Emerita of French and Comparative Literature, Yale University
“Literature and Vulnerability”

History has put on trial a series of creative thinkers. At the dawn of philosophy, Socrates drinks the cup of poison, to which he is condemned by the Athenians for his influential teaching, charged with atheism, and corruption of the youth. Centuries later, in modernity, similarly influential Oscar Wilde is condemned by the English for his homosexuality, as well as for his provocative artistic style. In France, Flaubert and Baudelaire are both indicted — brought to court as criminals — for their first, remarkably innovative literary works; Emile Zola is condemned for defending a Jew against the state which has convicted him, and flees from France to England to escape imprisonment.

However different, all these accused have come to stand for something greater than themselves: something that was symbolized — and challenged — by their trials. Through the examination of selected literary texts that mirror or reflect upon these legal dramas, this seminar will ask: Why is literature important, why does it matter? Why are literary writers, artists and philosophers, repetitively put on trial, and how in turn do they put on trial culture and society? What is the role of art and literature as (willing or unwilling) legal actors, and as political performers in the struggles over ethics and the struggles over meaning? The seminar will focus on the case of Wilde as an exemplary case of conflict between literature and law and of encounter between poetry, vulnerability, laughter, cry, desire, justice and injustice, comedy and tragedy, courage, language, silence, beauty.
Avishai Margalit, Schulman Professor Emeritus of Philosophy, Hebrew University of Jerusalem; former George F. Kennan Professor, Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton University

“Just and Unjust Wars”

War is violent, but also a means by which political communities pursue collective interests. When, in light of these features, is the recourse to armed force justified? Pacifists argue that because war is so violent it is never justified, and that there is no such thing as a just war. Realists, in contrast, argue that war is simply a fact of life and not a proper subject for moral judgment, any more than we would judge an attack by a pack of wolves in moral terms. In between is just war theory, which claims that some wars, but not all, are morally justified. We will explore these theories, and will consider how just war theory comports with international law rules governing recourse to force. We will also explore justice in war, that is, the moral and legal rules governing the conduct of war, such as the requirement to avoid targeting non-combatants. Finally, we will consider how war should be terminated; what should be the nature of justified peace? We will critically evaluate the application of just war theory in the context of contemporary security problems, including: (1) transnational conflicts between states and nonstate groups and the so-called “war on terrorism”; (2) civil wars; (3) demands for military intervention to halt humanitarian atrocities taking place in another state.

Anthony Vidler, Professor of Architecture, Cooper Union; Vincent Scully Visiting Professor of Architectural History, Yale University

“The Smooth and the Rough: Surfaces Psychological and Architectural from Adrian Stokes to Rem Koolhaas”

This seminar/workshop will study the theoretical construction of the architectural surface in modernity, from “rough” Brutalism to “smooth” late Modernism, as read through the critical lenses of Walter Benjamin, Adrian Stokes, Melanie Klein, and contemporary architectural theorists Rayner Banham, Peter Smithson, and Rem Koolhaas. The campus of Cornell contains a gamut of such “surfaces” for on site study and discussion from the Herbert Johnson Museum of Art to the new Koolhaas extension to the School of Architecture.


“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
2017 Visiting Guest Lecturers

**Amanda Anderson**, Andrew W. Mellon Professor of Humanities and English; Director, Cogut Center for the Humanities, Brown University; Honorary Senior Fellow, School of Criticism and Theory
“Political Psychology: Theory and Doxa”

**Jonathan Culler**, Class of 1916 Professor of English and Comparative Literature, Cornell University; Honorary Senior Fellow, School of Criticism and Theory
“Narratology and the Lyric”

**Frances Ferguson**, Ann L. and Lawrence B. Buttenweiser Professor and Chair, Department of English, University of Chicago
“Molding Populations: Deep Education”

**Mariët Westermann**
Executive Vice President for Programs and Research, Andrew W. Mellon Foundation
“The Humanities in the World”

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 2015. 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
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 2017 summer session will be available by December 1, 2016. The application deadline is February 1, 2017, 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, 2017.

Contact Information

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

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

The School of Criticism and Theory
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A.D. White House
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Ithaca, NY 14853

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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