#### Theory Today: Year 2 [2025-2026] Working Group



'Theory Today: Between Past and Present' working group aims primarily to read and discuss the diverse range of trends within contemporary theory. From Psychoanalysis contemporary interventions Postcolonial Marxism, thought, Media Theory, and Gender and Sexuality studies, group will engage with published monographs and essays from various fields and backgrounds actively shaping the contemporary theoretical discourse.

Join us in reading closely and discussing rigorously the recent scholarship in theory. We aim to chart and better understand

theorizing and thinking theory in and for our time.

#### Organizers:

- Nisarg Patel [નિસર્ગ પટેલ], Doctoral Candidate, CSLC (<u>nvpatel@usc.edu</u>)
- Tania Sarfraz, Doctoral Candidate, SCA (<a href="mailto:sarfraz@usc.edu">sarfraz@usc.edu</a>)

#### Faculty Advisor:

 Neetu Khanna, Associate Professor, Comparative Literature (neetukha@usc.edu)

#### Sign Up:

New Member Registration: Please fill out this Google Form

Fall Workshop w. Alberto Toscano: <a href="https://forms.gle/neBFV8aJBzf3kwet7">https://forms.gle/neBFV8aJBzf3kwet7</a>

Spring Lecture by Alenka Zupančič: https://forms.gle/gQrL56SD5rrndnbH7

Spring Workshop w. Todd McGowan: https://forms.gle/tzCg8ETPCa5wsWwX6

For other queries, please email: theorytodayworkinggroup@gmail.com

[NOTE: 'Theory Today' now exists on Instagram. You can follow us for updates.]

#### **Working Group Sponsors:**

- Levan Institute for Humanities [USC]
- USC Dornsife Office of Dean and Vice-Dean
- Center for Feminist Research [USC]
- VSRI [USC]

#### Schedule of Events for 2025-'26

This year, the working group will focus primarily on the intersection of 'contemporary theory' with the themes of Capitalism, Psychoanalysis, and the Global South.

#### September 2025

Reading: Indifference: On the Praxis of Interspecies Being (Duke UP, 2023)

Date: Sept. 11, 2025 | Prof. Naisargi Dave will be joining the discussion

Time: 10 to 11:30 am PST | Responses

Meeting Link:

https://usc.zoom.us/j/99699810364?pwd=QKjW0t7lO2uzcTdfykvPFKGhSeMaxk.1

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#### October 2025

Reading: *Disavowal* (Polity 2024)

Date: Oct. 9, 2025 | Prof. Alenka Zupančič will be joining the discussion

Time: 10 to 11:30 am PST | Responses

Meeting Link:

https://usc.zoom.us/j/91908814982?pwd=O23j6iFYcaBTz2KyQvY2U1eKsBRJaZ.1

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#### November 2025

Reading: Stop Thief! Anarchism and Philosophy (Polity, 2024)

Date: Nov. 6, 2025 | Prof. Catherine Malabou will be joining the discussion

Time: 10 to 11:30 am PST | Responses

#### Meeting Link:

https://usc.zoom.us/j/92388883686?pwd=VogdXMOb9IcWoKeustedFY2L72fJxz.1

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#### December 2025

Reading: The Cinema of Extractions: Film Materials and their Forms (Columbia, 2025)

Date: Nov 19, 2025 | Prof. Brian Jacobson will be joining the discussion [In-Person]

Time: 12 to 2:00 pm PST | Responses

In-Person Location: DML 240, USC [3550 Trousdale Pkwy, Los Angeles, CA 90089]

Meeting Link:

https://usc.zoom.us/j/95704778106?pwd=55K5VleWV5Byc3tORRPPabljoBVx13.1

#### January 2026

Reading: Ghostly Pasts, Capitalist Presence (Duke UP, 2024)

Date: Jan. 15, 2026 | Prof. Tithi Bhattacharya will be joining the discussion

Time: 10 to 11:30 am PST | Responses

Meeting Link:

https://usc.zoom.us/j/96325607271?pwd=khNIFgz5EdCtb8HguYZ2O0Rc3U4zLx.1

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#### February 2026 [CANCELED]

Reading: Caribbean Inhospitality (Rutgers UP, 2025)

Date: Feb. 12, 2026 | Prof. Natalie Belisle will be joining the discussion [In-Person]

Time: 10 to 11:30 am PST | Responses

Meeting Link: N/A

In-Person Location: N/A

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#### March 2026

Reading: Pure Excess: Capitalism and Commodity (Columbia UP, 2024)

Date: March, 13, 2025 | Prof. Todd McGowan will be joining the discussion [In-Person]

Time: 10 to 12:00 am PST | Responses

Meeting Link:

https://usc.zoom.us/j/93184059726?pwd=LfFefbDoqqlGbEC3XocT58EmErpwGb.1

In-Person Location: THH-309K [Taper Hall, USC]

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#### **April 2026**

Reading: Sentient Flesh (Duke UP, 2020)

Date: April 9, 2026 | Prof. R.A. Judy will be joining the discussion

Time: 10:00 to 11:30 pm PST | Responses

Meeting Link:

https://usc.zoom.us/j/98648748355?pwd=baMpmbGooUVOAyNryAYfaKAiYH8kyG.1

========END OF THE ACADEMIC YEAR=============

#### Vision for 'Theory Today'

'Theory' today stands in a position that can be described, in the language of theory itself, in more than one way. If one is a Marxist, one would call it a 'contradictory' position where, on the one hand, theory facilitates us with more and more sophisticated reading of our predicament, and, on the other hand, even with all its sophistications, it stands pretty helpless when it comes to intervening [praxis] within the social field that it itself has rigorously analyzed. If one is a Freudian, one would call it a situation of 'fetishistic disavowal,' which, in the excellent definition by Octav Mannoni, is structured as "je sais bien, mais quand-meme" [I know very well, but all the same]. If one is Derridean, one would call it a situation par-excellence of being caught in a 'double-bind'; where, on the one hand, there is an ever-fleeting 'impossible' promises which theory offers, and, on the other, the ever-narrowing domain of the commons within which theory functions, or fails to function, in inventing and experimenting with Other ways of being, Other ways of living this life. Whatever your affiliation, whatever card you carry, theory will tell you, in your chosen theoretical language, that we, the theorists, as well as their theories, are in deep crisis.

To ask an old question then: "What is to be done?" What role can a theory play in the time when "[T]he old world is dying, and the new world struggles to be born"? What is theory today, "in the time of monsters"? I would like to keep these questions suspended [as Derrida likes to say], circulating on top of our heads like blackbirds of mountains or blades of a guillotine. The theorists that we will read and who will join us for discussion all respond to this crisis; the crisis which is, first and foremost, the 'crisis of reading.' My small hope is that 'theory today' will create a community of readers who will take on the interminable task of reading and thinking that theory bestows upon, as well as demands, from us— the community to come of theory readers.

—nisarg/નિસર્ગ [5<sup>th</sup> Sept. 2024, India]

"In works said to be theoretical, what is worthy of this name and what is not?"—asks Derrida early on in *Archive Fever*, a citation to which I turn not for the sake of citing Derrida but for this quote's ability to draw our attention to how the act of calling something 'theory' is first of all an act of classification. There is also of course a second, unfortunate, valence to the quote, that of value distinction; theory as a marker of worth. But one would do well to remember that the citation occurs in a text in which the value and the worth of knowledge claims are quite radically undermined—even concepts, supposedly the very core of philosophy, give way to imprecise and open-ended impressions in *Archive Fever*, all that the author of that work finds himself capable of ultimately furnishing.

In convening a working group called *Theory Today*, we have in one sense done nothing more than played a game of classification. The 7 authors we'll be reading over the course of the year are wildly different in style, tone, and commitments, not to mention discipline, objects, and methods. Theory emerges in the act of reading them together nonetheless. Rather than try to define theory, let alone defend it or even explain the purpose of a working group such as this, I might instead just indicate the pull of the word—theory—and its ability to set itself up as the open, indefinite, and imprecise zone where things beyond classification can be read and done in its name.

Tania

Vision: Year 2 | 2025-2026

As we sat down to co-write this vision for Theory-Today Year 2 program, we were faced with a question that was, to put it mildly, quite difficult to answer: How does one orient a project of reading theory within the times that we are living in? Crisis, we said last year, was our guiding star. We began and ended the Theory Today: Year 1 program by reflecting on the question of 'crisis'. We thought about 'crisis' in reading and the crisis that we inhabit in the humanities, and proposed that these two might, after all, not be unrelated. But this year, amidst the unfolding brutalities (cuts in funding, cuts on bodies), even the word crisis seemed to have reached its conceptual limit; becoming inadequate to encapsulate the nihilism of our times. From crisis to nihilism, what words/concepts/point de capiton are we to use? Where does one find a footing, an orientation?

To pun on Descartes, the only thing one can know amidst the rapidly changing times is that times are changing—changing monumentally, and for the worse. In such times of epochal changes, as Blanchot says somewhere, nothing remains untouched. Even our certain, or better commonsensical [a la Gramsci], knowledge comes within the grips of this change and uncertainty, making "certainty as inappropriate as uncertainty."

Through eight book discussions, two theory workshops [one on fascism and one on Hegel-Lacan], and a keynote lecture, we want to propose that Theory Today: Year Two is a search for a 'good enough' word to orient oneself in our 'out of joint' time.

—Nisarg [નિસર્ગ], Tania

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WORKING GROUP: 2025-2026

Fall '25 Reading Schedule

September

Indifference: On Praxis of Interspecies Being, Naisargi Dave (Duke UP, 2023)

October

Disavowal, Alenka Zupančič (Polity, 2024)

November

Stop Thief! Anarchism and Philosophy, Catherine Malabou (Polity, 2024)

December

The Cinema of Extractions: Film Materials and their Forms, Brian Jacobson (Columbia UP, 2025)

Organizers: Nisarg P. (CSLC) Tania Sarfraz (SCA)

Faculty Advisor: Prof. Neetu Khanna



For Queries:

Nisarg: nvpatel@usc.edu

Tania: sarfraz@usc.edu

# THEORYTODAY WORKING GROUP: 2025-2026

Spring '26 Reading Schedule

January

Ghostly Past, Capitalist Presence, Tithi Bhattacharya (Duke UP, 2024)

February

Caribbean Inhospitality, Natalie Belisle (Rutgers UP, 2025)

March

Pure Excess: Capitalism and Commodity, Todd McGowan (Columbia UP, 2024)

April

Sentient Flesh, R.A. Judy (Duke UP, 2020)

Organizers: Nisarg P. (CSLC) Tania Sarfraz (SCA)

Faculty Advisor: Prof. Neetu Khanna



For Queries:

Nisarg: nvpatel@usc.edu Tania: sarfraz@usc.edu Fall Workshop:

### THEORYTODAY

WORKSHOP W/ ALBERTO TOSCANO

FALL 2025

OCTOBER 17, 2025 | Online Workshop

Session 1 | Toscano: Contours of Contemporary Fascism Time: 10 am to 1 pm PST [Zoom]

Session 2 | Toscano: Keynote Lecture & Discussion Time: 4 pm to 6 pm [Zoom] + In-person Reception

The 'Theory Today' Fall '25 workshop focuses on discussing and dissecting the theme of contemporary fascism with one of the most insightful scholars on the topic, Prof. Alberto Toscano.

Toscano is the author of Communism in Philosophy (Brill), Late Fascism (Verso), Terms of Disorder (Segull), Cartographies of the Absolute (Zero Books), The Theater of Production (Palgrave), among others.

RSVP: <a href="https://forms.gle/ZUtLjnAS1DDNDBpE9">https://forms.gle/ZUtLjnAS1DDNDBpE9</a>



Levan Institute for the Humanities

For Queries: Nisarg: nvpatel@usc.edu Tania: sarfraz@usc.edu



AN EVENING W/ ALENKA ZUPANČIČ

Spring 2026

February 5, 2026

Zupančič: Keynote Lecture & Dinner Reception

Time: 4 pm to 6 pm

Place: MCB 101-102 [USC] + Zoom

Alenka Zupančič is the author of Disavowal (2024), Let Them Rot: Antigone's Parallax (2023), What is Sex? (2017), The Odd One In: On Comedy (2008), The Shortest Shadow (2003), Ethics of the Real: Kant and Lacan, and many other path breaking essays on psycholoanalysis, politics, and continental philosophy.

RSVP: https://forms.gle/vZWyQ3ADwK3ee2cD8



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For Queries: Nisarg: nvpatel@usc.edu Tania: sarfraz@usc.edu



**Spring Workshop:** 

### THEORYTODAY

#### WORKSHOP W/TODD MCGOWAN

March 2026

Day 1: March 12

Session 1 | McGowan: Foundations of Thinking [10 am to 1 pm]

Session 2 | McGowan: Capitalist Drives and Cinematic Desires

[3 pm to 6 pm]

Day 2: March 13

Book Discussion: Pure Excess: Capitalism and Commodity

(Columbia 2024) [11 to 1 pm]

Keynote Lecture by Todd McGowan + Reception [5 to 8 pm]

'Theory Today' Spring '26 workshop focuses on *reading* Psychoanalysis (Freud and Lacan) and Philosophy (Marxism and German Idealism) with one of the preeminent and prolific theorists of our time, Prof. Todd McGowan (UVM).

To apply:

https://forms.gle/G3XAPDt6jEFJKyFN6

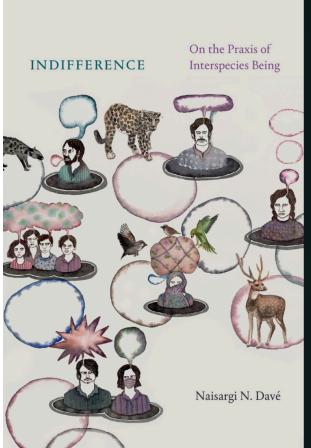
Deadline: 15th November, 2025



Levan Institute for the Humanities For Queries: Nisarg: nvpatel@usc.edu Tania: sarfraz@usc.edu



YEAR 2 [2025-2026]



September 2025

Indifference: On the Praxis of Interspecies Being w. Prof. Naisargi Davé

Date: September 11, 2025 Time: 10 am to 11:30 am PST Mode: Zoom Meeting

Coordinators: Nisarg Patel (CSLC) Tania Sarfraz (SCA)



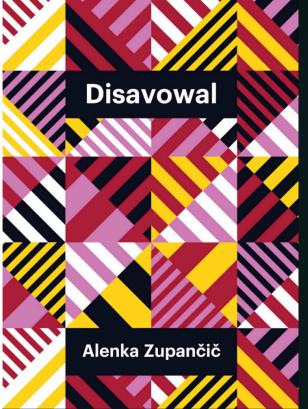


Prof. Naisargi Dave is a Professor of Anthropology at the University of Toronto





YEAR 2 [2025-2026]



October 2026

Disavowal w. Prof. Alenka Zupančič

Date: Oct 9, 2025

Time: 10 to 11:30 am PST

Mode: Zoom Meeting

Coordinators: Nisarg Patel (CSLC) Tania Sarfraz (SCA) Faculty Advisor: Prof. Neetu Khanna

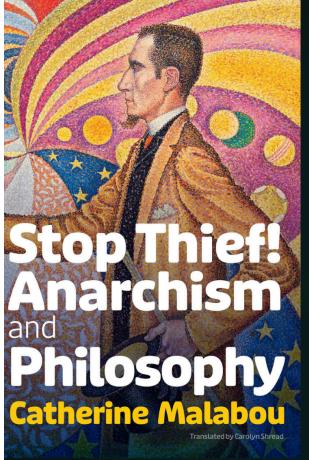




Prof. Alenka Zupančič is a Professor of Philosophy at the European Graduate School



YEAR 2 [2025-2026]



November 2025

Stop Theif! Anarchism and Philosophy w. Prof. Catherine Malabou

Date: November 6, 2025 Time: 10 am to 11:30 am PST

Mode: Zoom Meeting

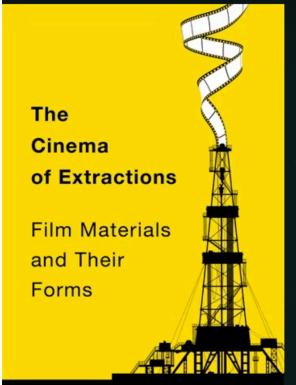
Coordinators: Nisarg Patel (CSLC) Tania Sarfraz (SCA) Faculty Advisor: Prof. Neetu Khanna



Prof. Catherine Malabou is a Professor of Philosophy at Kingston University



YEAR 2 [2025-2026]



November 2025

The Cinema of Extractions: Film Materials and their Forms w. Prof. Brian R. Jacobson

Date: November 19, 2025 Time: 12 am to 2:00 pm PST

Mode: DML 240 + Zoom Meeting

#### Brian Jacobson

Coordinators: Nisarg Patel (CSLC), Tania Sarfraz (SCA)



for the Humanities

Prof. Brian R. Jacobson is a Professor of Visual Culture at Caltech







YEAR 2 [2025-2026]

#### Ghostly



January 2026

Ghostly Pasts, Capitalist Presence w. Prof. Tithi Bhattacharya

Date: January 15, 2026 Time: 10 to 11:30 am PST Mode: Zoom Meeting

#### Presence

TITHI BHATTACHARYA

A SOCIAL HISTORY OF FEAR
IN COLONIAL BENGAL

Coordinators: Nisarg Patel (CSLC) Tania Sarfraz (SCA) Faculty Advisor: Prof. Neetu Khanna





Prof. Tithi Bhattacharya is an Associate Professor of History at Purdue University





YEAR 2 [2025-2026]

CARIBBEANINHOSPITALITY

February 2026

Caribbean Inhospitality w. Prof. Natalie Belisle

Date: February 12, 2026 Time: 12 to 2:30 pm PST

Mode: THH 309 + Zoom Meeting

The Poetics of Strangers at Home

NATALIE LAUREN BELISLE

Coordinators: Nisarg Patel (CSLC) Tania Sarfraz (SCA)

Faculty Advisor: Prof. Neetu Khanna



Prof. Natalie Belisle is an Assistant Professor of Comparative Literature at University of Southern California





YEAR 2 [2025-2026]

PURE. EXCESS Commodity
w. Prof. Too COMMO

March 2025

Pure Excess: Capitalism and

w. Prof. Todd McGowan

Date: March 13, 2026

Time: 11 am to 1:00 pm PST Mode: Online + In-Person

Location: THH 309K

**TODD McGOWAN** 

Coordinators: Nisarg Patel (CSLC) Tania Sarfraz (SCA)

Faculty Advisor: Prof. Neetu Khanna

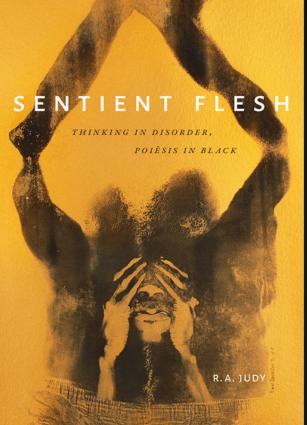




Prof. Todd McGowan is a Professor in Dept. of English at the University of Vermont



YEAR 2 [2025-2026]



April 2026

Sentient Flesh w. Prof. R. A. Judy

Date: April 9, 2026

Time: 10 to 11:30 am PST

Mode: Zoom Meeting





Prof. R.A. Judy is a Professor of Critical and Cultural Studies at the University of Pittsburgh



**Archives: Posters of Past Events** 



Fall '24 Reading Schedule

September 12, 2024 | 10 to 11:30 am PST Abundance: Sexuality's History, Anjali Arondekar (Duke UP, 2023)

October 10, 2024 | 10 to 11:30 am PST Immediacy Or, The Style of Too Late Capitalism, Anna Kornbluh (Verso 2024)

November 26, 2024 | 10 to 11:30 am PST Rated A: Soft-Porn Cinema and Mediations of Desire in India, Darshana Mini (California UP, 2024)

Coordinators: <u>Nisarg P. (CSLC)</u> <u>Tania Sarfraz (SCA)</u>

Faculty Advisor: <u>Prof. Neetu Khanna</u>

Levan Institute for the Humanities

For Queries or Meeting Info: theorytodayworkinggroup@gmail.com

Spring 2025

February 13, 2025 | 10 to 11:30 am PST The Fold: From Your Body to the Cosmos, Laura Marks (Duke UP, 2024)

February 28, 2025 | 12 to 2 pm PST Metaracial: Hegel, Anti-Blackness, and Political Identity, Rei Terada (Chicago UP, 2023)

March 20, 2025 | 10 to 11:30 am PST Bad Education: Why Queer Theory Teaches Us Nothing, Lee Edelman (Duke UP, 2023)

April 29, 2025 | 12:30 to 2:30 am PST Seeing Things: Spectral Materialities of Bombay Horror, Kartik Nair (Chicago UP, 2024)

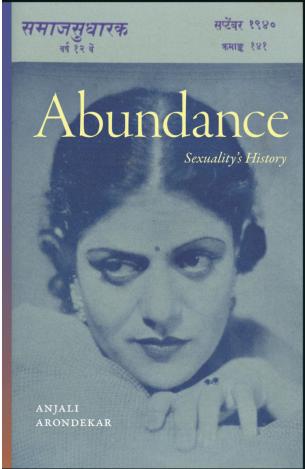
Coordinators: Nisarg P. (CSLC) Tania Sarfraz (SCA)

Faculty Advisor: Prof. Neetu Khanna

Levan Institute for the Humanities

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WORKING GROUP



September 2024

Abundance: Sexuality's History w. Prof. Anjali Arondekar

Date: September 12, 2024 Time: 10 am to 11:30 am PST Mode: Zoom Meeting (RSVP)

Coordinators: Nisarg P. (CSLC) Tania Sarfraz (SCA)

Faculty Advisor: Prof. Neetu Khanna



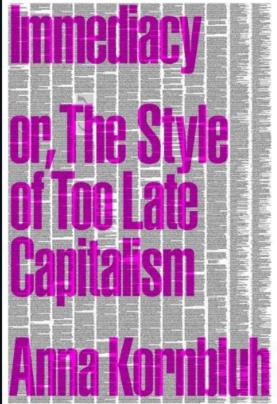
Prof. Anjali Arondekar is Professor of Feminist Studeis at UC, Santa Cruz



For Queries or Meeting Info: theorytodayworkinggroup@gmail.com



**WORKING GROUP** 



October 2024

Immediacy Or, The Style of Too Late Capitalism with Prof. Anna Kornbluh

Date: October 10, 2024

Time: 10 am to 11:30 am PST Mode: Zoom Meeting (<u>RSVP)</u>



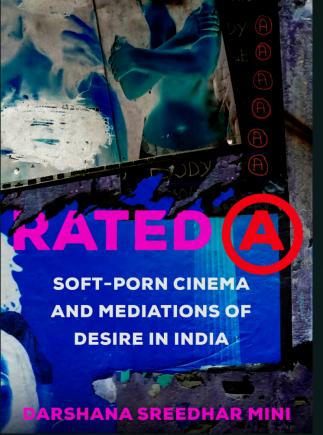




For Queries or Meeting Info:



WORKING GROUP



November 2024

Rated A: Soft-Porn Cinema and Mediations of Desire in India with Prof. Darshana Mini

Date: November 26, 2024 Time: 10 to 11:30 am PST Mode: Zoom Meeting (RSVP)



Coordinators: Nisarg P. (CSLC) Tania Sarfraz (SCA)

Faculty Advisor: Prof. Neetu Khanna

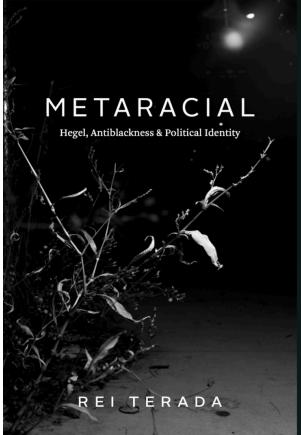
Prof. Darshana Mini is Assistant Professor of Film at Uni. of Wisconsin, Madison

Levan Institute

for the Humanities theorytodayworkinggroup@gmail.com



WORKING GROUP



February 2025

Metaracial: Hegel, Antiblacknesss & Political Identity with Prof. Rei Terada

Date: February 28, 2025

Time: 12 pm to 2 pm

Mode: In-Person

Location: Max Kade Institute, USC

Coordinators: Nisarg P. (CSLC) Tania Sarfraz (SCA)

Faculty Advisor: Prof. Neetu Khanna



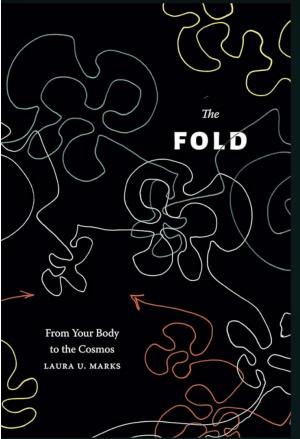
Prof. Rei Terada is a Professor of Comparative Literature, Uni. of California, Irvine

Levan Institute for the Humanities

For Queries or Meeting Info: theorytodayworkinggroup@gmail.com



WORKING GROUP



February 2025

The Fold: From Your Body to the Cosmos

with Prof. Laura Marks

Date: February 13, 2025 Time: 10 to 11:30 am PST

Mode: Zoom Meeting (RSVP)

Coordinators: Nisarg P. (CSLC) Tania Sarfraz (SCA)

Faculty Advisor: Prof. Neetu Khanna

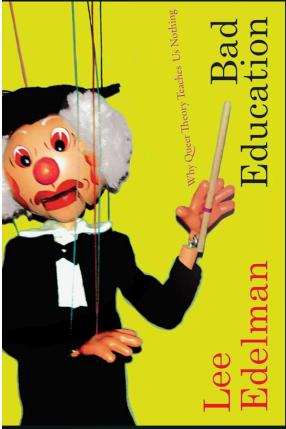


Prof. Laura Marks is Grant Strate University Professor at Simon Fraser University, Canada

Levan Institute

For Queries or Meeting Info: for the Humanities theorytodayworkinggroup@gmail.com

WORKING GROUP



March 2025

Bad Education: Why Queer Theory Teaches Us Nothing with Prof. Lee Edelman

Date: March 20, 2025 Time: 10 to 11:30 am PST Mode: Zoom Meeting

Coordinators: Nisarg P. (CSLC) Tania Sarfraz (SCA)

Faculty Advisor: Prof. Neetu Khanna

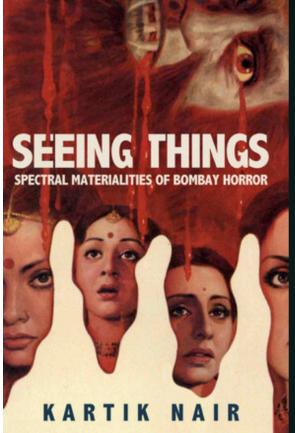


Prof. Lee Edelman is Fletcher Professor of English Literature at Tufts
University

Levan Institute for the Humanities

For Queries or Meeting Info: theorytodayworkinggroup@gmail.com

WORKING GROUP



April 2025

Seeing Things: Spectral Materialities of Bombay Cinema with Prof. Kartik Nair

Date: April 29, 2025

Time: 12:30 to 2:30 pm PST Mode: Taper Hall 309K + Zoom

Coordinators: Nisarg P. (CSLC) Tania Sarfraz (SCA)

Faculty Advisor: Prof. Neetu Khanna



Prof. Kartik Nair is Assistant Professor at Temple University

Levan Institute

**USC**School for the Humanities of Cinematic Arts

For Queries or Meeting Info: theorytodayworkinggroup@gmail.com