

# Theory Today: Between Past and Present Working Group



[Photo: Dayanita Singh]

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

Join us in reading closely and discussing rigorously the recent scholarship in theory across various disciplines. We aim to chart and better understand the trajectories of theorizing and thinking theory in and for *our* time.

## Coordinators

- Nisarg P. [निसर्ग पी.], Doctoral Candidate, CSLC ([nvpatel@usc.edu](mailto:nvpatel@usc.edu))
- Tania Sarfraz, Doctoral Student, SCA ([sarfraz@usc.edu](mailto:sarfraz@usc.edu))

## Faculty Advisor:

- [Neetu Khanna](mailto:neetukha@usc.edu), Associate Professor, Comparative Literature ([neetukha@usc.edu](mailto:neetukha@usc.edu))

## Sign Up

Fill out the Google Form to register: <https://forms.gle/Wa4n5o6c8fk4MPAX7>

For other queries, please email: [theorytodayworkinggroup@gmail.com](mailto:theorytodayworkinggroup@gmail.com)

- Theory Today now exists on [instagram](#) and [facebook](#). You can follow us for updates.

## Sponsors:

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## **Activities**

This group discusses recent publications in ‘theory’ (broadly construed). When possible, the group will also invite scholars whose work we will be reading.

Meetings will be held monthly and, in total, will be seven meetings during the 2024-'25 academic year.

## **Schedule of Events for 2024-'25**

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

**NOTE: All Meetings will be online via Zoom**

### **September 2024**

Reading: [Abundance: Sexuality's History by Anjali Arondekar \(Duke UP, 2023\)](#)

Date: Sept. 12, 2024 | Prof. Anjali Arondekar will be joining the discussion

Time: 10 to 11:30 am PST | [Responses](#)

Meeting Link:

<https://usc.zoom.us/j/95121324318?pwd=DU2nhA5xmWub9tsWjUKLbBcWxUhxKk.1>

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### **October 2024**

Reading: [Immediacy Or, The Style of Too Late Capitalism by Anna Kornbluh \(Verso 2024\)](#)

Date: Oct. 10, 2024 | Prof. Anna Kornbluh will be joining the discussion

Time: 10 to 11:30 am PST | [Responses](#)

Meeting Link:

<https://usc.zoom.us/j/99021473022?pwd=kz6QlvzBcVHAO2kVucbWMhyY6IzGO9.1>

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## November 2024

Reading: [\*Rated A: Soft-Porn Cinema and Mediations of Desire in India\* by Darshana Mini \(California UP, 2024\)](#)

Date: Nov. 26th, 2024 | Prof. Darshana Shreedhar Mini will be joining the discussion

Time: 10 to 11:30 am PST | [Responses](#)

Meeting Link:

<https://usc.zoom.us/j/98164597866?pwd=jjyX6dXKy1bmyik4eZcBy41CCMnH0r.1>

=====END OF FALL=====

## January 2025

Reading: [\*Metaracial: Hegel, Antirackness, and Political Identity\* by Rei Terada \(Chicago UP, 2023\)](#)

Date: January 23, 2025 | Prof. Rei Terada will be joining the discussion

Time: 12 to 2:00 pm PST | [Responses](#)

Zoom: <https://usc.zoom.us/j/93649978410?pwd=Aveci1qAF6dL3fTlqp6GTalqM1y4V2.1>

In-Person Location: Max Kade Institute, USC [2714 S Hoover St, LA, 90007]

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## February, 2025

Reading: [\*The Fold: From Your Body to the Cosmos\* by Laura Marks \(Duke UP, 2024\)](#)

Date: February 13, 2025 | Prof. Laura Marks will be joining the discussion

Time: 10 to 11:30 am PST | [Responses](#)

Meeting Link:

<https://usc.zoom.us/j/98001623214?pwd=74xiKD1y4tGMpGGfoDMilOZBpZkqCE.1>

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## March 2024

Reading: [\*Bad Education: Why Queer Theory Teaches Us Nothing\* by Lee Edelman \(Duke UP 2022\)](#)

Date: March 13, 2025 | Prof. Lee Edelman will be joining the discussion

Time: 10 to 11:30 am PST | [Responses](#)

Meeting Link:

<https://usc.zoom.us/j/95179999616?pwd=zjxzcajJgoalqGabS3vYXL8jJfXth.1>

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## April 2024

Reading: [Seeing Things: Spectral Materialities of Bombay Horror by Kartik Nair \(Chicago UP, 2024\)](#)

Date: April 17th, 2025 | Prof. Kartik Nair will be joining the discussion

Time: 10 to 11:30 am PST | [Responses](#)

Meeting Link:

<https://usc.zoom.us/j/91975558749?pwd=yJ7sjBjDND9ts5JbmNccrsVj9Hk3vo.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 seven theorists that we would read and who would join us for discussion [Anjali Arondekar, Anna Kornbluh, Darshana Mini, Rei Terada, Laura Marks, Lee Edelman, and Kartik Nair] 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 demand, from, us— the community to come of theory readers.

—nisarg/निसर्ग [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

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Fall 2024 Schedule:

# THEORY TODAY



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

Faculty Advisor: Prof. Neetu Khanna



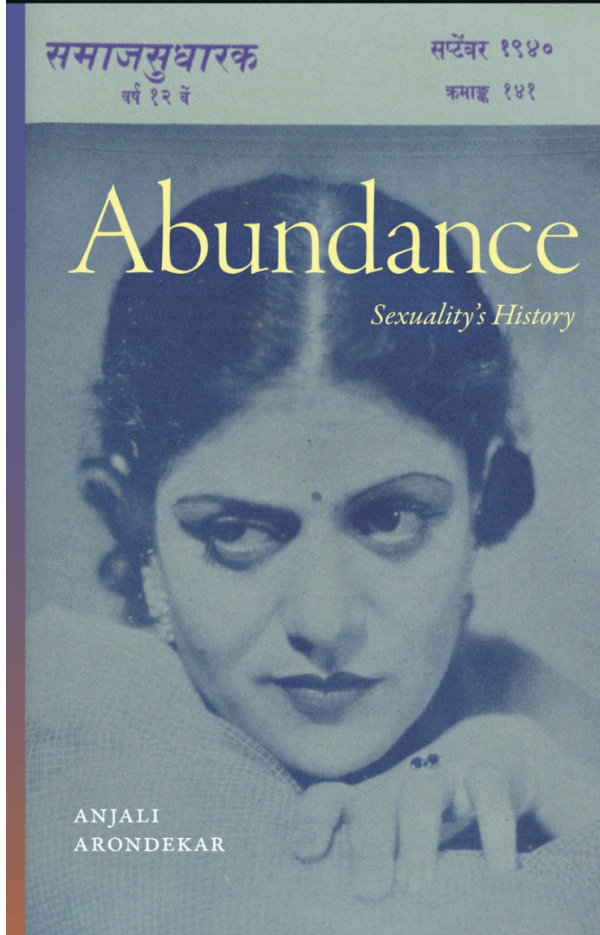
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For Queries or Meeting Info:  
[theorytodayworkinggroup@gmail.com](mailto:theorytodayworkinggroup@gmail.com)

September 2024:

# THEORY TODAY

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 Studies at UC,  
Santa Cruz

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Feminist Research



October '24:

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**Immediacy  
or, The Style  
of Too Late  
Capitalism**  
**Anna Kornbluh**

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 (RSVP)



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

Prof. Anna Kornbluh is a Professor of English at Uni. of Illinois,  
Chicago



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USC School  
of Cinematic Arts

CSLC  
comparative studies in  
literature & culture  
University of Southern California

November '24:

# THEORY TODAY

WORKING GROUP



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

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)



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

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Spring 2025 Schedule:

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## Spring '25 Reading Schedule



January 23, 2025 | 10 to 11:30 am PST  
*Metaracial: Hegel, Anti-Blackness, and Political Identity*, Rei Terada (Chicago UP, 2023)

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

March 13, 2025 | 10 to 11:30 am PST  
*Bad Education: Why Queer Theory Teaches Us Nothing*, Lee Edelman (Duke UP, 2023)

April 17, 2025 | 10 to 11:30 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



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