

CSCS Graduate Conference - Universality Renewed - March 21st to 22nd, 2025. Minneapolis, MN.

Keynote Speaker: Todd McGowan, University of Vermont

Around the world, the screws are tightening. In Gaza, genocidal violence against Palestinians soars as Benjamin Netanyahu continues to consolidate power while his western allies wring their hands in silence. Thrown into relief by their stances on Gaza, the struggle between right and left political agendas has never been so palpable around the globe. In India, marginalized groups have undermined the BJP's majority control of parliament while, in France and Germany, far right parties including the Rassemblement National and Alternativ für Deutschland have achieved unprecedented victories since the mid-twentieth century. Outside electoral politics, union drives have exploded across the United States, re-consolidating the power of organized labor in intermediary institutions for the first time in decades. Each of these phenomena represents distinct crises that would be absolutely uninterpretable without universal categories such as "the state," "democracy," "nationalism," "racism," and "colonialism." And yet, in its provincial way, the dominant trend within academia remains committed to the relentless particularization of these crises.

In this conference, "Universality Renewed," graduate students from the department of Cultural Studies and Comparative Literature and English at the University of Minnesota welcome papers that seek to derive the political, logical, and psychic grammar that might allow us to theorize the structural unities between putatively unrelated conflicts raging around the world. As scholars in the interpretive humanities, we would like to concentrate on the aesthetic as the dimension of social life where this tension between the universal and the particular are brought to light and find their most sophisticated expression. By "aesthetic," we think specifically of mediums like film, literature, music, performance, and theater, and the forms that activate the capacity for social self-reflection within them. In keeping with these concerns, we are interested in responding to questions like the following:

How do racial, ethnic, cultural, gendered differences invest its bearers with the revelatory power of determinate Otherness, not only revealing the extant contradictions of their moment but also pointing towards new formations of social life and struggle? How do fiction, music,

and film step forward as privileged sites for exploring the redemptive and recalcitrant aspects of political and racial contradictions? How have approaches such as Afro-Pessimism, post-structuralism, and New Materialism obfuscated the possibilities of social transformation and solidarity? What possibilities does a Black dialectical tradition offer to Black studies, particularly in mitigating Americo-centrist tendencies? What other political resources might remain within philosophical traditions maligned as “retrograde,” such as German idealism or Marxist political economy?

In sum, the conference is grounded in the hope that thinking about the relation between totality, contradiction, and social form will allow us to deepen our analyses of cultural works and political action, potentially finding a resolute through-line that allows for the regeneration of solidarity among disparate groups and schools. Bearing witness to these atrocities is the *theoretical* minimum; to wrench a sustainable and *practical* solution from these issues demands a more thorough, unapologetic, and *universal* understanding of their interlocking contexts.

**Keywords:** Post-colonialism, Black Studies, Psychoanalysis, cultural studies, comparative literature, World literature, Music and ethnomusicology, film studies, German idealism, Marxism.

We welcome submissions from graduate students worldwide. This conference, however, will be limited to people who are able to attend in person.

Applicants must provide the following information to [universalityumn@gmail.com](mailto:universalityumn@gmail.com) by Nov. 7th 2024:

- name & pronouns
- Institutional affiliation and level of study (if applicable)
- title of the paper
- 500 word abstract

Applicants will be notified as to whether or not their submissions have been accepted by Dec. 7th 2024: