



FALL 2020

# TOWNSEND

CENTER FOR THE HUMANITIES UC BERKELEY

UNA'S LECTURE **Jeannie Suk Gersen** ART OF WRITING ***Pandemic Diaries*** FELLOWS **Beth Piatote**



TOWNSEND CENTER FOR THE HUMANITIES

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IMAGE CREDITS

FRONT COVER (clockwise from left): Jeannie Suk Gersen by Nina Subin; Fall Leaves at Berkeley Law, Beth Platote, Campanile and Libraries from Memorial Glade by Eric Kotila; *The Triumph of Death*, fresco, 1446, Palazzo Abatellis, Palermo. unattributed.

INTERIOR: South Hall in Fall, Campanile in Fog from Stephens Hall by Eric Kotila, pp. 2-3; Fellows' Selfies, provided by Fellows, pp. 4-6; Joyce Carol Oates by Eric Kotila, p. 9; Jeannie Suk Gersen in Class by Jessica Scranton, p. 10; Jeannie Suk Gersen by Nina Subin, p. 11; Eucalyptus Trunks, Stephens Hall, by Eric Kotila, p. 12; *Plague in an Ancient City*, oil on canvas, circa 1652-54, Michiel Sweerts, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, p. 15.

BACK COVER: Summer Writing Institute Zoom Participants courtesy Joseph Harris.



LIGHTS OUT,  
FIAT LUX!

IT BEGAN with an email from **Joyce Carol Oates**. A friend and frequent guest of the Townsend Center, Oates had been scheduled to fly to campus for a Townsend Center event in early March. “Should I come?” she wrote. “Stay put,” we answered.

Then we canceled another event, **Thinking about Composition**, with Michael Hall, SanSan Kwan, and Dean Wareham. My colleagues at the Center — Rebecca, Colleen, Diane, Eric, and Alex — scrambled to cancel still more events. Our student employees — Leah, Juan, Helen, Anna, Sophia, and Charlie — went home. Almost overnight, it seemed, the Townsend Center and Stephens Hall went dark. We locked the doors and left.

I list names here to remind us that the Townsend Center is a collective enterprise. We thrive thanks to colleagues and friends, students and staff, from across campus. Our goal is conversation. But the word is fragile. And as the Berkeley campus was hit by the effects of the pandemic, we were shut down and silenced.

But then, just as suddenly, it started up again. Faculty members **Ron Hendel**, **Sugata Ray**, and **Jim Porter** bravely went online to talk about **Catastrophe and Storytelling**. **Ian Duncan** and **Ellen Oliensis** did their book chats via Zoom. And Zoom has its virtues. Audiences were robust, and old friends from around the globe began tuning in. So, we set



Exiting Stephens Hall

to work on a new set of activities, digitally mediated, for the coming year.

The generosity and creativity of our colleagues reaffirms the importance of the humanities community in the current, crazy, moment. With their help, we will persist, and even build our activities in the coming semester. In Fall 2020, we will feature a full program of **Berkeley Book Chats**, welcome Harvard Law professor **Jeannie Suk Gersen**, and welcome back **Joyce Carol Oates** — all online. For good measure, we will inaugurate two new series: **(Re) making Sense: The Humanities and Pandemic Culture** and **So, What Have You Been Reading? Students and Teachers Discuss Books That Matter**. Check our website for details.

There may be an occasional moment of dead air in our live broadcasts, but we promise that there won't be any boring conversations.

Timothy Hampton

Aldo Scaglione and Marie M. Burns Distinguished Professor of  
Comparative Literature and French



## UNA'S LECTURE Jeannie Suk Gersen

### UNA'S LECTURE

**ORDINARY TRAUMA: JEANNIE SUK GERSEN** in conversation with Wendy Brown

Wed, October 14, 2020 | 4 pm

LIVE BROADCAST ONLINE

**ROUNDTABLE** with JEANNIE SUK GERSEN, Joshua Cohen and Marianne Constable

Thurs, October 15, 2020 | 4 pm

LIVE BROADCAST ONLINE



**JEANNIE SUK GERSEN**, John H. Watson, Jr. Professor of Law at Harvard University, is the 2020-21 Una's Lecturer.

Gersen is a feminist legal scholar and contributing writer at the *New Yorker*, where she covers legal matters. She is the author of *At Home in the Law: How the Domestic Violence Revolution is Transforming Privacy*, which won the Law and Society Association's Herbert Jacob Book Prize. She has also published numerous scholarly articles, including "Is Privacy a Woman?" and "The Socratic Method in the Age of Trauma."

Before joining the faculty at Harvard, Gersen clerked for Justice David Souter on the US Supreme Court and Judge Harry Edwards on the US Court of Appeals.

She is the first Asian-American woman, and second woman of color, to be tenured at Harvard Law School.

Gersen is a leading voice in the conversation on how colleges handle the investigation and adjudication of accusations of sexual violence. She has argued, sometimes controversially, for the importance of due process within the university's approach, exposing what she sees as the institution's tendency to disregard the constitutional rights of the accused.

Gersen's work is a critical reflection on the evolving interpretation and application of Title IX, the 1972 law that prohibits sex discrimination by schools receiving federal funding. In Gersen's view, Title IX directives issued by the Obama administration in 2011 led to a troubling erosion on campus of procedural rights for individuals accused of sexual misconduct.

In response, Gersen and three Harvard colleagues designed their own set of Title IX procedures emphasizing due process for the accused. Although devised explicitly for use at Harvard Law School, the policy was created in the hopes that it would serve as a model at other universities. Under these procedures, individuals accused of sexual misconduct are given a set of rights that includes legal representation and the ability to question witnesses.

Calling Gersen "our foremost guide to the challenges that the #MeToo movement poses to the legal system," the *Chronicle of Higher Education* describes the political complexity of Gersen's stance:

She has staked out a position at once conventional and embattled. She shares #MeToo's

goal of ending the impunity surrounding sexual assault. But she remains committed to the principles of due process, presumption of innocence, and the right to a fair hearing. This commitment places her in tension with some of the most impassioned actors in American public life.

Prior to her legal career, Gersen trained as a literary scholar. She received a BA in literature at Yale University and was awarded a Marshall Scholarship to study literature at Oxford University, where she earned a DPhil in modern languages and published a book, *Postcolonial Paradoxes in French Caribbean Writing: Césaire, Glissant, Condé*, based on her dissertation research.



# TOWNSEND FELLOWS 2020-21

THE TOWNSEND FELLOWSHIPS program supports the research of faculty, advanced graduate students, and other research professionals at UC Berkeley. Throughout the year, the fellows meet for regular discussion and peer review of their research in progress.



**Anna Livia Brand's** (Landscape Architecture & Environmental Planning) study of the built environment focuses on racial landscapes in historical and contemporary black mecca neighborhoods in the American North and South.

**Assistant Professor Fellow**



In her study of contemporary queer writing by Latin American and US feminists, **Alex Brostoff** (Comparative Literature) explores the emergence of innovative, new bodies of theory — from “theory in the flesh” to “autotheory” and beyond — that rewrite the relationship between embodied experience and critical theory.

**Graduate Student Fellow**  
**Professor Norman Jacobson Memorial Fellow**



**Jianqing Chen** (Film & Media) conceptualizes touchscreen media and its user-spectators through contemporary Chinese media experiences.

**Graduate Student Fellow**  
**Irving and Jean Stone Fellow**



**Marianne Constable** (Rhetoric), a scholar of law and language, is at work on a book project examining Chicago women who killed their husbands and supposedly got away with it under something called the “new unwritten law.”

**Senior Faculty Fellow**

**Johaina Crisostomo** (English) explores the ethical crisis produced by the conversation between the novels and vernacular political theology of the Philippines during the changeover between the Spanish and American regimes in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

**Graduate Student Fellow**  
**Jeffrey Berg Fellow**

A scholar of early American literature from the 17th and 18th centuries, **Kathleen Donegan** (English) explores topics including suffering and violence in colonial settlement, and the “other worlds” of the Caribbean plantation.

**Associate Professor Fellow**

**Anne-Lise François** (English) is completing a book project on the fate of the temporal commons under industrial capitalism, in which she explores the relations between seasonal time, poetic time, and modes of diurnal living without reserve.

**Associate Professor Fellow**

**Jane Hu** (English) examines the rise of Asian Anglophone popular media in the post-1970s era of American economic decline.

**Graduate Student Fellow**  
**Albert Lepawsky Fellow**





**Asma Kazmi** (Art Practice) is a transdisciplinary visual artist whose current painting involves researching and extracting luminous ultramarine pigment from lapis lazuli, the stone from Afghanistan whose trade introduced the color blue to the world.

**Assistant Professor Fellow**



A scholar of medieval and early modern Iberia, **Nasser Meerkhan** (Near Eastern Studies and Spanish & Portuguese) focuses on Semitic literature, historiography, and women writers.

**Assistant Professor Fellow**



**Beth Piatote** (Ethnic Studies) traces the presence of Indigenous law through sensory representations in literary works by 20th-century Native American writers Zitkala-Sa, D'Arcy McNickle, James Welch, and Louise Erdrich.

**Associate Professor Fellow**



**Lisa Pieraccini** (History of Art) studies the material and visual culture of ancient Italy (Etruscan and Roman), with a special focus on the portrayal and representation of the ancient world from antiquity to modern times.

**Adjunct Faculty Fellow**



**Claude Potts** (Romance Languages Librarian) examines the final year of French-Algerian writer Albert Camus through correspondence, diaries, published writings, and the manuscript for his unfinished autobiographical novel, *Le premier homme*.

**Library Fellow**



In her research on the novella tradition in three literatures (Italian, neo-Latin, and Spanish), **Brenda Rosado** (Romance Languages & Literatures) analyzes the intersection of translation, imitation, and originality.

**Graduate Student Fellow**  
**Una's Fellow**

**Kim Sauberlich** (Music) explores Black Atlantic musical practice in Rio de Janeiro, from the 1808 transfer of the Portuguese court to the city to Brazil's 1888 abolition of slavery.

**Graduate Student Fellow**

The author of two books on politics and performance in 19th-century opera, **Mary Ann Smart** (Music) is at work on a project tracing the influence of musical experience and listening on French philosophy, phenomenology, and anthropology from 1920 to 1970.

**Senior Faculty Fellow**

**Robert Sharf** (East Asian Languages & Cultures) is a scholar of East Asian Buddhism with a focus on the origins of Zen in medieval China. His current project explores the parallels between metaphysical conundrums that preoccupied medieval Buddhist scholiasts, and issues currently debated in the philosophy of science.

**Senior Faculty Fellow**

**Ethan Shagan** (History) is a scholar of early modern Europe (1500-1800), especially Britain, and intellectual problems related to the history of religion.

**Senior Faculty Fellow**

**Andrew Wein** (Classics) examines the confrontation between high and low cultural traditions in the Greco-Roman World and its consequences for later political and aesthetic thought.

**Graduate Student Fellow**

**Gianfrancesco Zanetti** (Italian Studies), a legal scholar visiting from the University of Modena, Italy, examines the relationship between equality and "situated" vulnerabilities — meaning vulnerabilities that are not based on any notion of human nature.

**Visiting Senior Faculty Fellow**



**T**OWNSEND CENTER **Working Groups** bring together faculty and graduate students with shared research interests. They are a cornerstone of Berkeley's rich, collaborative interdisciplinary culture. This year the Center is pleased to support over 80 Working Groups.

2020–21

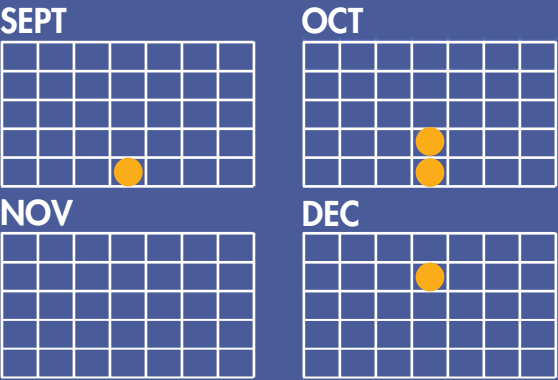
Amazon Forest  
Ancient Philosophy  
Andean Studies: Language and Culture  
Anthropological Inquiry  
Armchair Ethnography  
Armenian Studies  
Asian Art and Visual Cultures  
The Asian City: New Models of City-Making  
Autotheory  
Berkeley Latin American History  
Berkeley-Stanford British Studies  
BTWH: The Emergence of German Modernity  
Buddhist Studies Graduate Roundtable  
California Studies Dinner Seminars  
Collaborative Research Methods in the Social Sciences  
Colloquium in the Studies of Music  
Consortium on the Novel  
Contemporary Poetry and Poetics  
Counterdisciplinary Spinoza Studies  
Critical Times  
Critical University Studies  
Culture and History of East-Central Europe "Kroužek"  
Cyborg Linguistics  
Dance Studies  
Death of the Author  
Decolonizing Museums  
Der Kreis: German History  
\*dhworom

Digital Humanities  
Early Modern Studies  
Fieldwork Forum  
Filipino & Philippine Studies  
Folklore Roundtable  
Form and Formalism  
Found in Translation  
Foundations of Literary Theory and Cultural Criticism  
Francophone Studies  
Frankfurt School  
French and Francophone Film  
Graduate Film  
Graduate Medievalists at Berkeley  
History and Philosophy of Logic, Mathematics, and Science  
History of Science and Science & Technology Studies  
History of the Book and Reading  
Iberian Studies  
Interdisciplinary Marxist Working Group  
Interdisciplinary Research Group on Privacy  
Islamic Studies  
Italian Migration Studies  
Journal of Associated Graduates in Near Eastern Studies  
Klub Kul'tury  
Labor Studies  
Labor, Philosophy, and Change  
Language Revitalization  
Language Variation and Change  
Latin American Art and Literature  
Law and Contemporary Theory  
Library Scholars

Materiality of Religion in the Global South  
Meaning Sciences  
Mobilities and Materialities of the Pre- and Early Modern World  
More Aura: Walter Benjamin and Interiority  
New Media  
Nineteenth Century and Beyond  
British Cultural Studies  
Performance and Literary Studies  
Psychedelics, Neuroscience, and Religion  
Psychoanalysis  
Queer Ecological Imaginations  
Qui Parle  
Rabbinic Literature  
Romance Linguistics  
Russian History "Kruzhok"  
Russian Peripheries  
Secularism and Its Subjects  
Slavic Literature "Kruzhok"  
Sound Studies  
South and Southeast Asia Graduate Student Research Roundtable  
South Asia Studies: Theories and Methods  
Strategy and Statecraft  
Terra Infirma: Critical Studies of Land and Housing  
Theories of the Global South  
Theorizing Care  
Tourism Studies  
Translation Studies  
Transnational & Ethnic American Studies

BERK  
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BOOK  
CHATS

Celebrating Recent Work  
of UC Berkeley Faculty  
12–1 pm, Wednesdays



FALL 2020

- SEPT 30

Christopher Tomlins LAW  
*In the Matter of Nat Turner: A Speculative History*
- OCT 21

Victoria Kahn COMPARATIVE LITERATURE and ENGLISH  
*The Trouble with Literature*
- OCT 28

Ken Light JOURNALISM and José Ángel Navejas  
*Midnight la Frontera*
- DEC 9

Mario Telò CLASSICS  
*Archive Feelings: A Theory of Greek Tragedy*

JOYCE  
CAROL  
OATES

In Conversation

Thurs, October 1, 2020 | 4 pm

[Live Broadcast Online](#)



THE TOWNSEND CENTER is pleased to host an online conversation with **Joyce Carol Oates**, author of over seventy works of fiction, nonfiction, and poetry.

Oates is the Roger S. Berlind '52 Professor Emerita of the Humanities at Princeton University and has taught as a visiting professor of English at UC Berkeley. She is a recipient of the National Humanities Medal, the Carl Sandburg Award for Lifetime Achievement, and the Jerusalem Prize.

The author's oeuvre confronts questions of interiority and violence, American history, and female experience, and it employs a stunningly wide range of genres. The novel *Blonde*, a finalist for the National Book Award and Pulitzer Prize, tells a semi-fictional tale of Marilyn Monroe's iconic rise to fame.

One of the author's most celebrated and haunting short stories, "Where are You Going, Where Have You

Been?" confronts sexual awakening and murder in middle America.

Oates, who joined the Princeton faculty in 1978, is a celebrated teacher whose guidance has helped many undergraduates become published authors. "Writing and teaching," she notes, "have always been, for me, so richly rewarding that I don't think of them as work in the usual sense of the word."

Her teaching has recently extended into the online realm with a course on the art of the short story. Modeled on the author's writing workshops at Princeton, the course traverses questions of structure and form, drafting and revising, as well as how to mine personal experience for writerly inspiration.

Oates is in conversation with poet and literary scholar **John Shoptaw** (English, UC Berkeley).

ART OF WRITING

# Writing the Pandemic

ART OF WRITING



IN EARLY APRIL 2020, **Art of Writing** launched its **Pandemic Diaries** essay collection — inviting students, alumni, staff, and faculty members to share their experiences living through COVID-19. With Berkeley’s writing community dispersed and its courses convening online, this virtual anthology was envisioned as a creative outlet, living document, and archive of experience.

In the diaries, graduating seniors cope with the uncertainties of a transformed post-college world. Alumni struggle to balance life and work in quarantine. Faculty deal with the abrupt dispersion of their intellectual community. Contributors share their thoughts on what it means to mourn via Zoom, what “home” means in the midst of a pandemic, and how their relationships to writing have changed as a result.

“Before the pandemic, I was writing poems about a new planet. Now, I just want the things that tether me to this one,” **Chiyuma Elliott**, assistant professor of African American Studies, writes in her diary

entry. “I’m not writing poems. But I keep receiving invitations to share the pandemic poems I’m not writing, in print and via Zoom readings. While I’m not writing poems, I’m thinking of angels and laundry and keeping a difficult balance.” Still, poetry weaves its way into Elliott’s thoughts, and she offers a brief poem as part of her piece.

For **Chester-Jehu Arevalo** ’21, poetry is the most generative way of capturing the sadness of a new love in the time of COVID-19. His selection of sonnets begins with a lover’s lament: “When loving you has been my vocation; / true, can I quarantine from thoughts of you?”

From her quarantine in El Gouna, Egypt, **Farida Radwan** ’18 documents how life changed as the country’s infection count began to climb, coinciding with the start of Ramadan. “The curfew was extended further to 9 pm, enabling families and friends to eat Iftar together and make it home in time,” she writes. “With cases in Egypt still increasing, the extension didn’t make a lot of sense, but no one has the authority to question the government, and certainly no one has the authority to question religion.”

In Istanbul, **Defne Karabatur** ’23 writes about celebrating her birthday while her father lies sick on the family couch, and she questions what can now be considered “normal” life. “Normal was having no one sit next to me on the plane, because it was only half-full. Normal was reading an old edition of the Turkish Airlines monthly magazine because, given the circumstances, they couldn’t print the new ones,” she writes. “Normal was having to quarantine myself for 14 days in my childhood bedroom, haunted by past selves whispering, ‘Joke’s on you, there is no future.’”



The Pandemic Diaries include voices past and present. Among the contemporary entries, readers can find a series of archival accounts of ancient and early modern plagues. Curated and translated by **Peter Sahlins**, emeritus professor of history, these entries speak both to the foreignness of the past and — following Mark Twain (reputedly) — a past that rhymes with the present.

Take, for example, **Francesco Petrarch**’s account of the 1349 plague, in which he writes of the vacuum of information that accompanied the arrival of the disease: “Has what happened in these years ever been read about — empty houses, derelict cities, ruined estates, fields strewn with cadavers, a horrible and vast solitude encompassing the whole world? Consult historians, they are silent; ask physicians, they are stupefied; seek the answer

from philosophers, they shrug their shoulders, furrow their brows, and with fingers pressed against their lips, bid you be silent.” In the face of such silence, the Pandemic Diaries document the myriad ways in which life, both personal and professional, has been altered.

Members of the UC Berkeley community are invited to submit their own reflections on the pandemic for consideration for online publication. Email submissions to [artofwriting@berkeley.edu](mailto:artofwriting@berkeley.edu).

Read the Pandemic Diaries at [artofwriting.berkeley.edu/pandemic-diaries](https://artofwriting.berkeley.edu/pandemic-diaries).

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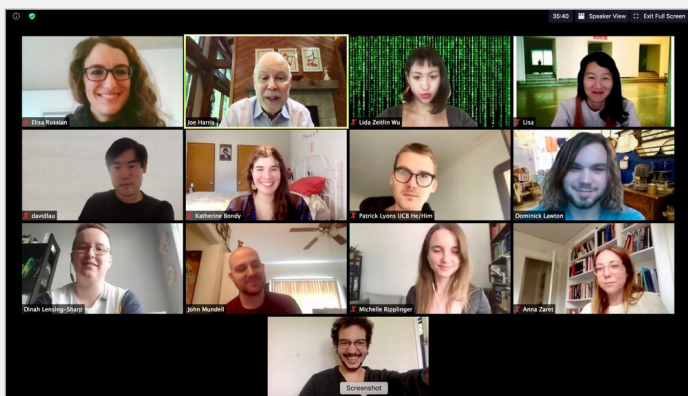
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HG-09

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**G**RADUATE STUDENTS in the 2020 Summer Writing Institute, held remotely this year. **Joseph Harris**, director of the composition program at the University of Delaware, led participants in a two-week workshop on writing pedagogy designed to prepare them to teach their own undergraduate composition courses at Berkeley. The Institute is sponsored by **Art of Writing**.

## Fall 2020 DEADLINES

September 18, 2020

**Conference & Lecture Grants**

September 25, 2020

**Public Speaking for Graduate Students  
Workshop**

November 9, 2020

**Townsend Honors Thesis Workshop**

November 13, 2020

**Townsend Dissertation Fellowships  
Townsend Fellowships for Assistant and Associate  
Professors  
Townsend Fellowship for Library and Museum  
Professionals**

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