



French Department Newsletter March 2023

Things have been increasingly back-to-normal at Cal after several years of pandemic disruption. Classes are in-person, study abroad has resumed, and students are happy to fully engage with campus life after such a long period of isolation.

EVENTS

In the French Department, a lot has happened since our last newsletter one year ago.

At the end of last spring semester, we held a colloquium to celebrate Professor Emeritus **David Hult**'s remarkable career. Speakers included former students **Mary Franklin-Brown**, **Spencer Strub**, **R. D. Perry**, **Lukas Ovrom**, and UC Davis colleague **Noah Guynn**. David has spent much of this past year traveling around the world.



We have hired a new medievalist, **Dr. Henry Ravenhall**, who is currently a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Cambridge, and who will join the ranks of our department this August. Henry is currently working on a project entitled 'Tactile Communities: Emotion and the Experience of Medieval French Literature', which examines how

readers of medieval French touched their manuscripts and explores the implications of these haptic interactions for community formation, aesthetic experience, and the very idea of literature.

We are currently conducting a search for a specialist in 19th-, 20th-, and/or 21st-century French Studies, and are very much looking forward to welcoming the person chosen for that position this fall as well.

In the fall, we enjoyed visits by Professor **Jill Jarvis** (Yale), who gave a talk entitled “Radiant Matter : The Long Shadow of French Nuclear Imperialism in the Living Sahara,” Berkeley Alum Professor **Louisa Mackenzie** (University of Washington), who presented “Pedagogy Matters: The Non-binary Turn and Inclusive Language Teaching” as our Distinguished Alumni Lecture, and Professor **Abdellali Hajjat** (Université libre de Bruxelles), who presented a lecture entitled “The Wretched of France: The 1983 March for Equality and Against Racism.”

This March we are hosting Professor **Anne Garréta** (Duke University and the University of Rennes 2) as our 2023 Pajus Distinguished Visitor. Professor Garréta will be giving a pair of public lectures (“Gambling on Form: from Lucretius to Perec to Chat GPT” and “Proust’s Private Eyes”) as well as a seminar entitled “What *was* an author?”

**Monique Wittig:
Twenty Years Later /
Vingt ans après**

Friday 17 and Saturday 18 March 2023

Department of French,
University of California – Berkeley

This March, the Department of French will mark the twentieth anniversary of the passing of the lesbian activist, writer and philosopher Monique Wittig (1935-2023), as well as the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of her *Lesbian*, with a two-part international conference: “Monique Wittig: Twenty Years Later / Monique Wittig : Vingt ans après.”

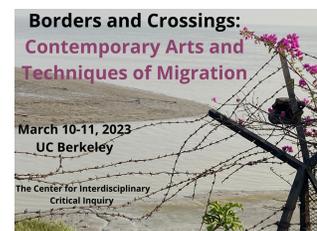
Cosponsored by the Department of French at the University of California – Berkeley and the Institut des Études Genre at the Université de Genève, this conference will encourage new directions in scholarship on Wittig and stimulate transatlantic and international exchange about her work. The Geneva leg of the conference will take place on 27-28 June 2023.



Monique Wittig, Berkeley, 1979. Photo by Marina Karotki. Used with permission.

Professor Garréta will also be the keynote speaker at an international conference organized by Professor **Will Burton** to mark the twentieth anniversary of the passing of lesbian activist, writer and philosopher Monique Wittig. The first part of this conference, entitled *Monique Wittig: Twenty Years Later / Vingt ans après*, will take place on March 17-18 in Berkeley, and will be followed by a second part that will take place June 27-28 at the University of Geneva.

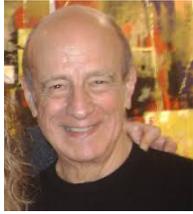
Another major conference this month is organized by Professor **Debarati Sanyal**, who has been appointed Director of the [Center for Interdisciplinary Critical Inquiry](#) (CICI). The conference, *Borders and Crossings: Contemporary Arts and Techniques of Migration* (March 10-11), will address such questions as: How do contemporary border policies and technologies reanimate histories of racialized and imperial violence? How are climate and environmental change affecting borders and their crossing? What are the possibilities and limits of humanitarian and human rights discourses on migration and refugees? What forms of dissent, becoming and belonging are taking shape at borders?



Looking to the future, Professor Sanyal intends to promote cross-divisional collaborations around questions of digital media and disinformation, Environmental Humanities, Medical Humanities, Global Humanities and Human Rights. She aims to foster synergies among the programs and centers in CICI and sees the consortium as uniquely situated to address timely issues through an interdisciplinary lens.

Other events this spring include lectures by Professors **Kadji Amin** (Emory University), **Olivia Walsh** (University of Nottingham), **Barbara Bullock** (University of Texas, Austin), and **Joëlle**

Papillon (McMaster University), who will deliver this year's Rex Lecture. Details on all these events can be found on our department website (french.berkeley.edu).



Finally, at the end of last spring semester we celebrated the life and work of Professor Emeritus **Leo Bersani** at a memorial held at the Women's Faculty Club. Eloquent tributes and readings were offered by **Michael Lucey**, **D. A. Miller**, **Carla Freccero** (UCSC), **Christopher Scott**, **Ann Smock**, and **Damon Young**, followed by remarks by Leo's husband, **Sam Geraci**, who generously donated Leo's book collection to the French and Comparative Literature

libraries.

PEOPLE

Congratulations to **Daniel Hoffmann**, **Ariel Shannon**, **Maya Sidhu**, and **Margot Szarke**, who have all passed their excellence reviews and have been promoted to continuing lecturer status. Maya gave a talk on Alice Diop's 2021 film *Nous* and chaired a panel titled "The Off-Screen Space in Film and Media" at the PAMLA conference in November, and Daniel gave a paper on the same panel entitled "(Un)Fit to Frame: Homosexuality and the Politics of Assimilation in *Race d'Ep* (1979). Margot recently published an article entitled "Textual 'Piqûres': Vaccination in the Hands of Nineteenth-Century French Writers" in *Nineteenth-Century French Studies*. Ariel is designing a new accelerated French course for speakers of other Romance languages, which we plan to offer starting next year.

Just this week, **Debarati Sanyal** and **Judith Butler** were awarded a Mellon grant to work on a project titled "Imagining Beyond Authoritarianism." Congratulations to Debarati and Judith!

Karl Britto began his term as Associate Dean of Arts and Humanities this past fall and the Division has benefited from his administrative acumen.

Déborah Blocker and **Claire Tourmen** have been awarded a French Embassy *Empowering French and Francophone Studies* grant. Their project involves developing professional internship opportunities for majors/minors in 1) Art World and Cultural Institutions and 2) International Relations (incorporating Media and Politics, French for Business, French for Medical Professions) that would provide students the experience of participating in meaningful work involving French as well as the opportunity to reflect on differences between local and international experiences, cultivating their intercultural sensibilities and insights. An important feature of the project is the involvement of graduate students not only as research assistants but also as mentors to undergraduates engaged in these internships.

In observance of the centenary of Marcel Proust's death, **Michael Lucey** published a major book entitled *What Proust Heard: Novels and the Ethnography of Talk* (University of Chicago Press) and guest edited a special issue of the journal *Paragraph* on "Approaching Proust in 2022" that included articles by both **Ben Beitler** and **Ty Blakeney**.

Tim Hampton has been supporting his recently published book on the history of cheerfulness with blog posts, magazine essays, and interviews on public radio in the UK and Australia. Last spring, he delivered the Martin Meyerson Research Lecture at Berkeley and in June he gave a

keynote lecture at a conference titled “Dylan and the Beats,” at the new Bob Dylan Center at the University of Tulsa, where he spoke about Dylan, Ginsberg, and Rimbaud. Tim is currently on leave working on a memoir/essay about the role of social class in the discourses of the humanities, and a project on early representations of the colonial in the Renaissance.

Mairi McLaughlin published a digital edition of the first periodical dedicated to the French language itself, the *Journal de la langue française* (1784-1795). The periodical was founded and run by François-Urbain Domergue who was known as the “grammarian of the Revolution.” It consists primarily of letters from readers to Domergue and other grammarians on questions of language. The fact that it was published in the years surrounding the French Revolution means that it is an important resource for understanding the relationship between language and society, or the media and politics in that period. It can be accessed via [Garnier’s Corpus des remarques et des traités sur la langue française \(XVIIIe siècle\)](#). Mairi is now working on a paper critical edition of the same periodical which will be published by Garnier. She is also co-editing two major works: *The Oxford Handbook of the French Language*, with Wendy Ayres-Bennett, and *Historical and Sociolinguistic Approaches to French*, with Janice Carruthers and Olivia Walsh.

Will Burton spent last summer finishing an article on Claude Lévi-Strauss, Monique Wittig and the anti-dialectical turn in French thought, and planning for the Wittig conference described above. While doing research in the Wittig archives, Will uncovered letters from **Leo Bersani** to Monique Wittig.

With **Rick Kern**, **Vesna Rodic** has continued to co-facilitate the First Step Discovery Fellows Program, as part of the Berkeley Discovery Initiative. Over the past two years, some 50 instructors from 15 different departments have been trained in developing discovery-based curriculum. Vesna has further incorporated new curricular units that she developed into our second-year language program, including those from the “Diversity in the Second-Year French Curriculum” workshop that she facilitated, and the “Film in the Foreign Language Curriculum” workshop that she completed. Rick and Vesna presented their work at the Excellence in Pedagogy and Innovative Classrooms (EPIC) conference at UCLA last spring and at the MLA in San Francisco this past January.

Déborah Blocker’s second book, [Le Principe de plaisir: esthétique, savoir, et politique dans la Florence des Médicis \(XVIe-XVIIe siècle\)](#), has been well received and last June she presented it at the main French bookstore in Rome, the Librairie Stendhal, in dialogue with historian [Samir Boumediene](#). The book studies how new conceptions of art emerged in a late 16th century Florentine academy, the Accademia degli Alterati. Déborah is currently developing a new comparative research project that aims to study how the arts were used and conceptualized in two major aristocratic families of the 16th and 17th centuries, the Strozzi of Florence (and Rome) and the Montmorency of France. She is also working collaboratively with two other colleagues, Ulrike Schneider (Freie Universität, Berlin) and Veronica Vestri (Prato) on a digital edition of two Florentine manuscripts, BMLF Ashburnham, 560 and 561. In these manuscripts, the Alterati of Florence collectively discuss the writing and evaluation of poetry among themselves, engaging in sustained esthetical discussions.

After four years of chairing the Department, **Nick Paige** spent last year in Paris, both researching a new project (on aesthetic evolution) and continuing some quantitative work he developed in his

last book on the history of the novel. During this time, he wrote an article on the history of Coleridge's famous phrase "the willing suspension of disbelief," and gave a number of talks in France, Germany, and the US (notably on the history of landscape painting). Several articles came out in the past year, one methodological piece on how we can do a history of "fiction," and another on Molière's great comedy *Le Tartuffe* in the context of mid-seventeenth-century transformations in the Paris cityscape. Fresh from his time in the City of Lights, Nick taught French 80, "Paris: an Historical Anatomy of the World's Most Romantic City" last fall. He's also serving as the undergraduate faculty advisor, and with the inspired efforts of our new Undergraduate Student Advisor **Nina Rennert-Cohen**, is energizing the community of French majors.

Michael Arrigo published an article entitled "L'incertitude à double sens : le conditionnel journalistique et la construction de l'objectivité et de la subjectivité dans les textes journalistiques" in a special issue on Agency and Reported Discourse in *Synergies pays riverains de la Baltique* n°15.

Last fall, **Johannes Junge Ruhland** taught a version of French 112 that he called "Reading Literature in French, 1100 to 1500, through the Lenses of Gender, Animality, and Cultural Difference." He also organized two conferences at Stanford: *Making History with Manuscripts in Medieval Europe*, held in the fall, and another this spring for the annual Primary Source Symposium with CMEMS, *Embodied Histories*.

Alexis Stanley is spending this spring semester in Paris as a recipient of the Phi Beta Kappa Society's Walter J. Jensen Fellowship, working on her project entitled "Gestures of Enlightenment: Theatricality and Embodiment in 18th-Century France." Please see the complete [news release here](#). Last fall, Alexis taught an upper-division course of her own design called "Bodies, Affects, Gender, and Aesthetics: Literary Depictions of Embodiment in Modern French Literature" as an Acting Instructor-Graduate Student. She also gave a guest lecture for a graduate seminar entitled "Philosophy in Motion" (led by Felwine Sarr and Anne-Gaëlle Saliot) in the Romance Studies Department at Duke University.

Two other graduate students taught upper-division courses this year. **Ty Blakeney** developed his course "Writing the Prison: Sensationalism, Metaphor, and Revolution" (French 180: French Civilization) to trace three parallel traditions of the representation of prisons in French culture across the 20th and 21st centuries. Ty has just accepted a tenure-track position at Northwestern University – congratulations Ty! **Amber Sweat** designed her own French 141 (French Studies in an International Context) with the course title "Celebrating Black Lives in the Francophone World," which will culminate with a student research roundtable at the end of this spring semester. Amber recently published "[The colonial wounds of Senegal's girlchild](#)" in *Africa is a Country*. She also presented at the MLA in January with a poster on diverse student identities, reading, and teaching literature in the French classroom, as well as a "Just In Time" session on the French *présidentielle* with colleagues from UCLA. She has published book reviews in *The French Review* and *Continuum*, and she has a piece recently accepted for publication in the MIT Press special edition *Color Protocols: Technologies of Racial Encoding in Chromatic Media*.

Ben Beitler, a native of Palo Alto, recently published a [review and analysis](#) of Malcolm Harris's 720-page text *Palo Alto: A History of California, Capitalism, and the World*. As a contributor to

the Los Angeles Review of Books, Ben brings perspective and historical analysis to envision change around his area of research interest: exploring environmental conflict in film and literature.

Caroline Godard published [a review](#) on the film adaptation of Annie Ernaux's 2000 memoir *L'Événement* in LitHub last summer.

Patrick Lyons is working on a special issue of the journal *L'Esprit Créateur* on "Racial Capitalism in French and Francophone Studies."

Rachel Weiher is wrapping up her dissertation project centered on sensitizing learners to variation in spoken French. She has designed, implemented, and assessed a supplemental curricular component on sociolinguistic variation in French in our elementary French program.

Oliver Whitmore has continued to run the Occitan Studies Working Group on Zoom. This year's current theme is media representations of Occitan / by Occitans / in Occitan. Alumni and community members who would like to learn more are invited to send Oliver an email at whitmore.1@berkeley.edu.

Jennifer Kaplan is currently conducting ethnographic fieldwork in Montreal, funded by a Hildebrand Research Fellowship through the Canadian Studies Program. She is studying how non-binary or gender variant Francophone Canadians grapple with the dualistic grammatical gender inherent in French (masculine and feminine). Specifically, she seeks to document the emergence of new grammatical gender markers and neo-pronouns as used by gender non-conforming people in Quebec. She will also explore how Quebec's complicated relationship with Anglophone Canada has complicated attitudes towards non-binary French today.

Recent PhD graduate **Victoria Bergstrom** is spending the current academic year as a postdoctoral fellow at the Fox Center for Humanistic Inquiry at Emory University.

Alumna **Maya Smith** writes from the University of Washington that she has secured a book contract for her memoir project on Alvenia Bridges, and is now serving as Associate Dean of Equity, Justice, and Inclusion in the College of Arts and Sciences at UW.

The Library of French Thought continues to grow as a space for undergraduate exploration, while providing faculty and graduate students with exceptional resources to pursue their research. We would like to thank the French department community-at-large for their donations to our collections. We would especially like to recognize the contributions from the estate of the late Professor **Leo Bersani**. We also thank Professors **David Hult** and **Larry Hyman** (UC Berkeley Linguistics), **Jay Siskin** (UC Santa Cruz), and alumni & community members **Jess Morton**, **Laurie Farber**, **Anne Dumontier**, and **Amanda Fox** for their donations. If you are interested in donating materials to the Library of French Thought, please send an email to frenchlibrary@berkeley.edu.

Please note that alumni are welcome to use the reading room in the library during hours of operation.

We would like to get more alumni news for our next newsletter – please send notes to me at rkern@berkeley.edu

Please support the French Department during today's Big Give. [You can make a gift here.](#)

Un grand merci!