

Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences

A CONVERSATION
WITH ARCHITECT

JEANNE GANG

HONORING
MARGARET ATWOOD

EMPATHY AND
OUR FUTURE

ARTISTS AT WORK

THE POST-PANDEMIC
FUTURE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

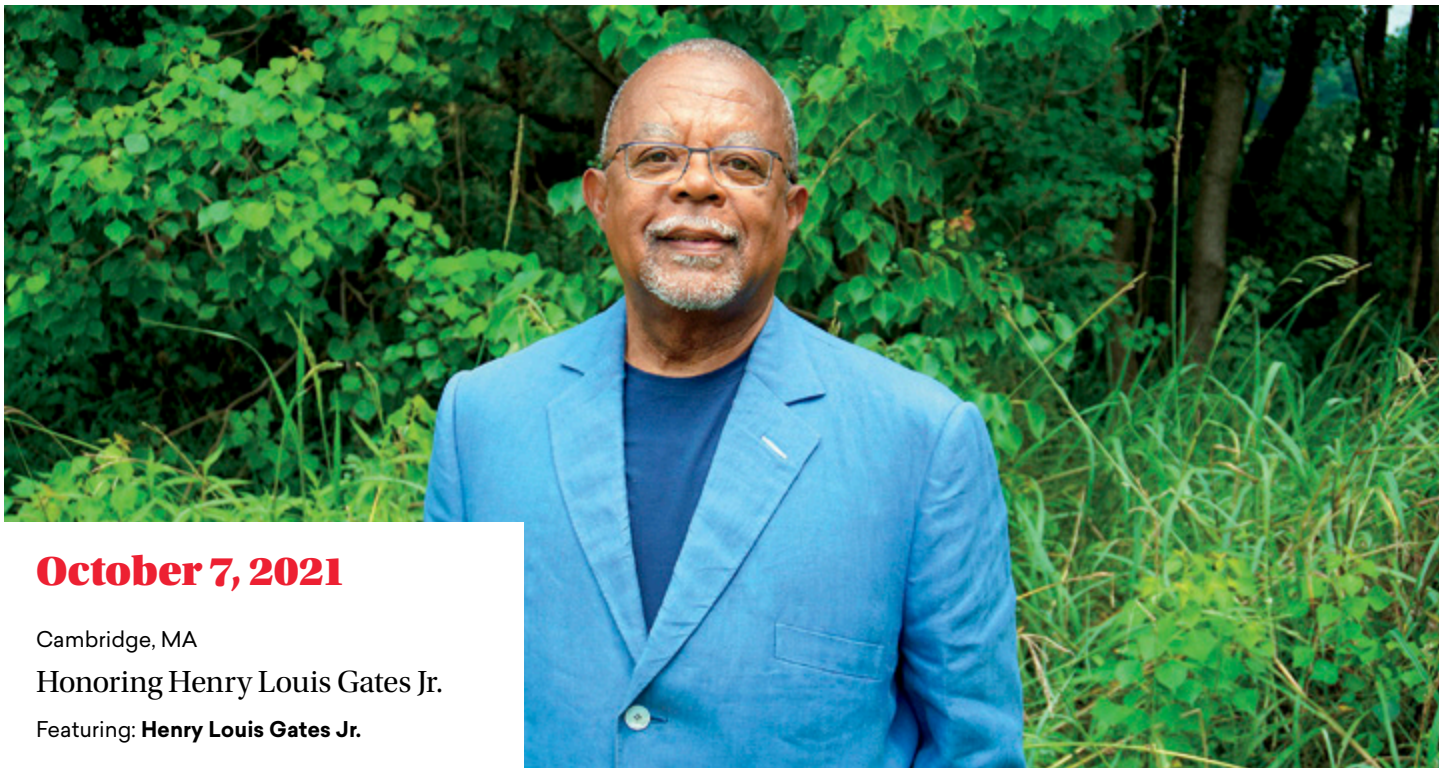
Photograph © Jason O'Rear

SUMMER 2021



SELECT

UPCOMING EVENTS



October 7, 2021

Cambridge, MA

Honoring Henry Louis Gates Jr.

Featuring: **Henry Louis Gates Jr.**



April 1-3, 2022

Cambridge, MA

Induction Weekend

Honoring Members elected in 2020 and 2021

For a full and up-to-date listing of upcoming events, please visit amacad.org/events.



Nature Boardwalk at Lincoln
Park Zoo in Chicago, Illinois
Photograph by Steve Hall
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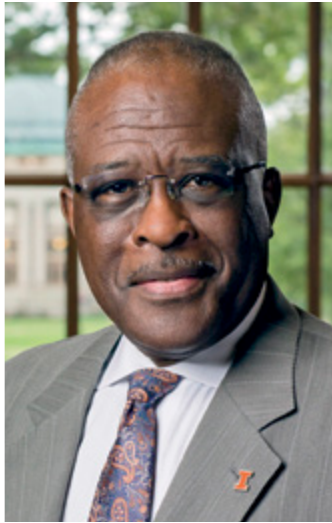
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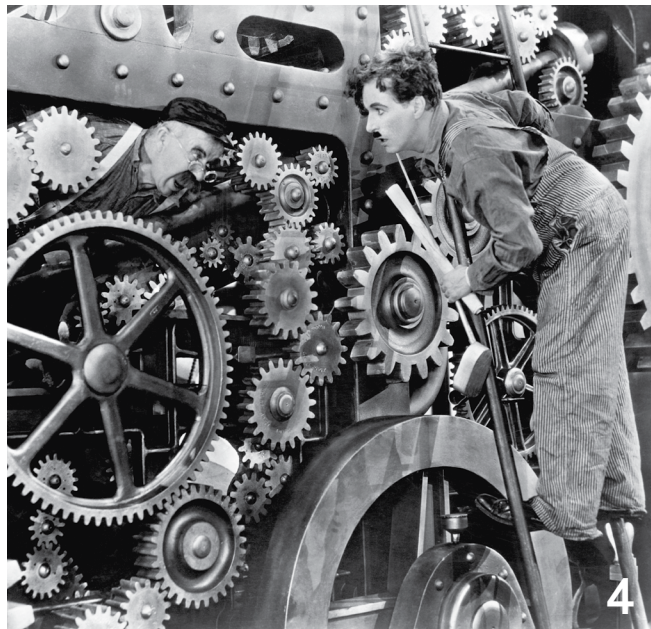
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ON THE COVER: MIRA in San Francisco, California
Photograph © Jason O'Rear

“Despite the challenges of the pandemic, our community of members has remained active and engaged in the life of the Academy. Our virtual events reached more audiences in more places than ever before. Our project work continued unabated. And our members came together to produce a record-breaking fundraising year.”



From the President

In my previous message, I discussed how – despite the challenges of the pandemic – our community of members has remained active and engaged in the life of the Academy. During the past year, our virtual events reached more audiences in more places than ever before. Our project work continued unabated, including the release of *Our Common Purpose: Reinventing American Democracy for the 21st Century* and the development of new major projects on climate change and inequality. And despite great uncertainty, our members came together to produce a record-breaking fundraising year.

As reflected in the pages that follow, the vigorous and varied life of the Academy continued throughout the spring. We were honored to present the Emerson-Thoreau Medal to author Margaret Atwood for her distinguished achievements in the field of literature. Academy members Sherry Turkle and Eric Liu gathered members for a discussion on “Empathy and Our Future.” Architect Jeanne Gang discussed her work in designing spaces that foster connection – and how that work relates to *Our Common Purpose* and its call to strengthen social, civic, and democratic infrastructure. Leaders of the Academy’s Affiliate institutions gathered to discuss “The Post-Pandemic Future of Higher Education.” And arts leaders Oskar Eustis, Thelma Golden, and Laura Zabel spoke about the challenges and opportunities facing “Artists at Work.”

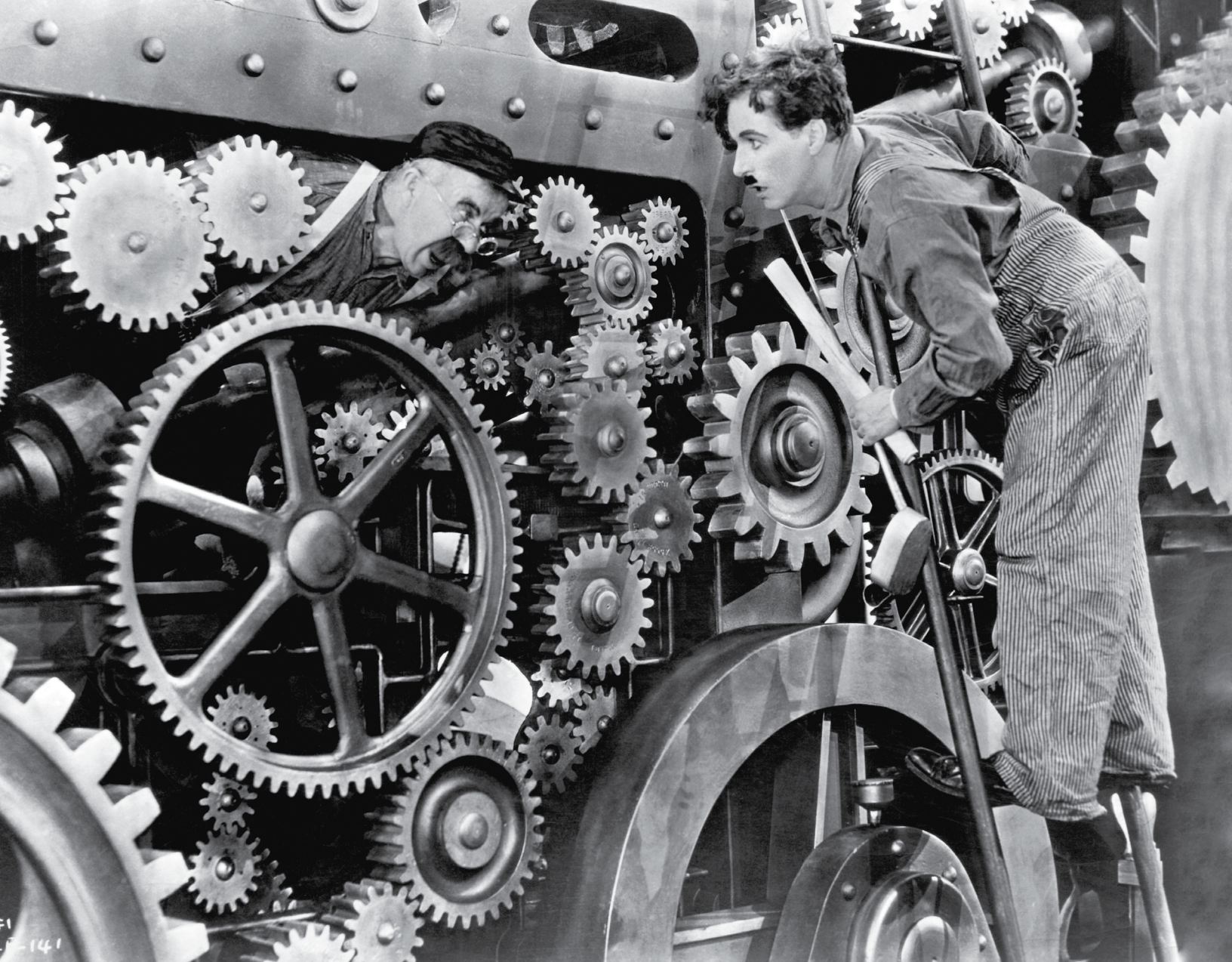
Of course, the biggest news of the spring was the election of 252 outstanding new members. From

paleontologist Zeresenay Alemseged to media entrepreneur and philanthropist Oprah Winfrey, labor leader Mary Kay Henry to computer scientist Fei-Fei Li, economist Dirk Bergemann to playwright, screenwriter, and actor Suzan-Lori Parks, the class of 2021 reflects the true breadth of the modern Academy. In an important milestone for the diversity of the Academy, we are proud to note that 55 percent of the members elected in 2021 are women.

The election of new members is always a moment of great hope and promise, and this has perhaps never been truer than this year. As we congratulate our new members, we also look forward to the return of in-person Academy events, including the first Induction ceremony since 2019. We are pleased to announce that Induction Weekend for the classes of 2020 and 2021 will take place in Cambridge, Massachusetts, during April 1–3, 2022. We are looking forward to celebrating again in person.

In the meantime, the Academy will gradually be returning to in-person events, including local and regional events across the country. I encourage you to contact me if you would like to organize an event with members in your community or if you would like to become otherwise involved in our projects, publications, or events. Thank you for all you have done for the Academy during this challenging time, and I hope we have the opportunity to meet in person soon.

David W. Oxtoby



Deconstruct? Reconstruct? *Dædalus* Debates the Administrative State

While COVID-19 cases and mortality surged in spring and summer 2020, the U.S. government seemed to lack the capacity to respond. Mixed messaging and insufficient testing, ventilators, personal protective equipment, and contact tracing raised disturbing questions about the will of the executive and the health of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. But were

these challenges particular to the pandemic? Or, as one author asks in the newest issue of *Dædalus*, “is the failed pandemic response a symptom of a diseased administrative state?”

Debates surrounding the role, effectiveness, and even constitutionality of the administrative state are not new. Indeed, while presidential advisor Stephen Bannon’s vow in 2016 to pursue the “deconstruction of the administrative state”

may have brought the concept to the forefront for many Americans, debates around this so-called fourth branch of government have persisted since its origins in the late nineteenth century: Who controls it? What limits should it face? And is it time for significant change?

The Summer 2021 issue of *Dædalus* on “The Administrative State in the Twenty-First Century: Deconstruction and/or Reconstruction,”

guest edited by Mark Tushnet, features fourteen essays by scholars in the fields of law, political science, public policy, public administration, governance, and ethics on the future of the modern administrative state – the more than two million civilian employees working largely in government agencies and institutions such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Environmental Protection Agency. Three options emerge for the future of the administrative state: deconstruction via regulation and control by the legislature; tweaking, which would modify existing doctrine without making significant changes; and reconstruction, which might involve adopting ever more flexible modes of regulation, including direct citizen participation in making and enforcing regulation.

Peter Strauss and Susan Dudley, in their contributions, provide detailed accounts of the administrative state's emergence in the United States, situating the ensuing discussion of deconstruction and reconstruction. As the administrative state has grown, with the “alphabet agencies” that were created during the New Deal and a second proliferation of agencies in the 1960s and 1970s, new problems posed by technological, economic, and social change challenge institutions that are ill-adapted to deal with them.

In addition to such challenges, conventional wisdom suggests that party polarization leads to legislative gridlock, disabling congressional oversight of agencies and eroding their legitimacy and accountability. In his essay, however, Sean Farhang complicates, both empirically and normatively, the relationship between Congress and administrative power in the era of divided government. And David Lewis, in his contribution, questions the relationship between the executive and administrative agencies. He examines the Trump administration's poor

The Summer 2021 issue of *Dædalus* on “The Administrative State in the Twenty-First Century: Deconstruction and/or Reconstruction” features the following essays:

Introduction: The Pasts & Futures of the Administrative State

Mark Tushnet (Academy Member; Harvard University)

How the Administrative State Got to This Challenging Place

Peter L. Strauss (Academy Member; Columbia Law School)

Milestones in the Evolution of the Administrative State

Susan E. Dudley (George Washington University)

Legislative Capacity & Administrative Power Under Divided Polarization

Sean Farhang (University of California, Berkeley)

Is the Failed Pandemic Response a Symptom of a Diseased Administrative State?

David E. Lewis (Vanderbilt University)

Replacing Bureaucrats with Automated Sorcerers?

Bernard W. Bell (Rutgers University)

Administrative Law in the Automated State

Cary Coglianese (University of Pennsylvania)

The Innovative State

Beth Simone Noveck (New York University)

Deconstruction (Not Destruction)

Aaron L. Nielson (Brigham Young University)

Constraining Bureaucracy Beyond Judicial Review

Christopher J. Walker (The Ohio State University; American Bar Association)

Capturing the Public: Beyond Technocracy & Populism in the U.S. Administrative State

Avery White (The Ohio State University) & Michael Neblo (The Ohio State University)

The Uncertain Future of Administrative Law

Jeremy Kessler (Columbia University) & Charles Sabel (Columbia University)

Some Costs & Benefits of Cost-Benefit Analysis

Cass R. Sunstein (Academy Member; Harvard University; U.S. Department of Homeland Security)

The Hedgehog & the Fox in Administrative Law

Neomi Rao (U.S. Court of Appeals)

Debates surrounding the role, effectiveness, and even constitutionality of the administrative state are not new. Indeed, while presidential advisor Stephen Bannon's vow in 2016 to pursue the "deconstruction of the administrative state" may have brought the concept to the forefront for many Americans, debates around this so-called fourth branch of government have persisted since its origins in the late nineteenth century: Who controls it? What limits should it face? Is the administrative state constitutional? And is it time for significant change?

pandemic response through a survey of thousands of federal executives, which showed that while many had a low opinion of that administration, years of neglect, culminating in regular and severe administrative failures, are also to blame.

Increasingly, federal agencies employ artificial intelligence (AI) and rely on digital automation powered by machine learning (ML) algorithms. Bernard Bell argues that the opaqueness and nonintuitive nature of AI threaten the core values of administrative law: that persons be judged individually, that administrative regulations reflect means-end rationality, and that decisions be transparent and subject to external review. Yet Cary Coglianese suggests that a highly automated state and the responsible use of ML algorithms could result in more accurate and data-driven decisions. The challenge, however, will be ensuring that the automated state is also an empathic one. In order to take advantage of the power of new technologies for governing, Beth

Noveck argues that the federal government will need, first and foremost, to invest in training public servants to work differently to prepare them for the future of work in a new technological age.

So where do we go from here? Aaron Nielson contends that the administrative state should be deconstructed (though not destroyed) and identifies where theory and practice diverge – and offers solutions with realistic chances of adoption. The result, he suggests, should not be the destruction of the administrative state, but rather the development of higher-quality federal policy. Christopher Walker agrees that there is a need for deconstruction, and develops the concept of bureaucracy beyond judicial review, looking to provide safeguards against bureaucratic overreach and abuse. And Avery White and Michael Neblo, in their essay, find that while government administration is necessary in a complex modern society, the existence of such a powerful bureaucracy undermines the legitimacy

of American government, and they suggest incorporating deliberative democratic practices.

Despite a long-smoldering debate between progressive defenders and conservative critics of the administrative state, Jeremy Kessler and Charles Sabel argue that neither side has adequately confronted the growth of uncertainty and the spread of guidance. They suggest that in response to deep changes in the circumstances of decision-making, administration has begun to purposefully adapt to, and might well emerge better equipped to meet, the demands of a volatile world. Cass Sunstein, in his contribution, calls the American administrative state a cost-benefit state. But while a cost-benefit state can provide safeguards against decisions based on presumptions, perceived political pressures, and arbitrary decisions, it also needs to focus directly on human welfare. And in her essay, Judge Neomi Rao draws on her experience as Administrator of the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs to examine the "constitutional muddle" of how federal agencies operate, arguing that agencies often exist in substantial tension with the Constitution.



"The Administrative State in the Twenty-First Century: Deconstruction and/or Reconstruction" is available on the Academy's website at www.amacad.org/daedalus. *Dædalus* is an open access publication.

Page 4: Charlie Chaplin and Chester Conklin struggle to repair the giant machinery of an idle factory in the 1936 silent film *Modern Times*. Film distributed by the United Artists Corporation; image held by the Bettmann Archive, courtesy of Getty Images.



The Post-Pandemic Future of Higher Education: A Virtual Convening of American Academy Affiliates

On April 23, 2021, the Academy convened leaders from its Affiliates network for a candid, forward-looking discussion about how lessons learned from the disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic might inform the future of higher education. The event provided an opportunity for the participants – university presidents and chancellors, provosts, deans, faculty, and other administrators from over forty American colleges and universities – to gather, share ideas, and make sense of a challenging year.

Richard Arum (Dean and Professor of Sociology and Education at the University of California, Irvine) began the meeting with a

presentation about the results from the Next Generation Undergraduate Success Measurement Project, a study that began collecting data on undergraduate behavior in the fall of 2019 and continued its work throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. He described the project's primary goals: to develop and disseminate new measures of undergraduate experiences and outcomes; to inform efforts to improve institutional performance and advance educational equity; and to promote a deeper understanding of educational processes and the identification of educational value. As a result of its timing, the project offered rare, data-driven insights into the

impact of remote learning on student success.

Arum's presentation highlighted his project's methodology and offered some initial conclusions on the impact the abrupt, pandemic-driven shift to virtual instruction had on undergraduate student success at UC Irvine. Although students expressed initial concern about their academic progress at the onset of the pandemic, by winter 2021 students' stress levels had returned to their pre-COVID levels, completed credits remained steady, and average GPAs had increased. When surveyed about their preference for the post-pandemic future, nearly 40 percent of



From left to right: Richard Arum, Ana Mari Cauce, Robert Jones, and Christina Paxson

students reported an interest in an even mix of online and in-person instruction. The pandemic accelerated changes that were already underway on many campuses, and this data suggest that students are

more resilient in the face of changes and challenges than previously anticipated.

Following Arum’s presentation, Academy President David Oxtoby moderated a panel discussion

that featured university leaders Ana Mari Cauce (President of the University of Washington), Robert Jones (Chancellor of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign), and Christina Paxson (President of Brown University). The conversation was candid and far reaching, covering trends in admissions and financial aid, community relations, pedagogical methods, student retention, outcomes, equity, and the value of a residential experience. The event concluded with small breakout room conversations in which participants connected with colleagues from across the Affiliate network, expanded on the earlier discussions, and shared their own visions for the post-pandemic higher education landscape.

During each part of the event, there was ample opportunity for discussion and the exchange of ideas. The Academy anticipates holding additional Affiliates network convenings and will use the ideas generated from this event to inform future programs.



To learn more about the Affiliates Program, visit the Academy’s website at www.amacad.org/about/affiliates.

Discussion Themes

A broad range of issues facing the higher education community were raised during the Q&A session with Richard Arum, at the panel discussion with university leaders, and during the breakout room conversations. The main themes discussed included:

- Access, affordability, and university finances in the post-pandemic landscape
- College admissions as a source of social mobility
- Measuring student mental health
- The role of the campus community in student outcomes
- Pedagogical approaches to remote instruction
- The future of work for faculty and staff
- The hidden costs of the residential undergraduate experience
- Creating equity in online learning environments
- Test optional admissions policies
- Communicating financial aid opportunities to low-income and first-generation students.



Artists at Work

The past year has been one of crisis in the arts sector. As the nation grappled with the COVID-19 pandemic, venues closed, employment plummeted, and uncertainty affected every facet of the cultural field. Simultaneously, the renewed racial justice reckoning that swept the country last summer spurred an assessment of inequities in the arts. Leaders of arts organizations were confronted by difficult decisions and significant opportunities as they navigated these crises and attempted to support both the arts and artists.

To assess what artists and creatives need to thrive in this environ-

ment, the Academy sponsored a virtual event on May 20, 2021, with Springboard for the Arts. The program focused on *Artists at Work* and featured Academy member Thelma Golden, Director and Chief Curator of the Studio Museum in Harlem; Oskar Eustis, Artistic Director of The Public Theater and a member of the Academy's Commission on the Arts; and Laura Zabel, Executive Director of Springboard for the Arts and a member of the Arts Commission.

In her introduction to the program, Zabel noted that the Academy's Commission on the Arts sees elevating the value of the work of

individual artists as a core component of its mission. Despite widespread appreciation of art, the public often fail to appreciate the individuals and organizations that bring art into their lives. Many artists, who are employed as contract workers or are small business owners, are undercompensated and lack access to affordable healthcare and worker protections. Zabel added that the Commission's working group on Arts in Community and Economic Development is using the Works Progress Administration of the 1930s as an "invocation to boldness and scale . . . and a reminder to start specifically with individual artists

ARTISTS AT WORK

in our conversation and center the lives of creative workers and artists in the work we were doing.”

This ethos was reflected in the participants’ remarks and in the missions of their organizations. Springboard for the Arts strives to connect creatives to the resources they need to serve their communities, while also promoting a vision

Page 9: Dr. Eboni Bell painting a community mural at Springboard for the Arts in Saint Paul as part of Artists Respond: On Plywood, June 2020.

Below: The Tiny School of Art & Design by artist Heidi Jeub at the Rural Arts & Culture Summit, October 2019.

of the future in which artists are considered essential. With offices in both urban St. Paul and rural Fergus Falls, Minnesota, Zabel describes the organization as “intensely place-based and neighborhood-focused, and also national in [its] aspiration.”

With a similarly close connection to its community, the Studio Museum was founded in 1969 by a group of artists, activists, philanthropists, and Harlem residents to “preserve, present, collect, and interpret the work of artists of African descent, locally, nationally, and internationally.” As Thelma

Golden noted, the museum is dedicated to providing artists with the space they need to “not only survive but thrive.” During her presentation, Golden showed an image of *The Architect* (1959), a painting by Jacob Lawrence, one of the founders of the museum, and photographs of Harlem during the Harlem Renaissance to illustrate the dynamism and diversity of the creative workforce and point to artists’ vital role in building futures. To support that vision, the Studio Museum houses a residency program that serves three Black artists each year. As Golden stated, at the Studio Museum,



“‘studio’ comes first – the museum is responsible not only for objects/artworks, but for care of artists.”

At The Public Theater, connecting the public with artists’ work is central to the organization’s mission, as indicated by the theater’s very name. The Public, which runs the popular Free Shakespeare in the Park in Central Park (among many other things), was founded in the 1950s to bring theater to the public. It continues its mission of being “by, of, and for the public” through The Mobile Unit, support of new plays, and the Public Works program that engages community groups and professional actors in the creation of participatory theater. As Oskar Eustis stated, “the job of The Public Theater was to take the voice of the people and put it on the stage . . . to make a new canon, a canon for our age, that gave voice to all the people who make up this fabulous, kaleidoscopic democracy.”

The past year has both reaffirmed the work happening at these institutions and called for a reorientation. Golden noted that this last year has charged the field with re-envisioning “what it is we need to create to imagine more justice and more equality.” This call has energized the field at a critical time when uncertainty makes clarity of purpose more essential than ever. The converging crises of 2020 offered a moment to, as Golden put it, “[rethink] the hierarchical relationship between artist, object, audience, and institution, and center artists.”

The present moment is not without precedent. Past periods of tumult have led to artistic movements that defined American culture. Speaking about how those past events and movements should inform our perspective now, Eustis shared:

We’re at a historical moment when things may be possible that were never possible before. We’ve had great periods of democratic expansion and

The past year has been one of crisis in the arts sector. As the nation grappled with the COVID-19 pandemic, venues closed, employment plummeted, and uncertainty affected every facet of the cultural field.

enfranchisement that led to great theatrical renaissances: in the 1930s as a result of the Depression . . . the WPA and the Federal Theater Project came out of that. . . . In the 1960s the Civil Rights Movement, the Anti-War Movement, the Great Society Movement all produced this explosion of non-profit theaters across the United States in a beautiful decentralization of the American Theater. And now we’re at a moment when it’s possible that we could have another resurgence of democracy and culture. . . . It’s our job to make sure that, coming back from COVID, we’re helping to contribute to this being a moment when America becomes more equal, when the distribution of value across the culture is more equitable, when there is more justice, more inclusion, and more people get to claim that they are at the center of what America is.

As the arts sector looks for greater equity, building a better system to support individual artists and their work is imperative. The fragility of the paths available for artists to support their livelihood creates an often-insurmountable barrier for many who aspire to a career in the arts. As Zabel stated, “we have an emergency of inequity for artists and for communities that are impacted by multiple crises. Artists were among the first to lose

their jobs and contracts as the bottom fell out at the beginning of the pandemic, and more than a year later, the unemployment statistics for artists are still really heartbreaking. For some disciplines, the unemployment rate remains over 50 percent, and over 90 percent of artists in this country report that they had income loss over the last year.” Artists need the protections that will allow them to earn a living wage, support their families, and, in turn, continue the work that makes life in communities and society meaningful.

The Commission on the Arts is developing a report on the creative workforce that will address these issues and recommend reforms at the national, state, and local levels. Conversations with arts leaders, including those who participated in the *Artists at Work* event, have been vital to the Commission’s understanding of the problems and, most important, the potential opportunities and solutions available to the field. The work of organizations like the Studio Museum in Harlem, The Public Theater, and Springboard for the Arts epitomizes the essential role art plays in individual and civic life and demonstrates the necessity of building a world in which artists and creative workers are valued and supported.




For more on the Commission on the Arts, visit the Academy’s website at www.amacad.org/project/commission-arts.



Empathy and Our Future

2097th Stated Meeting | March 10, 2021 | Virtual Event
Morton L. Mandel Public Lecture

The background of the page is an abstract, watercolor-style illustration. It features large, flowing, organic shapes in shades of blue, green, and yellow. The shapes are layered and overlapping, creating a sense of depth and movement. The overall composition is dynamic and artistic, with a focus on color and form rather than recognizable objects.

While many discussions in America are now focused on accountability versus unity, a concept that belongs in conversations about how America can recover from a divisive election, devastating pandemic, and long history of racial injustice is *empathy*. At a virtual Stated Meeting, **Sherry Turkle** (MIT) and **Eric Liu** (Citizen University) joined Academy President **David Oxtoby** in a conversation about what empathy looks like in an increasingly digital world, the search for authentic connections at a time of isolation and disunion, and the role authentic connection can play in repairing our civic culture. An edited version of their conversation follows.

“Many of us have spent the last year of our lives in front of screens, isolated from family, friends, and colleagues, and trying to make sense of a divisive election, a devastating pandemic, and a long history of racial injustice. This period of tumult has also been a period of reflection, leading many of us to think about our own lives and our relationships with each other.

David W. Oxtoby

David W. Oxtoby is President of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. He was elected a Fellow of the American Academy in 2012.

Today’s program is focused on authentic connection at a time of isolation and disunion. Many of us have spent the last year of our lives in front of screens, isolated from family, friends, and colleagues, and trying to make sense of a divisive election, a devastating pandemic, and a long history of racial injustice. This period of tumult has also been a period of reflection, leading many of us to think about our own lives and our relationships with each other. I am glad that so many of you have joined us today to investigate the role empathy can play in helping us make the most of this challenging moment.

Our consideration of the role that authentic connection can play in repairing our civic culture will be led by two Academy members, whose lives have been dedicated to understanding the power of empathy. Sherry Turkle is the Abby Rockefeller Mauzé Professor of the Social Studies of Science and Technology in the Program in Science, Technology, and Society at MIT. Through her dual perspective as a psychologist and sociologist, Sherry pioneered the study of the emotional impact of technology on personal identity. Her groundbreaking work in understanding the role the computer plays in our relationships with each other and ourselves has helped the world navigate the rise of the computer and Internet culture. Her conclusions about what we can – and, crucially, what we cannot – expect from our relationship to technology have been chronicled in her books, which include *The Second Self: Computers and the Human Spirit*; *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*; and *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age*. In her latest

book, *The Empathy Diaries: A Memoir*, Sherry turns that incisive lens inward, excavating her personal history to understand the origins of her own capacity for connection. As she chronicles her trajectory from working-class Brooklyn through her studies at Radcliffe, to her time in France, and eventually to her work at MIT, Sherry is vulnerable and revealing, inviting an intimacy with her reader that, as she argues, is the root of empathic connection.

Eric Liu is Cofounder and CEO of Citizen University and Director of the Aspen Institute’s Citizenship and American Identity program. He is the former Deputy Director of the White House Domestic Policy Council, has held policy roles for the U.S. Senate and the National Security Council, and is the author of numerous books, including, most recently, *Become America: Civic Sermons on Love, Responsibility, and Democracy*. With Danielle Allen and Stephen Heintz, Eric chairs the Academy’s Commission on the Practice of Democratic Citizenship. In its report, *Our Common Purpose: Reinventing American Democracy for the 21st Century*, the Commission advances 31 recommendations for strengthening our civic life and political institutions. The recommendations are designed to create a democratic system and political culture in which Americans can escape their echo chambers and recognize their shared interest in a healthy, thriving democracy. Eric has been a fierce advocate for the power of connection to heal our civic culture, and his work reminds us how important engaging with our neighbor is to the well-being of our nation.

I am grateful to Sherry and Eric for lending their distinct perspectives to this topic. Today’s exploration of empathy will, appropriately enough, be structured as a dialogue. Eric, let’s start with you. Empathy seems to be the word of the moment. Our media is fixated on empathy. Joe Biden made empathy a cornerstone of his presidential campaign and the inauguration. What is empathy, and why is it so relevant to our current political reality?



Eric Liu

Eric Liu is President and CEO of Citizen University. He is a cochair of the American Academy's Commission on the Practice of Democratic Citizenship and was elected to the American Academy in 2020.

I define empathy simply as a capacity to imagine the emotional experiences of another. Imagination and understanding are not merely cognitive. They are visceral and emotional, and I think part of the reason why empathy is all the rage in the language of our politics today is precisely because it is also painfully absent in the practice of politics right now. So much of our political culture in the United States rewards and accelerates a deep dehumanizing instinct to treat the other as the other, as the enemy, as an object, as an obstacle, and not as somebody who has hopes, dreams, fears, needs, wants like any other human, including oneself. I think we have polarization today not just because people decided to be mean and because some prominent leaders started to issue mean tweets, but because something deep and structural has been happening in our country, in which the concentration of wealth and the acceleration of inequality have frayed that sense of common purpose – that we are all in it together.

That structural shift has given rise to a vicious cycle, in which the culture of our civic life is increasingly brutish, increasingly dehumanized and cynical, and just rolls its eyes at the idea that we are all in it together. This experience of COVID-19 of the last twelve months has been a painful reminder of that. In the early weeks, we all were in it together, and advertisers were quick to make slogans about that. But as the pandemic has continued, it has only accentuated the ways in which empathy is evaporating from the political ecosystem, so that the prominent feeling is “glad that ain’t me.” Half a million have died; glad that ain’t me. Many of them are brown and black and poor and older; glad that ain’t me. And I think that unspoken dynamic is revealed in other ways: in the rawness and dehumanizing style of our politics right now. We need to find ways to reckon with that, and Sherry’s work shows us a path to do that.

OXTOBY: Thank you, Eric. Sherry, what does empathy mean to you, and why did you choose it as a theme for your memoir?



Sherry Turkle

Sherry Turkle is the Abby Rockefeller Mauzé Professor of the Social Studies of Science and Technology in the Program in Science, Technology, and Society at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. She was elected a Fellow of the American Academy in 2014.

Empathy goes beyond putting yourself in the place of the other to put yourself in the problem of the other. It is a commitment to go the distance with another person.

Empathy begins with humility and commitment. ”

To me, empathy goes beyond putting yourself in the place of the other to put yourself in the problem of the other. It is a commitment to go the distance with another person. For me, empathy needs to become an integral part of citizenship. And when this kind of empathy, let's call it empathy taken to a higher power, does its work, you don't begin by saying, "I know how you feel." You start with, "I don't know how you feel. I'm here to listen to you and to do the work that I need to do to be able to hear you." Empathy begins with humility and commitment.

Our screens have gotten in the way because a lot of what we do on our screens undermines empathy. If we focus on our screens, our eyes are off the people we are with, and it is harder to listen to them. We divide our attention. That's become our standard practice.

This morning I was sent, for a final copyediting, one of the op-eds that I had written several months ago to accompany my book launch. In it, I was very optimistic about our possibilities for new connections as we came out of the pandemic because together, we would have had a shared experience of our human frailty. I argued that the pandemic would make space for empathic political connection. This morning I revised those paragraphs because my optimism was too simple. It was a good theory, but the reality has been more complex. We have an opening for change. But learning how to tend to each other will take a lot of work and political will.

OXTOBY: Let me follow up on that before I come back to the question of technology. What tools and experiences might help us to increase our ability to empathize? We can't all be writing memoirs or researching human behavior as you are, Sherry, or dedicating our professional lives to repairing civic society as you are, Eric. So, what advice do you have for us about the tools and things that we could do to increase our ability to empathize? Sherry, I'll start with you and then ask Eric to comment.

TURKLE: Well, the first thing I would say is that solitude is the place where empathy is born. If you can't be alone with yourself, then when you talk to another person, you are looking to them to tell you who you are. You can't listen to someone else and be empathic until you have a capacity for solitude. Now, this is not what people want to hear when they ask, "How can I be empathic?" They don't want to hear, "Learn to be alone." But an empathic person is someone who can know themselves by themselves. Only then are you ready to listen to someone else's story.

I suggest that to train yourself for empathy, the first thing is to turn off your screen during critical times with others (the dinner table, while you are in the car, while you are preparing food). Then, develop some kind of practice in which you try to be alone without distraction. Think of it as time to get to know yourself better. These are two ways of becoming a better listener.

The second thing is when you sit down to listen to someone else, try not to tell them what you think they should do, which is what we usually do. I have hundreds of hours of taped conversations of people talking to each other. It is common to hear one person, who is trying to be empathic, explain what their divorce was like and what the other person should do if they are getting divorced. Try to adopt the discipline of listening and not suggesting. You are there to communicate "I am here to give you my full attention. I'm here not because I know how you feel, but because I *don't* know how you feel." Empathy is a discipline of humility.

LIU: To extend the continuum from there, I think that the ability to sit with oneself is very hard to do, especially now because we have unlimited distractions. And so that capacity to "lash ourselves to the mast" and not be pulled one way or another is key. Let's assume for the moment that we have been able to do that: we have been able to sit with ourselves and now with humility and empathy we can engage with another. From the work that we do at Citizen University and also from the recommendations in

our Academy report, *Our Common Purpose*, I put a great premium on building bonds of trust and affection through two means. First, join a club. Join an association that involves other people and that requires you to search out common goals and common aspirations, figuring out how to navigate your differences to do those things. It could be civic or political. It could be gardening; it could be baseball. I think that muscle—the joining of clubs—is atrophied in American civic life now: the Tocquevillian idea that habits of the heart are cultivated not in isolation, but in the doing of things with others and the effort to associate that way.

“ I put a great premium on building bonds of trust and affection through two means. First, join a club. Second, search out shared experiences in which the focal point of the experience is not you or me but a third thing.

Second, search out shared experiences in which the focal point of the experience is not you or me but a third thing. The Academy’s Commission on the Practice of Democratic Citizenship spent a couple of years traveling across the country, listening to people from the left and right, in rural and urban areas, to distill the recommendations in *Our Common Purpose* for how to reinvent our democracy, and core to those recommendations is a great emphasis on national service. We believe that an expectation of universal national service for young people in the United States would go a huge way toward closing that empathy gap and giving people that set of shared experiences where they are having to do something. They have to fix something, clean something, solve something that isn’t just about you and me indulging ourselves with our own kind of story. And that fixing and doing of a third thing can be catalytic in public life. I am pleased to learn that among the things included in the COVID stimulus and recovery act is the largest ever investment in national service programs, such as AmeriCorps, Senior Corps, and the like.

David, I would challenge one thing that you said earlier. You said not everybody can devote their lives to cultivating civic engagement and conversation, and I beg to differ. Everybody can. Not everybody can make that their profession, but everybody just by the way they live as a citizen, the

way they show up for others, the way that they participate in the life of community and country, everyone absolutely can take some piece of ownership of that body of work. We all know that empathy has its limits. Empathy will not solve a difference in ideology about whether low-wage workers should be paid a \$15 minimum wage, but our politics is meant for us to hash that out in a way that isn’t demonizing, scorched earth, and zero-sum. And the only way we get to non-scorched earth, non-zero-sum politics is to begin to recommit to everything Sherry was talking about. Listening, rehumanizing, building relationships with

people in which you see them in more than one dimension and can say, “We differ on minimum wage, but I get where you are coming from.” “We differ on this, but I feel the challenges that you have gone through.” And that is a habit that cannot trickle down from a president to the rest of us. It has to come from the inside out, from the bottom up in our society, and that is what in *Our Common Purpose* we refer to when we talk about a culture change.

OXTOBY: Are there shared cultural moments? Sherry, you mentioned that originally you were more optimistic, but now you are less optimistic about all of us coming together. How does the pandemic or the national reckoning around race affect our capacity for empathy?

TURKLE: At least two things are happening at once. First is the personal difficulty that people experience when learning how to have conversations. I report an interview in *Reclaiming Conversation* in which a young woman is talking to me about what she calls “the seven-minute rule.” She says what she has learned about conversation is that you have to pay attention to someone for seven minutes to understand what they are trying to say. She says it is true of her mother, it is true of her family, and it is true of her friends. As I was

listening to her, I was thinking, “Yes, yes, what a wise young woman!” And then she says, “But, of course, I can’t do that. I look at my phone after two. I cannot get to seven minutes.” She knows she has to listen for seven minutes, but she admits that her life with her phone has made this a near-impossibility. Distraction has become her way of life. So, there is work to be done. When people get into groups for conversation, they need support, so I am excited that there will be money and resources to help them. But making such groups successful requires more than having a room, chairs, and some coffee. You need to give people support and skilled individuals. People need help as they begin to talk to each other, particularly across significant differences. We need empathic support as we take steps to learn how to attend to each other.

LIU: A word that is drawn from Sherry’s book, which articulates that support, is *ritual*. When Sherry says we need support to be able to have these conversations in a way that doesn’t go off the rails, which makes it safe for people to go from an unexamined inner into a productive outer engagement, that relates to why so much of our emphasis in our work at Citizen University is around ritual. We have these gatherings called Civic Saturdays that are essentially a civic analog to a faith gathering, with the architecture and the arc of a faith gathering. We ask our participants to turn to the stranger next to them and talk about a common question

technology out there called theater that immerses you in a ritual that is meant to completely regenerate your capacity for empathy, and it is not just a matter of passive entertainment. It is an awakening of both the inner and outer work. And whether you choose a path of art and theater or civic gatherings or other forms of structured ritual, there are programs aplenty that are providing frameworks for people to do that. Because, Sherry, you are absolutely correct. Even if someone is motivated to want to go from the first step of inner work, there is a big chasm that is scary. If I do that, am I going to mess up? Am I going to step on a land mine?

TURKLE: My research suggests that the Internet and our devices (the whole world of screens) offer us an escape from feeling vulnerable. People feel vulnerable in face-to-face conversations, and what rituals and art do is reduce people’s vulnerability so that they begin to participate. But vulnerability is, of course, where empathy is born. Where do I see optimism? Our time during this pandemic has offered what the great anthropologist Victor Turner would have called liminal time. A time betwixt and between, where the rules have been broken, and there are no new rules in place. This can be a time of great creativity. Now, I don’t think things are falling into place in quite the simple positive ways that I might have wished for. But I do see positive signs in the way Americans have been able to step back and watch a fuller reality of

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that cuts through small talk; we ask them to sing and hear poetry. There is a reading of scripture and texts that are civic, not religious. And what we call for in *Our Common Purpose* similarly is grounded in trying to emphasize and build ritual structures. And not just gatherings like Civic Saturdays or organizations like Living Room Conversations.

As you know well, Sherry, and your life and your research have demonstrated this, art is such a force. Oskar Eustis, the great Artistic Director of the Public Theater in New York, recently described theater, very proudly, as the anti-Internet. He is trying to remind people that there is a social

America. We have seen our country anew, in ways we hadn’t seen it before. Seeing racial inequality, White racism, the Capitol riots, police brutality, the Me Too movement: so many people have watched all of these unfold during the pandemic. And I think we have come to a vision of ourselves that is not the Fourth of July version. No, it is so *other* from what we are used to seeing that there has been a wake-up call. We can talk about things that we could not have spoken about a year ago in the same way. We are more realistic now. I take hope from that because new seeing makes new conversations possible.

LIU: In *Our Common Purpose* we speak about this period that we are living through, this liminal time as Sherry was saying, as essentially a fourth founding of the United States. The first founding was the framing of the Constitution; the second was the aftermath of the Civil War and Reconstruction; the third, which we just commemorated this past weekend in thinking about Bloody Sunday, was the Civil Rights movement; and we appear now to be in the midst of a fourth awakening of the United States. The thing about this particular moment that makes it both promising and exciting but also challenging is that we are now attempting to do something that has not been done before. It was implicit in the fine print of our social contract from the beginning, but it is only

If you are trying to find a path between those poles and a synthesis that recognizes the durability and the power of the universal ideals of this nation while acknowledging the complexity of these cultures and all these traditions, we need to be comfortable with the way in which demographically we have changed.

OXTOBY: I would like to ask each of you to comment on two things that have been brought up already. One is the role of art and storytelling in developing empathy, and the second is technology. Can technology ever help, or is it always negative? Let's start with Sherry. Your memoir involves a lot of wonderful storytelling. How does that help us in terms of developing empathy?

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When you try seriously to do all those things at once, we find two words at the very center of all disputation: we and us. Who is us? And who is this we that has permission to talk about topic X or Y? Who is the us that is never heard from? Who are the people who get to determine what is part of the story of the country? If the Capitol riots didn't bring Congress together, what will? We are still in a mode in which evidence and experience are used to confirm a prior bias and a prior narrative of who is us. If your prior narrative is this is a White Christian nation that is too much in disarray right now because there has been too much change, then you are going to look at January 6 in one way. If your story of us is this is a country that from the beginning has been hypocritical and breaking promises about equality, then you are going to look at things in a different way.

TURKLE: One path to self-discovery is through personal storytelling. Writing my own story increased my capacity to understand other people and myself. I finally understood in a deeper way why my family would not tell me my father's name, and this brought me closer to them. The discipline of getting the story straight forced me to make sense of small details of my life that had always bothered me. To take one emotionally fraught example: Only when I had constructed a meticulous timeline of my mother's life in relation to important events in mine did I understand why my mother lied to me about having knitted me a hat that I knew she had in fact purchased at a local five-and-dime. I knew she bought the hat, yet she handed me the hat and said, "I made this for you." It made me angry at her. She lied about so many big things. My father's name. That she had been divorced. But why this hat? In writing my memoir, I realized that she told that "odd" lie just when she discovered she had cancer and decided that she would

never burden me with this knowledge. My mother bought me the hat on her way back from a frightening visit to the doctor. She wanted to feel close to an eight-year-old me, and so she blurted out: “I made this for you.” This small detail brought me closer to my mother long after her death.

When I wrote my memoir, my daughter said it was a gift. We need to tell our stories to our children. I think we are getting out of this habit. When

demands greater empathy right now. Citizenship also demands candor about power: understanding who has and does not have power, why that is, how that came to be, how it can be undone and redone, and how the redoing of it can occur in a way that does not make people fearful in a zero-sum way. Can we imagine a world in which men value women as women, women value men as men, and other people who do not fit that gender

Citizenship demands greater empathy right now. Citizenship also demands candor about power: understanding who has and does not have power, why that is, how that came to be, how it can be undone and redone. ”

I study families, I ask, “Did your parents tell you about your grandparents and the story of your family?” They usually answer “no.” What used to happen around the dinner table has been lost. Too often, we bring our phones to meals. Put the phones away and use mealtime to talk about your family and your history.

LIU: On storytelling, I would add that one of the core recommendations that we make in *Our Common Purpose* is a nationwide effort we call Telling Our Nation’s Story. It is about asking questions such as, How did your family come to be here? What did your family call this land? What did this land call your family? Where do you have a sense of place? Where and when in your family’s life did a storyline begin to take hold that you either do or do not have power? What is the role of power in the ways that you live and in the ways that you were formed? This is about imagining in a different way where we have come from. And when we do that, we realize how much we actually have in common in terms of our shared experiences, our pain, and the ways in which we have been formed.

OXTOBY: Let me now turn to some audience questions. The first question is about solitude versus belonging to a group. Sherry began with solitude. Eric followed with joining a group. How do you think about the differences between extroverts and introverts when dealing with empathy? Eric, would you like to respond?

LIU: One of the things that can shut down conversation or engagement is power. Citizenship

binary are fully valued? Can we imagine a world in which no one is diminished by the inclusion of everyone? For a lot of people, the answer is no, I can’t. Including everyone feels like I am going to get less, so I’m going to resist. I think our commitment to making a positive-sum story out of this is what is crucial, whether you are an introvert or an extrovert.

If you are an introvert, the capacity for that kind of inner work and self-reflection that Sherry spoke of may be easier and may come more readily to you than if you are actively extroverted. But then the next phase, of engaging with other folks, might be difficult. I think our civic life is like the human body itself because it contains multitudes. There are multiple ways of engaging. You don’t have to be extroverted like a Bill Clinton. You could be like an Abraham Lincoln, who was introverted, who was quite self-reflective, whose grief and the pain from his family experiences colored his sense of responsibility for preserving the Union. And that capacity for recognizing all the different styles that we have and that can contribute to civic life is part of the beauty of this moment. You don’t have to be like a classic politician to live like a citizen. Quiet is a huge part of what is needed right now in civic life, and if that is what you bring to the table, a quiet with integrity, a quiet that draws other people, a quiet that has power, then that is a great gift to share with others.

OXTOBY: Thank you. This next question is for Sherry, from Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot: “To have empathy we must see the other person as human, as worthy of being treated with dignity and

respect. I wonder whether you would speak about the historical, cultural, and political reasons that stand in the way of our seeing each other as fully human. And speaking developmentally, how do we in families and schools encourage the growth of empathy?”

TURKLE: For reasons of time, I’m going to begin with the second question and find another time to fill in the historical context. It deserves to be its own session. *The Empathy Diaries* began as a chapter in my book *Reclaiming Conversation*. I was invited to consult at a school because the teachers complained that there was a lack of empathy among their students. What does it mean for teachers to diagnose a lack of empathy? What were the signs? The presenting symptom was that the children were looking at their screens and not at each

dinner table. It is important to remember that so many children don’t have a meal in which they sit down regularly with their family and share the “news of the day.”

OXTOBY: The next question is from Neil deGrasse Tyson. When does joining a group, which people do when they engage in social media, morph into dangerous tribalism? Eric, let’s start with you.

LIU: This question calls to mind the distinction that Bob Putnam made between bridging and bonding social capital, between strong ties and weak ties. Let me amend what I said earlier. When I said join a club, that is the very short version. If I would add a few words, I would say join a club that is inclusive and can bridge you to other clubs. One of the things about where we are now is that so-

“ One of the things that makes me optimistic about the moment that we are in is that now, coming out of the pandemic, if you propose an exciting screen curriculum to parents (after their children have been on screens for a year), parents are likely to say, “I want my child to have a person! I want my child to have a mentor. I want somebody who is going to talk to my child.”

other. The children were not talking to each other in the lunchroom and on the playground. I developed some exercises in which I would show children that if there were a phone on the table between them and another child, they would pay no attention to that other child. Or if there were a phone in their peripheral vision, their interest in the other child would drop. They couldn’t remember anything about the conversation that they had with that child.

So, to develop empathy, the first step is to get buy-in from the people you are working with that there is a problem. You begin by convincing children (and parents and teachers) that their devices are getting in the way of their friendships even though they think that their devices are the centerpiece of their friendships. You also develop the rituals (for example, within the school day) that encourage intensive listening. For example, at school lunch, try to recreate the rituals of the family

cial media amplifies bonding – joining with birds of a feather, ideological or other – that allows the group to become more homogeneous. And the commitment should be to find ways to join groups that are by definition heterogeneous and whose purpose is to bridge across lines of difference and distinction, such as race, class, ideology, generation, and more.

Of course, this should begin in a school setting, and as adults we ought to continue to seek out and find these heterogeneous groups. Living Room Conversations is one organization; Encore.org is another. It empowers elders to think about how they can bring their wisdom and accumulated life experience into a conversation that is intergenerational. And if we think about those kinds of circles that Sherry was describing, they can be in a school setting or in an adult setting. For example, one of the projects that Howard Gardner and his colleague Lynn Barendsen have cultivated at Harvard

is the Family Dinner Project. It is reteaching families how to have conversations, how to create that space even if it is not going to be literally at the dinner table.

In all these settings, there are some magic keys and those keys are universal human questions. One of the earliest books that I wrote that had nothing directly to do with citizenship was called *Guiding Lights*. It was about life changing mentors. Everywhere I went I asked people two questions: Who has influenced you? And how do you pass it on? Sherry's book is a beautiful answer to those two questions in her life. Who has influenced you and how do you pass it on? When you have two keys like that, you can open up conversation in a way that sets our political differences in a humanizing context. If we search out groups that do that, that's a good thing. If we search out groups that want to filter us away from that complexity, that's a dangerous thing.

OXTOBY: Sherry, would you like to comment?

TURKLE: One of the things that makes me optimistic about the moment that we are in is that now, coming out of the pandemic, if you propose an exciting screen curriculum to parents (after their children have been on screens for a year), parents are likely to say, "I want my child to have a person! I want my child to have a mentor. I want somebody who is going to talk to my child. I want a human being. I want the full embrace of the human. Could I please have a person now?" I think we are in a position to approach screens more deliberately. We are more likely to want privacy on screens. We saw the damage that big tech could do.

OXTOBY: The next question is about shame and whether it interferes with people's ability to be empathic. And this relates to hope as we see parts of our country that are not what we would wish them to be. How do we not become ashamed and despondent?

LIU: I think it begins with facing and naming the shame and then taking responsibility for the choice that comes after that. And the choice is either I will push that down and it will displace and find its expression in some other unhealthy way in my life, or I will convert it into a form of reckoning and responsibility-taking. And that's the choice. There is a great organization, Facing History and Ourselves, based in Boston, doing work all around

the United States using the Holocaust, the Civil Rights movement, the Rwandan genocide, and moments like these in which large groups of people had shame about things that they or others around them did or failed to do at critical moral junctures. And they are using those historical examples to teach young people how not only to think about what you would do in that moment but if you inherited that shame, if you own that shame, what do you do with it? And it can't simply be a matter of saying, "Well, I'm ashamed. I'm going to let that block me and choke off my development." We have an opportunity in this country right now, and it's why I too am hopeful like Sherry, that in the younger generation especially there is a greater taking of that kind of responsibility and saying, "OK, we know the bad and the ugly, not just the good of the American story. Now, what are we going to do? How are we going to stitch things together and go forward?"

OXTOBY: Sherry, would you like to comment?

TURKLE: Let me speak very personally. In my family, we had distant relatives in Europe who were swept up in the Holocaust. I grew up with a mantra that such a thing couldn't happen in this country, but that of course, it might, and it was my responsibility that if I saw a sign of American fascism I was to leap into action, like Wonder Woman, because we saw what had happened in Europe. And then this year, we all witnessed how American fascism threatened our country. We watched as the unspeakable happened – or almost happened. And trapped in my home, I was no Wonder Woman. I think we are poised for this fourth founding that Eric mentioned.

OXTOBY: Thank you, Sherry and Eric. This has been a very rich conversation, and we have only scratched the surface. Let me close by thanking Sherry and Eric for their thoughtful comments and responses, and for their time and deep commitment to strengthening empathy and American democracy.

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To view or listen to the presentation, visit www.amacad.org/events/empathy.





The Academy's Emerson-Thoreau Medal

is awarded to an individual for overall literary achievement. Named for Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, the prize was first awarded to poet Robert Frost in 1958, and has since been presented seventeen times, including to T. S. Eliot, Hannah Arendt, Philip Roth, and, most recently, Toni Morrison in 2016.

The Academy awarded the 2020 Emerson-Thoreau Medal to **Margaret Atwood** for her distinguished achievement in the field of literature. The virtual award ceremony included remarks by Academy President **David Oxtoby**; a video message from **The Honorable Chrystia Freeland**, Deputy Prime Minister of Canada and Minister of Finance; and a reading of the Emerson-Thoreau Medal citation by Chair of the Academy's Board **Nancy C. Andrews**. Following the presentation of the medal, Margaret Atwood delivered brief acceptance remarks and then joined author **Gish Jen** in a conversation. Margaret Atwood's acceptance remarks and an edited version of her conversation with Gish Jen follow.

2098th Stated Meeting | March 24, 2021 | Virtual Event

Honoring Margaret Atwood



Margaret Atwood

Margaret Atwood is the author of more than fifty books of fiction, poetry, and critical essays. Her work includes *The Handmaid's Tale*, *Cat's Eye*, *The Robber Bride*, *Alias Grace*, *The Blind Assassin*, and *The Testaments*, which won the 2019 Booker Prize. She has been an International Honorary Member of the American Academy since 1988.

Thank you, dear Academy of Arts and Sciences. I am so honored to have been given this award, one with a truly illustrious group of past recipients, one that celebrates the importance of the written word at a time when words have become increasingly important, and one that is especially meaningful for me. When I began writing, as a teenager long ago in the 1950s, I did not know that such an award existed. However, I would have recognized the name of Thoreau: my father, a biologist and canoe expert born in 1906 in a very rural location, was a huge fan of Thoreau, and we had *Walden* and also *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* in the house. My father was especially keen on the idea of self-reliance, and appreciative of Thoreau's willingness to go to jail in defense of principles in which he believed. He is indeed one of the grandfathers of peaceful protest.

When I made it to New England, land of my ancestors, in 1961, one of the things I did – apart from visiting Salem, so deeply of interest to us of witchy reputation – was to visit Walden Pond, where the outline of Thoreau's cabin or shack was still visible. I thought it was a bit small compared to the father-constructed cabins and shacks I'd spent much of my childhood in, but unlike ours it was for only one person. When we were making a little woodland memorial for my father, we put on it one of his favorite quotes from Thoreau: "if one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with success unexpected in common hours."

My connection with Emerson was more tenuous, but as a Toronto undergraduate I studied him with a New England professor who was

surely channelling him. I was never sure exactly what Transcendentalism was, but it seemed benign, as was the professor. He had a dreamy way of looking out the window while saying something impenetrable that I will never forget. I can't say that I fixated much on Individualism and Freedom back then – as a young person, I took them for granted – but I am focusing on them now, as these concepts badly need revisiting. As for Nature, need I say more, in this time of climate crisis? Emerson and Thoreau, you were ahead of your time. Way ahead.

So, I thank you, dear American Academy of Arts and Sciences, for this award, so touching to me personally. And Mr. Thoreau and Mr. Emerson, I especially thank you. You embodied the positive currents of your time and place, which is all any of us can be expected to do. And thank you too for daring to be different. We need that example. As Thoreau said, "If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away." Nowadays he would have said "person," but now is not then. If you could pop awake, gentlemen, and discover who has just been given this wonderful award in your names, would you be very surprised?

I have faith in you. I think not. You yourselves were viewed as eccentrics in your day. I believe you would have taken me in stride. Maybe we could go on a canoe trip, Mr. Thoreau. Though not Mr. Emerson. He would have been too absent-minded. While contemplating the higher truths he would have toppled overboard, I fear. Though Mr. Thoreau and I being more practical, would have fished him out.

I thank you all, most sincerely, once again.

Thank you, dear American Academy of Arts and Sciences. I am so honored to have been given this award, one with a truly illustrious group of past recipients, one that celebrates the importance of the written word at a time when words have become increasingly important, and one that is especially meaningful for me. ”



Gish Jen

Gish Jen, a Fellow of the American Academy since 2009, is the author of the novels *Typical American*, *Mona in the Promised Land*, *The Love Wife*, *World and Town*, and *The Resisters*; a collection of stories, *Who's Irish?* and the books *The Girl at the Baggage Claim: A Tale of Two Selves* and *Tiger Writing: Art, Culture, and the Interdependent Self*.

Margaret, that was just wonderful. Let me say what an honor it is to talk to you. And I want to tell you that we have something in common. We both studied with the great Canadian literary critic, Northrop Frye. Back in the 1970s, he taught a seminar at Harvard on the Bible, in conjunction with which there was a reception for him at Kirkland House, which I dutifully attended. Unfortunately, I did not realize it was Daylight Savings Time, so I arrived an hour early. And even more unfortunately, there was one other guest who also missed that it was Daylight Savings Time, namely Professor Frye. So, there I was, twenty years old, about to have a one-hour tête-à-tête with Northrop Frye. I stood up as tall as I could. I took a deep breath. And in an attempt to make learned conversation, I asked him whether there was any Canadian literature to speak of. Of course, my head came off and went rolling on the floor as Northrop Frye explained to me about the great figures who were emerging. And the very first name out of his mouth was Margaret Atwood. That was the very first time I heard your name; it is a great honor to be sharing a screen with you today.

Since we are here in Massachusetts, at least virtually, I thought we might talk about the origins of *The Handmaid's Tale*, some of which do lie here in Massachusetts, as you signal in the dedication to the book. You dedicate the book to two people, the first of whom is Mary Webster – “Half-Hanged Mary.” I wonder if you might talk a little bit about her.

ATWOOD: Half-Hanged Mary was accused of witchcraft just before the Salem trials really got going. She was taken from Hadley, Massachusetts, to Boston, where she was tried and then exonerated. Back she goes to her hometown, where they still believed she was a witch, so they strung her up. But it was before the drop had been invented, so they didn't drop her. They just held her up, sort of like a flag. She must have had a very tough neck or been quite thin because she didn't die. When they came to get her in the morning, thinking they were going to be cutting down a corpse, she was still alive. I guess they thought she was really in league with the Devil on that occasion. But they didn't re-kill her. She lived another fourteen years. Guess what she was accused of? Making an old man old. Witches do that.

On Mondays, my grandmother – whose maiden name was Webster – would say she was a

relation of ours. But on Wednesdays, she might re-think it and say, “No, no, she wasn't.” So, it has always been a topic of conversation in our family. We can't really find out if we are related because we can't determine whether she had any children. If she didn't have any children, she can't be an ancestor. She might just be a collateral, like Daniel Webster, the lawyer, who is a collateral. But Noah Webster is a direct. So, it goes like that. People on the East Coast are really into their genealogies. I had some aunts who were like that. They devoted quite a bit of time to this, and anything they found out, they would dutifully send along.

JEN: Well, she was certainly your spiritual ancestor. And you dedicated your book to her, as well as to a second person – the great American intellectual historian, Perry Miller, who worked so much on the Puritans, and whose course you took during your graduate work at Harvard.

ATWOOD: I took the classical tradition in American literature. And I took another course with him, which was American Romantics. And to fill in my gap of the eighteenth century – in which not a lot of writing went on; there was a sort of warfare going on at that time – I studied with Alan Heimert, who was an intellectual descendant of Perry Miller. That was deeply interesting to me, and certainly was some of the background for *The Handmaid's Tale*, because like middle-American pyramids, they never actually tore down a pyramid, they just built on top of it. And I think cultures do that. They don't completely eradicate whatever was there before. They build on top of it. So, we think of America as eighteenth century, Declaration of Independence, Constitution, etc. But that's built on top of an earlier pyramid, which is seventeenth-century Puritanism. And every once in a while, it comes up again, as it did during the Great Awakening in the nineteenth century – and as you have been seeing recently in the United States, with the resurgence of the religious right, which began in the 1980s as a political force.

JEN: Yes. And, of course, it comes up very much in *The Handmaid's Tale*, where a lot of the rhetoric and many of the cultural practices in the Republic of Gilead – which, of course, is the regime that has taken over the United States in *The Handmaid's Tale* – appear to come from the Puritans. Did you discover all of this in Miller's work?

ATWOOD: Well, being Canadian, we had the Bible in school. We didn't have separation of church and state. It's a very odd arrangement. There's a Catholic school board, and there's a Protestant school board, which is basically secular. But in my day, it wasn't. And we had Bible readings in school. Being a curious child – and despite the wishes of my parents – I went off to Sunday school as well.

JEN: So it seems that Perry Miller reinforced things that you had already been quite steeped in.

ATWOOD: There was Northrop Frye's Bible course. You had to know the Bible if you were studying honors English, because it began with Anglo-Saxon and went all the way up to T. S. Eliot. And unless you know the Bible, you're not going to get a lot of the references. That's true of American literature until recently as well.

JEN: But it's particularly a lot of the Puritan practices that resurface in *The Handmaid's Tale*.

ATWOOD: The Puritans were not very women friendly.

JEN: Exactly. It also seems – though maybe this is wrong – that you shared Miller's view that the classical tradition in American literature, from the Puritans on down, has a political focus – that it's about how people relate to a power structure and vice versa. To what degree was this idea one you had before you ever came to Perry Miller's class? Was this also something reinforced by his class?

ATWOOD: Well, you can't study literature from *Beowulf* on up without figuring that out. And it's whether the author intends it or not. Messages of books are supplied by readers, essentially. But language itself has moral valences: weed is a plant you don't want. Flower is a plant you do. That is how language is arranged. And you can't speak or write without moral implications. I think about the closest we came to getting rid of that was a French writer called Robbe-Grillet, who wanted to do away with character and plot and message and everything else. And I don't know whether you have ever read him, but it is really like reading about a cafeteria menu. Because we are human beings, we actually like plot and characters and moral outcomes. And any child, if you're reading them a fairy tale,

they know who is supposed to be disapproved of. It's right in the story. So, you can't get rid of that. But also you should not prescribe it. You should not have a situation in which the state is telling writers what to write. If you have that, it's just going to be propaganda. But, of course, we have had censorship through the ages. The reason there are no religious swear words in Shakespeare is that they were censored. You could not do that on the stage. It's why he gets so inventive with his swearing.

JEN: Well, he certainly managed to get a great many things on the stage in any event.

ATWOOD: That was the point of them. Some words were verboten at the time. And you can follow this story through various civilizations and various cultures and see it in the play. But there has never been a time when people felt that art was morally neutral. It's just a question where the line is drawn and whether you are going to consider artists in harness to the stage – which they have been from time to time – or whether you are going to take the Romantic view and say that they are writing against power. And that goes back and forth. So, eighteenth century, hooray, the aristocracy, king, great, love it. Nineteenth century, not so.

JEN: Would you talk a little bit about your experiences at Harvard? When you were there, women were not allowed in Lamont.

ATWOOD: Yes, and that is where all the poetry was. That is how I came to be in the cellar of Widener, reading about witches, because the witches were in Widener. There were pluses and minuses, as there always are. Because the Harvard English department did not hire women, you weren't the competition. The men who were in my class were given a much harder time. They had much harder orals. My orals were a walk in the park, because the three men on the committee spent all the time talking to themselves. I just had to sit there. For the men, there was nothing at stake when it came to women who were going to graduate from Harvard. They would never be the competition as far as they were concerned. That changed. But in the 1960s, that is the way it was.

JEN: I love what you once said about that time: "For a woman to say she planned to be a writer

was like saying you were going to pee in the men's bathroom." In the green room just before our program began, you mentioned a women's dorm on Appian Way in which you lived.

ATWOOD: It was actually a graduate dorm in a house. And that house was the basis for the house in *The Handmaid's Tale*. Everything in *The Handmaid's Tale* has a basis in a building either at Harvard or around Harvard. I am the kind of writer who has to visualize where the characters are. I seem unable to just completely make that up.

JEN: I wonder if you want to talk a little bit about your experiences in this dorm. I understand there was a Peeping Tom, whom you cornered and had prosecuted, right?

ATWOOD: And the year after I left, they would phone – this was before the Internet – the graduate women's dorm and say obscene things. So, they got a dog whistle. I also met some interesting women who lived there. And some of them have been my lifelong friends. You must have come across the book called *The Equivalent* about the Institute for Independent Study at Radcliffe that was founded in the 1960s. Tillie Olsen and Anne Sexton and people like that were in it that first year. It's pretty fascinating.

JEN: Yes, it is amazing. So, you were never a Radcliffe Fellow or a Bunting Fellow?

ATWOOD: I think I put that at the other Radcliffe dorm. But the Brattle Theatre is where they get their outfits. And the various shops were repurposed as Loaves and Fishes. And, of course, I wanted people hanging on the wall. When we came to film the first movie, however, we did it at Duke, because Harvard was not amused at that time. They have become more amused since. We are filming the TV show in Toronto and Hamilton. And in Hamilton, there is a very convenient wall. And that is the wall that they are using. I did some research for *The Testaments* last time I was there. Walking here and there in the Yard, what can you see from this or that vantage point? I wanted to be accurate, because if you don't get those things right, you will get the outraged letter.

JEN: I noticed that you did take the veritas off the library. All of which, I must say, suggests something very fitting about you receiving the Emerson-Thoreau Medal, since you seem to have felt about as enthusiastic about Harvard as they did.

ATWOOD: I actually did feel enthusiastic about Harvard, because although there were these downsides – and there are downsides to everything – I did have some wonderful professors. And I went there in the first place because I wanted to study Victorian literature, which was not fashionable at the time. But there was one person who was an expert in it: Jerome Hamilton Buckley, a fellow Canadian. This was a time when they

We see a lot of Harvard in Gilead: something suggestive of the red Harvard doctoral gowns on the women, the hangings on the Harvard Yard wall. ”

ATWOOD: I was too young to have been in that cohort. And I then was leading too peculiar a life for that to have been possible.

JEN: It's not too late. I think the Radcliffe Institute would love to have you.

ATWOOD: Yes, but I would be taking the place of somebody else who would need it more than me.

JEN: Very true. We see a lot of Harvard in Gilead: something suggestive of the red Harvard doctoral gowns on the women, the hangings on the Harvard Yard wall, and Harvard Yard as the site for the women's reeducation center.

were actively recruiting people to go to graduate school, because they knew the baby boom was about to descend on them. And they didn't have enough of anything. They were actively looking for people who could fill these teaching slots and doctor slots and just about any slot you could think of. It does really influence your life what year you are born. So, for characters in my books – and I'm sure you do the same thing – you choose their birth date, and then you put the years across the top. And you figure out what was happening when they were ten, what was happening when they were twenty, etc., because that will have quite an influence on what is possible for them and how they will be thinking.

JEN: Well, speaking of dates, when we think about *The Handmaid's Tale* – and you've said this yourself – a very important date is when you were born, which was in 1939.

ATWOOD: That's correct. In 1939, Canada had just entered World War II. My story is that's why I'm so short. There was rationing. That's a joke! The United States didn't enter until Pearl Harbor, which was the end of 1941. So, there were a couple of years – 1940 and 1941 – when Britain was struggling pretty much by itself. And aid came from places like Canada and from the States, too; FDR managed some aid despite the resistance of Congress to be involved. And, of course, people of my generation spent their early childhood in the war. For me, the war wasn't really over until about 1949, because the rationing continued. And that gives you quite a different view and makes you, indeed, somewhat more resilient when times get tough, because you've been through tough times. And as for vaccines, a lot of the important ones were in the 1950s. Polio was still rampaging when I was a child. There was still Smallpox. There was still Diphtheria, which killed four of my cousins. Quarantine signs on houses: that was normal. I think for very much younger people, to whom nothing like this has ever happened, the pandemic today is like the end of the world. It's the worst thing that's ever happened. How will I ever endure it? But now, they have endured it.

JEN: I read that if people wanted to read one book related to *The Handmaid's Tale*, your recommendation was that they read *The Rise of the Nazi Party*.

ATWOOD: It's a TV show. But they can watch it. It's very deep.

JEN: So you grew up in the shadow of *Mein Kampf*. There is a line in *The Testaments*, “Stupid, stupid, stupid. I believed all that claptrap about life, liberty, democracy, the rights of the individual.” All this stuff has been on your mind your whole life. And you sit down to write a novel in 1984, of all years, and of all places, in Berlin.

ATWOOD: And, of course, the wall wasn't down yet. So, it was West Berlin. I went to Czechoslovakia. They were still all Iron Curtain countries. And at that time, nobody could see that ending. I think the only person who saw it was Ryszard

Kapuściński. He said, “The cracks in the wall are going to appear in Poland first.” And he was right. Of those countries I went to, East Germany was the tightest, Czechoslovakia second, and Poland was already pretty loosey-goosey. And why was that? Because there was a big official opposition. And that was the Catholic Church.

JEN: So there you are. You are touring these places, it's 1984, and it occurs to you that you might like to write a dystopia, which at the time must have been the craziest idea ever.

ATWOOD: Yes, it was a crazy idea. But in 1980, Ronald Reagan gets elected. And you see the rise of the religious right. And one of the things they said was women belong in the home. And being a practical person, like Mr. Thoreau, I thought how are you going to get them there? How are you going to stuff them all back in? So, what do you do? You roll back laws about 150 years, and you're there.

JEN: Harold Bloom said of you, “This author has been concerned with Survival from the beginning, and surviving is inherent in her identities as a woman, an author, and a Canadian.” Agree or disagree?

ATWOOD: Agree.

JEN: Congratulations! You have now survived the interview portion of receiving the Emerson-Thoreau Medal.

ATWOOD: It was fun!

JEN: And now we will turn to a few questions from our audience. “Hello, Ms. Atwood. I am a creative writing university student from England. And I'm wondering if you have any tips or hints at all for success for a new writer?”

ATWOOD: The first thing you have to do is finish the book. And people often get discouraged about that. Some people are actually afraid of publishing because they are afraid of being judged. And then they stop because by that time, they are afraid of the page. So, too much anticipation of the future is probably going to kill you right there. The good thing about writing, unlike being a live opera singer, is if you make a mistake, nobody's going to see it.

People of my generation spent their early childhood in the war. For me, the war wasn't really over until about 1949, because the rationing continued. And that gives you quite a different view and makes you, indeed, somewhat more resilient when times get tough, because you've been through tough times. ”

JEN: That's what the delete button is for.

ATWOOD: It's what it's for, or even the blue pencil or the wastepaper basket. You get a load of second chances. And you can work away at your piece of writing until it convinces you, because that's important. Now let's pretend you have finished the book. What do you do then? If I knew that, I would bottle it and sell it and make a lot of money. There's no formula for success. But there are four possibilities: 1) good books that make money; 2) bad books that make money; 3) good books that don't make money; and 4) bad books that don't make money. And of those four, you can live with three.

JEN: Our next question: “*The Handmaid's Tale* was written as a bit of a cautionary tale. And then, the television show ended up being both that and also a guide to resistance through the Trump years. Could you sense the book taking on a new importance in the wake of the election, and what kind of impact do you think it had both recently and at its original publication?”

ATWOOD: Much more impact recently, because, at its original publication, a lot of people were still saying America is this wonderful democracy. We would never allow that to happen. By the time *The Handmaid's Tale* launched in 2017, Trump had been elected. We had heard a lot of that rhetoric, and people were no longer so sure that it was not possible in the United States of America. People started looking back at history and seeing that actually there was quite a big Nazi Party in the 1930s.

There was a plot to assassinate twenty-three television producers in Los Angeles. My feeling has always been you should not say of any place, “It can't happen here,” because given the right circumstances, anything can happen anywhere. And we know what happened to the Weimar Republic. Who said, “The price of freedom is eternal vigilance”? You would think it was one of the founding fathers, but it was somebody else. Anyway, it's a pretty good saying. I think one should

be aware of tendencies in that direction and never ever think it – namely a totalitarian, repressive government – can't happen here. It can happen anywhere, including Canada.

JEN: Yes, of course, we just saw the Capitol riots, and are all too aware that you are correct.

ATWOOD: It was a close call. If martial law had been declared, that would have been the end of the story as far as an elected democracy goes for a while. We have seen what happened in Chile, what happened in Argentina. These are all events of my lifetime as were many more autocracies and massacres here and there.

JEN: We have another question: “Could you please talk about the dystopian environment in your books?” Having grown up in Canada, and with a father who was interested in trees and insects, I'm wondering if these things are connected. We are all concerned about climate change. But is that a particularly deep topic for you?

ATWOOD: Biologists study systems. But they also study the interconnectedness of things. My father was a very broad reader, both in biology and in history. Rachel Carson was a total and complete pioneer. I have written a couple of things about her quite recently. Before her, people were saying DDT was safe. My uncles, who were apple farmers, both got cancer. We're not a cancer family. We're a heart and stroke family. And I'm sure it's because they were breathing this stuff in like perfume. Chemical companies were saying, “Oh, it's perfectly safe.” The latest news is that sperm rates are declining precipitously, as indicated in *The Handmaid's Tale*. People are thinking about this a lot. There are a lot of scientists and people who study ecosystems who are thinking about it. But the big question for us is, “Will they be in time?”

JEN: Our next question is from Maria Tatar. She asks, “You once wrote about how fairy tales taught you that words can change us – the power of

language has both an upside and a downside. Can you say something about the redemptive power of language, and also about how language can be weaponized and used to subordinate, oppress, and disenfranchise?”

ATWOOD: When there’s a coup, and people are taking over, what’s the first thing they do? They arrest the Gang of Four. Let’s use that as an example. The second thing they do is they take over the communication systems: radio, TV, and the Internet. You grab hold of the means of communication, so that only your message gets out. Anybody staging a coup, or even contemplating staging a coup, knows that you have to grab the megaphone. A friend of mine at Harvard said, “Let’s go for a walk. It’s a beautiful Sunday.” Little did I know that the destination of our walk was one of the first peace marches. So, we’re marching along. People are coming out of bars and yelling and screaming. When we get to the Boston Common, there is a group of pacifists and they have a megaphone. And the Nazi Party comes along and grabs their megaphone. But they’re pacifists, so they didn’t know how to grab it back. Can you do fisticuffs to get your megaphone back? A big debate went on. But this is the problem. And that is why it was kind of mega that Twitter shut down President Trump because that was his megaphone.

JEN: And Facebook as well. This next question is from a professor from Israel: “I’m curious to hear your stand on silence. Is it only to do with powerlessness or, more specifically, is silence monotonous, variable, or valuable?”

ATWOOD: Silence can have many dimensions. If you are very powerful and are being accused of this or that, you don’t need to say anything, because you’re very powerful. If you’re very powerless, speaking up can get you into a lot of trouble. That is why people formed labor unions and why they formed mass movements, so that there wouldn’t be just one person. Writers have always been targets because they are solitary. You can pick them off one by one. There are not thousand-person marches of writers. Who gets to say what, when, and with what consequences? And that is one of the primary issues of our time. What do we mean by freedom of expression? I think PEN USA and Suzanne Nossel, who has a book called *Dare to Speak*,

have a pretty good fix on that. But if you came up through Amnesty International and PEN International, as I did, what you were usually defending in those organizations was people who were in jail or being exiled, being silenced, or being killed for having expressed views that were not popular with those governments. I think we always, in the United States, go back to de Tocqueville. The biggest oppressor is public opinion. We are still in that era of de Tocqueville. What happens when you don’t have an autocrat, when you don’t have a king, when you don’t have a permanent powerful structure that’s oppressing the peasants? Who is going to determine what can or can’t be said, because in every society, there are things that can or can’t be said – and they shift. They shift a lot. And if you’re caught on the wrong side of that shift – at the moment when that shift happens – and you put up the wrong big character poster on the wall and opinion has changed – uh-oh.

JEN: Our next question: “Can you talk about the importance of imagination or storytelling, or the value or urgent need of sustaining these in our contemporary STEM-focused society?”

ATWOOD: So, STEM provides tools. But what we do with those tools depends on our human imagination. It depends on the things we have always wanted. And if you want to know about the things we have always wanted, you read a lot of folk tales, because it’s all in there: wishes, fulfillments, fears. You can pretty much compile that list from the good things that people get in fairy tales and the bad things that happen in fairy tales. Yes, we’ve always wanted a self-covering table that cleans itself up. We’ve always wanted the bag of gold that always renews itself. We’ve always wanted the seven-league boots so that we can travel very fast. We’ve always wanted the cloak of invisibility. Do you remember Andrew Lang? Andrew Lang compiled folk tales. He has *The Red Fairy Book*, *The Blue Fairy Book*, *The Green Fairy Book*, *The Yellow Fairy Book*, *The Brown Fairy Book*, *The White Fairy Book*, *The Pink Fairy Book*.

JEN: I remember those books. I loved those books.

ATWOOD: Now, I gobbled those up as a child, in addition to Grimms’. And I keep adding. In addition to my little corner of witches, I also have a big corner of folklore. A lot of the motifs seem to recur

or move from culture to culture. For instance, animal transformation. The wife who is really a goose, a swan – and one of my favorites, a snail.

JEN: There are many advantages to being a snail.

ATWOOD: Yes, that's true.

JEN: Next, we have several questions about your #MeToo op-ed.

Silence can have many dimensions. If you are very powerful and are being accused of this or that, you don't need to say anything, because you're very powerful. If you're very powerless, speaking up can get you into a lot of trouble. ”

ATWOOD: Oh, that's still ongoing in Canada. The issue is simply that in the case that I was involved in, nobody knew anything. It is very different when things are known. Harvey Weinstein, we knew what the accusations were. There was a trial. Jeffrey Epstein, we knew. Bill Cosby, we knew. About this case, nothing was known, because it was one of these university deals, in which you weren't allowed to know what the person was accused of. You weren't allowed to know what the evidence was. And when the verdict came out and said “No, it didn't happen,” you weren't allowed to know why. So, of course, it created a completely polarized situation. If you happen to believe in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as I naively do, it says, “Everyone is entitled to an open and fair process.” So, who's against that? Put up your hand, please. I don't think anybody is against that. Or are they? If they are, we are in the land of totalitarianisms, because that is the thing totalitarianisms do – the Star Chamber, secret trials.

I'm stuck on the French Revolution. It is a template for revolutions, unlike the American Revolution, which is atypical of revolutions. In the French Revolution, we have the Terror up until the point at which they decided they had had enough of that, and they chop off the head of Robespierre. And then you have something called the Thermidorian Reaction, in which people turn around and start chasing the other way. And they start chopping off the heads of people who have chopped off the heads. So, I would say, in this situation, you want to prevent

the Thermidorian Reaction, and come back instead to a place of reasoned discourse, based on telling the truth, and deciding that, “If this is true, is this other outcome fair?” But you can't do that until you know what the truth is. And that's why they say, “Truth and Reconciliation.” Truth first, then reconciliation.

JEN: Our final question is from poet Henri Cole: “Are there feelings more suitable for poetry than prose?”

ATWOOD: I think any feeling is suitable for anything, including graffiti on a wall. But with poetry, what you're doing is evoking. It's not that you are expressing yourself. You are evoking emotions for the reader because we must not forget that writing of any kind is a time machine. It travels from the person who has done it across space and time into the hands of the person who is “reading” it. But reading for me is like a musical performance. You are interpreting a score. You, the reader, are the musician of the book. And you, the reader, are the musician of the poem. It's the same poem – the words are the same on the page – but every interpretation of it is going to be different, because you, the reader – with your mental violin – are going to be playing that score somewhat differently. And you are going to be bringing to it everything that you have experienced. And that's going to be different for each person. The writer writes the message, puts it in the bottle, chucks it in the ocean. And it comes to shore. The person opens the bottle and either says, “I can't make anything out of this” and throws it back in, or “Maybe this message is for me,” or “I understand what the person might have been trying to say in this message, but I'm interpreting it differently.” And that is what reading and writing are.

JEN: So eloquently put. Thank you, Margaret. This has been wonderful. I think you yourself have been a source of wonderful music this hour. Everybody will be taking away different things and interpreting them in different ways. But I'm sure that everybody will be thinking about them for quite a long time. Thank you so much.

ATWOOD: It has been a real pleasure. Now, I'm going to read all your books.

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To view or listen to the presentation, visit www.amacad.org/events/margaret-atwood-medal.

A CONVERSATION WITH ARCHITECT **JEANNE GANG**

2099th Stated Meeting | May 6, 2021 | Virtual Event



Jeanne Gang, founding principal and partner of Studio Gang, is known for her forward-looking approach to design. She creates spaces that connect people with each other, their communities, and the environment. Her projects range from cultural centers, such as the Writers Theatre in Glencoe, IL, to public projects that connect citizens with ecology, such as the Nature Boardwalk at Lincoln Park Zoo, to high-rise towers that foster community, such as downtown Chicago’s Aqua Tower. At a virtual Stated Meeting, Jeanne Gang discussed how the design of physical spaces supports social, civic, and democratic infrastructure – a recommendation offered in *Our Common Purpose*, the final report of the Academy’s Commission on the Practice of Democratic Citizenship. A summary of her presentation “Rethinking Public Spaces on Multiple Scales” and an edited version of the discussion session follow.



Writers Theatre in Glencoe, Illinois
Photograph by Steve Hall © Hall+Merrick

Jeanne Gang

Jeanne Gang is the founding principal and partner of Studio Gang, an international architecture and urban design practice headquartered in Chicago, IL. She is also a professor in practice at the Harvard University Graduate School of Design. She was elected a Fellow of the American Academy in 2017.
Photograph © Saverio Truglia



The pandemic highlighted the essentiality of public spaces – large, flexible, open spaces ‘saved the day’ by providing a pandemic-safe environment for outdoor activities and even mass protests for racial justice. ”

Academy President David W. Oxtoby opened the program and noted the parallels between Jeanne Gang’s commitment to the idea that our physical spaces can be in service to the common good and the themes of the Academy’s Commission on the Practice of Democratic Citizenship. During its dozens of listening sessions with Americans from all corners of the country, the Commission consistently heard a need for spaces in which to assemble, deliberate, and converse. The Commission’s final report, *Our Common Purpose: Reinventing American Democracy for the 21st Century*, calls on America to expand its civic infrastructure to facilitate association and connection between disparate segments of society. Recommendation 4.1, “Create a National Trust for Civic Infrastructure,” provides a blueprint for how this expansion could happen in a way that ensures equity and includes communities that have historically been marginalized and underserved.

President Oxtoby drew a direct connection between the recommendations of *Our Common Purpose* and Gang’s work, noting that “whether through her public parks or her urban residential towers, Jeanne’s approach is a beautiful illustration of how to honor the values of civic engagement and social justice when designing for the future.” In her presentation, Gang used examples from her portfolio of projects and research to argue for the role architecture and urban design can play to create stronger social connections and more just communities.

Gang began by reflecting on what the COVID-19 pandemic revealed about the role of public spaces in encouraging or discouraging social interaction. Disease mitigation practices, including tables set six feet apart and the removal of park benches, illustrate that spaces can be manipulated to produce outcomes. The pandemic also highlighted the essentiality of public spaces – large, flexible, open spaces “saved the day” by providing a pandemic-safe environment for outdoor activities and even mass protests for racial justice. Public parks, riverways, and other communal spaces have not

always existed, but as society’s appreciation for these public spaces grows, there will be new opportunities for expansion, including an appetite for indoor and semi-public environments.

Beloit College, a small liberal arts college in Beloit, WI, commissioned Studio Gang to transform a coal-burning powerplant into a three-in-one health center, recreation center, and student union. Gang shared her philosophy that “in each project . . . it’s important not just to take the brief as it is, but to think about how the architecture can expand beyond the boundaries of the brief, and to give something to the public.” At Beloit, that meant delivering a student center that also provided a public connection to the bank of the Rock River, creating a literal and figurative bridge between the college and the surrounding community. In addition to creating space for the students and the larger public, the former powerplant is now environmentally conscious, using the river water as a heat exchange and introducing new green roof spaces for gathering. The building has transformed from a machine for generating power into a “machine for generating equity and access.”

Sometimes Gang’s work takes the shape of a research project that does not have a client, thereby creating the opportunity for an objective reimagining of public spaces for the twenty-first century. In 2015, that research focused on the question of whether architecture could do anything to help mitigate police violence and brutality. Gang and her team looked at the history of American police stations – which by the 1970s had become intimidating, “fortress-like” spaces built in the middle of communities that are already wary of a police presence – and explored whether those buildings could better serve the area. Because it was a self-initiated research project rather than a commission from the police, her Studio had the freedom to consider deeply what interventions would be most beneficial for the neighborhood overall. Through research, interviews, and historical analysis, Gang reimagined police stations – which are publicly owned buildings – as places that “serve

their community,” as well as spaces where shared interests and amenities encourage community members and police officers to cross paths and meet. One successful application of this theory is a parking lot at a police station that the design team converted into a sports court in partnership with the local government, community, and police. One year after the conversion, community members expressed that they encourage their children to play on this court, sometimes with the police officers, representing a significant improvement on the mistrust that the old, intimidating building had fostered.

Gang also spoke about how to utilize public assets to reinforce a sense of community. The waterfront in Memphis, TN, is a space with a complex and meaningful history that includes ties to the region’s Mississippi River ecology, the cotton economy and system of slavery, and various forms of transportation and industrialization. Taking this context into account, Gang worked in collaboration with local organizations, government, and individuals in Memphis to conceptualize a Riverfront that was more connected, engaging, inclusive, and ecologically healthy. As part of this work, she interviewed artists, activists, clergy, philanthropists, and political leaders to better understand the insights and needs of the community before beginning to design. The first built component of this project will be a thirty-acre park, designed with landscape architect SCAPE, that accommodates the diverse desired activities of the Memphis community and is accessible to all. This philosophy of engaging directly with the community as the “client” produces more equitable and beautiful spaces. Gang calls this approach that pushes design’s ability to create public awareness and give rise to change “actionable idealism” – a concept she expanded on during the discussion session.

DISCUSSION

DAVID OXTOBY: Would you say a little bit about how the term actionable idealism came to be?

JEANNE GANG: As architects, we work with organizations and with individuals who have dreams, and they want those dreams to become reality. Our job as designers is to partner with them to flesh out the implications of those dreams. I’m excited about helping people use design to get to the next level. Some

cities, like Memphis, are ambitious about their future. Fleshing that out and making sure that all the potential opportunities are visible to everyone is important. But some projects don’t start out with a client. Our work along the Chicago River started out with the Natural Resources Defense Council, an environmental not-for-profit. We were trying to figure out how to transform the Chicago River into an asset that people would care about and become stewards for, especially given the river’s history as an industrial dump. Some of our projects are self-initiated; others have partners who help to make something happen. So, the idea behind actionable idealism is: how can you play an active role in realizing positive change? My mom was a community activist, and my dad was an engineer. They were both action-oriented, so maybe I got it from them.

OXTOBY: The pandemic has changed the way people interact with and in public spaces. Has this last year changed your approach to design?

“ Through research, interviews, and historical analysis, Gang reimagined police stations – which are publicly owned buildings – as places that ‘serve their community,’ as well as spaces where shared interests and amenities encourage community members and police officers to cross paths and meet.

GANG: What’s so exciting is that the things we were thinking about five or ten years ago are now making even more sense. For example, how can we make it possible for people to connect with the environment? Generous, flexible, outdoor public spaces became more important during the pandemic. I think the biggest changes are probably in the workspace. But in public spaces, the pandemic reinforced for me the need for biodiversity in the natural environment, for more resiliency, the importance of our natural resources, and the importance of access. The projects that I showed tonight were in the works long ago, but those ideas resonate now more than ever. I hope that we can get



Arcus Center for Social Justice Leadership at
Kalamazoo College in Kalamazoo, Michigan
Photograph by Steve Hall © Hall+Merrick

back together soon. We need public spaces to be able to have unpredictable exchanges, where different kinds of people can meet each other without planning to.

OXTOBY: We have a few questions about the riverfront projects, about flooding from the Mississippi River, and about climate change. How do you think about those types of issues when you are designing spaces near rivers?

GANG: People love to be near the water. But there are challenges in building next to the water. The codes and regulations force us to build up higher

and higher to avoid flooding. And that is a barrier that needs to be overcome, because once you start elevating riverfronts, it becomes a barrier in terms of access. In some areas, it is worth an investment to make it possible for people to resist sea-level rise. The Mississippi River, for example, even before climate change, has always had an annual fifty-foot difference in its water levels. So everything has to be able to get wet. And the parts that you want to keep dry need to be elevated. It is a huge challenge in terms of accessibility. How do we design with nature and appreciate those changes instead of constantly creating barriers?

OXTOBY: There are several questions about public and private: one is about private developers who are developing public spaces but doing so on their own terms. The other question is whether the people who are providing the money for projects try to influence you in terms of how you design the space.

GANG: In general, there has been a loss of public space. While there is public space in every city – think about the roads, sidewalks, and rivers – that space is often underutilized and underinvested in. It is attractive to a lot of cities to have these public/private partnerships in order to secure those necessary investments. But there needs to be an agreement that the space is open to everyone. What are the design elements that make that possible? We have had genuine efforts on the part of our clients to embrace social equity. In the last five years there has been an earnest effort to make spaces accessible to all, with pressure from cities to make sure that that happens.

OXTOBY: Are there ways in which architecture can be used to break down some of the geographical divisions in a community like Chicago?

GANG: A few years ago, we worked in the neighborhoods of Brownsville and Morrisania in New York to direct investments in existing infrastructure, like libraries and the undersides of elevated rail tracks, to create safe spaces for those communities. In this work, we were asked to tee up the opportunities for other architects. And it was successful. Working with the community, we identified the places that either had potential or needed attention because they were unsafe. And then those projects were bid out to other architects to design the interventions. It is an interesting way of working. In Chicago, the opportunities are starting to show up. Recently the City hosted the C40 Reinventing Cities Competition, a global initiative through which cities are addressing social equity and climate change. The competition was for a site in the Loop, across from the Harold Washington Library Center. Our team proposed to build affordable housing for people who work in the Loop and have been traditionally excluded from the success of the Loop because they make between \$19,000 and \$75,000 per household. A city like Chicago needs

investment in its neighborhoods. It needs political leadership, philanthropists, and engaged community members.

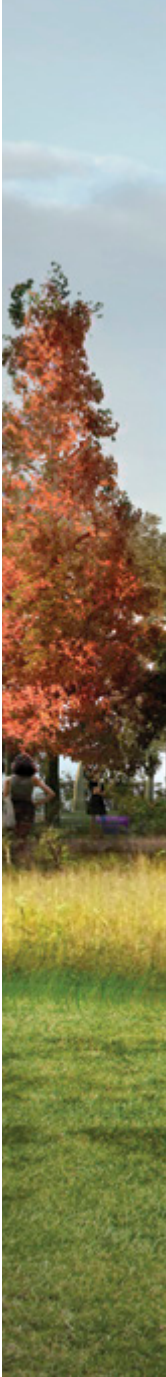
OXTOBY: The Academy has a Commission on the Arts that, among other issues, is looking at how best to support the creative workforce, who have been hit hard by the pandemic. Do you bring artists, and especially local artists, in to work with you on your projects?

“ We work with artists who not only do visual art, but also performance art, because they can help us think about the public space. If you are designing a public space where you want a performance to happen, there are certain things that need to be included in the design ahead of time.

GANG: Absolutely. Sometimes we bring the artists in, and sometimes we are brought in by the artists. When we bring in artists, we work with artists who not only do visual art, but also performance art, because they can help us think about the public space. If you are designing a public space where you want a performance to happen, there are certain things that need to be included in the design ahead of time. We always gain insight from collaborating with artists.

OXTOBY: In your planning and thinking about spaces, do you always consider individuals with special needs?

GANG: Yes. If you want the space to be equitable, it needs to be accessible. There is mobility accessibility, but also visual and hearing accessibility. In our project with Beloit College, we had to make the space publicly accessible within its topography, which is difficult to navigate, and within a building that belongs to a private college.





Arkansas Museum of Fine Arts in Little Rock, Arkansas
Rendering © Studio Gang and SCAPE

OXTOBY: Our next question is about working with Larry Booth and what you learned from that early experience.

GANG: I started my career with Rem Koolhaas in the Netherlands. When I decided to come back to the States, Chicago just seemed like a place where you could do something. It was also a place I knew a little bit better than some others. So my landing spot was at Booth Hansen. I worked with Larry Booth closely, and with a lot of colleagues there, and really got to know the city. While I was working with Larry Booth, I was also teaching at IIT. The pedagogy at IIT is very influenced by the Bauhaus – we taught the students through the different building materials. There was a brick studio, a

steel studio, a concrete studio, and a wood studio. That method was extremely influential because that was not the way that we were learning architecture at Harvard, or in my work at Rem Koolhaas. But I love materials. And I think that comes through in our work at Studio Gang.

OXTOBY: And, of course, Koolhaas designed the structure at IIT – the connection to the Chicago “L,” is that right?

GANG: Yes. I ended up helping with that project because of my work with Rem in the past. I worked between the contractor, IIT, and the architects. It is a great project, and it really changed the IIT campus and made it more focused on the student experience.



Richard Gilder Center for Science, Education, and Innovation at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City
Rendering © Studio Gang and MIR

OXTOBY: Having lived twenty-eight years in Chicago, it is a wonderful place for architecture. And you have added a great deal to it.

GANG: Thank you.

OXTOBY: Our final question is about the arts and the sciences. Do you think about them separately or together? How do you connect the artistic to the scientific or mathematical?

GANG: That is such a great question. In one way, it's easy to answer; and in the other way, it's not easy at all. Being the daughter of an engineer, teaching at IIT, and having a strong scientific orientation, I keep a rigorous research agenda and follow through with that. But you also have to know, intuitively, when to turn off the analytical side of

your brain and just go make things. I love going into my office's model shop, working with my colleagues, making things, drawing, and constantly observing the natural world. There is a kind of aspect of wonder to it. And so for me, that is how the arts and sciences connect.

OXTOBY: Thank you, Jeanne, for your time and your insights, for your wonderful pictures, and for the work that you are doing all over the world. It is very exciting to see.

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To view or listen to the presentation, visit www.amacad.org/events/jeanne-gang.

Select Prizes and Awards to Members

Daron Acemoglu (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) was elected a member of the American Philosophical Society.

Elizabeth Anderson (University of Michigan) was elected a member of the American Philosophical Society.

James G. Anderson (Harvard University) is the recipient of the 2021 Dreyfus Prize in the Chemical Sciences.

Anna Katherine Behrens-meyer (Smithsonian Institution) was elected a member of the American Philosophical Society.

Stephen Benkovic (Pennsylvania State University) was elected a Foreign Member of the Royal Society.

David W. Blight (Yale University) was elected a member of the American Philosophical Society.

Philip Chase Bobbitt (Columbia Law School; University of Texas at Austin School of Law) was made an honorary Knight Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (KBE).

Lawrence D. Bobo (Harvard University) received the 2020 AAPOR Award for Exceptionally Distinguished Achievement from the American Association for Public Opinion Research. He also received the 2021 Warren Mitofsky Award from The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research at Cornell University.

Tomiko Brown-Nagin (Harvard Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study) was elected a member of the American Philosophical Society.

Jeff Cheeger (New York University) was awarded the 2021 Shaw Prize in Mathematical Sciences. He shares the award with Jean-Michel Bismut (Université Paris Sud).

Mark Dean (University of Tennessee) was inducted into the Florida Inventors Hall of Fame.

Philip J. Deloria (Harvard University) was elected a member of the American Philosophical Society.

Scott D. Emr (Cornell University) was awarded the 2021 Shaw Prize in Life Science and Medicine.

Louise Erdrich (Minneapolis, Minnesota) won the 2021 Pulitzer Prize in Fiction and the Aspen Words Literary Prize for her novel *The Night Watchman*.

Joseph S. Francisco (University of Pennsylvania) was elected a member of the American Philosophical Society.

Kenneth Frazier (Merck) was named 2021 Chief Executive of the Year by *Chief Executive* magazine.

Huajian Gao (Nanyang Technological University) is the recipient of the 2021 ASME Timoshenko Medal of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers.

H. Charles Godfray (University of Oxford) was elected a member of the American Philosophical Society.

Jeffrey I. Gordon (Washington University in St. Louis) received the 2021 Kober Medal from the Association of American Physicians.

Joy Harjo (Tulsa, Oklahoma) was elected a member of the American Philosophical Society.

Kristen Hawkes (University of Utah) was elected a member of the American Philosophical Society.

Gerald Holton (Harvard University) received the BBVA Foundation Frontiers of Knowledge Award in the Humanities and Social Sciences.

Barbara V. Jacak (University of California, Berkeley) was elected a member of the American Philosophical Society.

Sheila Jasanoff (Harvard University) was elected a member of the American Philosophical Society.

Carl June (University of Pennsylvania Perelman School of Medicine) received the Sanford Lorraine Cross Award.

Victoria Kaspi (McGill University) was awarded the 2021 Shaw Prize in Astronomy. She shares the award with **Chryssa Kouveliotou** (George Washington University).

Marc Kirschner (Harvard Medical School) was elected a member of the American Philosophical Society.

Chryssa Kouveliotou (George Washington University) was awarded the 2021 Shaw Prize in Astronomy. She shares the award with **Victoria Kaspi** (McGill University).

Tania León (Brooklyn College, City University of New York) won the 2021 Pulitzer Prize in Music for her orchestral work *Stride*.

Trudy F.C. Mackay (Clemson University) was elected a member of the American Philosophical Society.

Margaret H. Marshall (Choate, Hall & Stewart; formerly, Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court) was awarded the 2021 Susan and Carl Bolch Jr. Prize for the Rule of Law by the Bolch Judicial Institute of Duke Law School.

Margaret Martonosi (Princeton University) is the recipient of the 2021 Eckert-Mauchly Award.

James McBride (New York University) was awarded the inaugural Gotham Book Prize.

Robert C. Merton (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) is the recipient of MIT's 2021–2022 James R. Killian Jr. Faculty Achievement Award.

David Miliband (International Rescue Committee) received the 2021 Robert A. Muh Alumni Award, given by the MIT School of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences.

Mary Miller (Getty Research Institute) was elected a member of the American Philosophical Society.

Rafael Moneo (Harvard University) is the recipient of the Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement of the 17th International Architecture Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia.

Daniel G. Nocera (Harvard University) was elected a member of the American Philosophical Society.

Indra Nooyi (PreeTara; formerly, PepsiCo) was elected a member of the American Philosophical Society.

Claire L. Parkinson (NASA Goddard Space Flight Center) was awarded the 2020 Roger Revelle Medal by the American Geophysical Union.

Carl Phillips (Washington University in St. Louis) is the recipient of the 2021 Jackson Poetry Prize, awarded by Poets & Writers.

Richard J. Powell (Duke University) was elected a member of the American Philosophical Society.

Gene E. Robinson (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign) was elected a member of the American Philosophical Society.

Ares Rosakis (California Institute of Technology) was awarded the Horace Mann Medal by Brown University.

Helmut Schwarz (Technische Universität Berlin) received the 2021 Leonardo da Vinci Award from the European Academy of Sciences.

Stefanie Stantcheva (Harvard University) was named a 2021 Andrew Carnegie Fellow.

Susan C. Stokes (University of Chicago) was named a 2021 Andrew Carnegie Fellow.

Billie Lee Turner II (Arizona State University) was elected a member of the American Philosophical Society.

Neil deGrasse Tyson (American Museum of Natural History) was elected a member of the American Philosophical Society.

Moshe Vardi (Rice University) received the 2021 Donald E. Knuth Prize, awarded by the Association for Computing Machinery and the Institute for Electrical and Electronics Engineers.

Darren Walker (Ford Foundation) was elected a member of the American Philosophical Society.

Christopher A. Walsh (Harvard Medical School; Boston Children's Hospital) was awarded the 2021 Gruber Neuroscience Prize. He shares the prize with Christine Petit (Institut Pasteur; Collège de France).

Karen L. Wooley (Texas A&M University) received the 2021 SEC Faculty Achievement Award and was named the 2021 SEC Professor of the Year.

New Appointments

Spyros Artavanis-Tsakonas (Harvard Medical School) was appointed to the Board of Directors of Braintree.

Lord Browne of Madingley (L1 Energy) was named Senior Advisor to General Atlantic.

France A. Córdova (National Science Foundation) was named President of the Science Philanthropy Alliance.

Elazer Edelman (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) was appointed to the Board of Directors of Xenter, Inc.

Sheldon Lee Glashow (Boston University) was named Editor-in-Chief of *Inference: International Review of Science*.

Susan Hockfield (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) was elected to the Board of Directors of Repertoire Immune Medicines.

Rakesh Jain (Harvard Medical School; Massachusetts General Hospital) was appointed to the Scientific Advisory Board of Elpis Biopharmaceuticals.

Amaney Jamal (Princeton University) was named Dean of the Princeton School of Public and International Affairs.

Paula A. Johnson (Wellesley College) was appointed to the Board of Directors of Abiomed.

William Kaelin (Dana-Farber Cancer Institute; Brigham and Women's Hospital; Harvard Medical School) was appointed to the Scientific Advisory Board of IconOVir Bio.

Marie-Josée Kravis (New York, New York) was named Chair of the Board of the Museum of Modern Art.

Robert S. Langer (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) was appointed to the Board of Directors of Xenter, Inc.

Ann Lee (Bristol Myers Squibb) was appointed to the Board of Directors of Coxa Therapeutics, Inc.

Frank McCormick (University of California, San Francisco) was appointed to the Scientific Advisory Board of IconOVir Bio.

Geraldine Richmond (University of Oregon) was nominated as Under Secretary for Science at the U.S. Department of Energy.

Brenda Schulman (Max Planck Institute of Biochemistry; St. Jude Children's Research Hospital) was appointed to the Scientific Advisory Board of BioTheryX.

Kevan M. Shokat (University of California, San Francisco) was appointed to the Scientific Advisory Board of BioTheryX.

Lawrence W. Sonsini (Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati) was elected to the Board of Trustees of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

Marta Tienda (Princeton University) was named President of the American Academy of Political and Social Science.

Pauline Yu (American Council of Learned Societies) was appointed to the Board of Trustees of the Institute for Advanced Study.

Peter Walter (University of California, San Francisco) was appointed to the Scientific Advisory Board of BioTheryX.

Owen Witte (University of California, Los Angeles) was appointed to the Scientific Advisory Board of IconOVir Bio.

Members appointed to the Presidential Commission on the Supreme Court of the United States

Jack M. Balkin (Yale Law School)

Walter Dellinger (Duke Law School; O'Melveny & Myers)

Richard H. Fallon, Jr. (Harvard Law School)

Heather Gerken (Yale Law School)

Nancy Gertner (Harvard Law School)

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Richard H. Pildes (New York University School of Law)

Cristina M. Rodríguez,
Cochair (Yale Law School)

David A. Strauss (University of Chicago Law School)

Laurence H. Tribe (Harvard Law School)

Keith E. Whittington
(Princeton University)

Select Publications

FICTION

Jonathan Franzen (Santa Cruz, California). *Crossroads: A Novel*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, October 2021

Ha Jin (Boston University). *A Song Everlasting: A Novel*. Pantheon, July 2021

Elizabeth Warren (United States Senate). *Pinkie Promises*. Henry Holt and Co., October 2021

Joy Williams (Tucson, Arizona; Laramie, Wyoming). *Harrow: A Novel*. Knopf, September 2021

NONFICTION

Danielle Allen (Harvard University). *Democracy in the Time of Coronavirus*. University of Chicago Press, September 2021

Carol Anderson (Emory University). *The Second: Race and Guns in a Fatally Unequal America*. Bloomsbury Publishing, June 2021

Robert D. Ballard (Ocean Exploration Trust) and Christopher Drew (Louisiana State University). *Into the Deep: A Memoir from the Man Who Founded Titanic*. National Geographic, May 2021

Ursula Burns (Teneo; formerly, Xerox Corporation). *Where You Are Is Not Who You Are: A Memoir*. Amistad, June 2021

Erwin Chemerinsky (University of California, Berkeley School of Law). *Presumed Guilty: How the Supreme Court Empowered the Police and Subverted Civil Rights*. Liveright, August 2021

Nancy F. Cott (Harvard University), Margot Canaday (Princeton University), and Robert O. Self (Brown University), eds. *Intimate States: Gender, Sexuality, and Governance in Modern U.S. History*. University of Chicago Press, August 2021

Gregg Easterbrook (Bethesda, Maryland). *The Blue Age: How the U.S. Navy Created Global Prosperity—And Why We're in Danger of Losing It*. PublicAffairs Books, September 2021

Sandra M. Gilbert (University of California, Davis) and **Susan Gubar** (Indiana University). *Still Mad: American Women Writers and the Feminist Imagination*. W.W. Norton, August 2021

Annette Gordon-Reed (Harvard University). *On Juneteenth*. Liveright, May 2021

Bernd Heinrich (University of Vermont). *Racing the Clock: Running Across a Lifetime*. Ecco, July 2021

Anita Hill (Brandeis University). *Believing: Our Thirty-Year Journey to End Gender Violence*. Viking Press, September 2021

We invite all Fellows and International Honorary Members to send notices about their recent and forthcoming publications, new appointments, exhibitions and performances, films and documentaries, and honors and prizes to bulletin@amacad.org.

Charles Larmore (Brown University). *Morality and Metaphysics*. Cambridge University Press, June 2021

Françoise Meltzer (University of Chicago). *Dark Lens: Imaging Germany, 1945*. University of Chicago Press, September 2021

Louis Menand (Harvard University; *The New Yorker*). *The Free World: Art and Thought in the Cold War*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, April 2021

David Nirenberg (University of Chicago) and Ricardo L. Nirenberg (State University of New York at Albany). *Uncountable: A Philosophical History of Number and Humanity from Antiquity to the Present*. University of Chicago Press, September 2021

Indra Nooyi (PeeTara; formerly, PepsiCo). *My Life in Full: Work, Family, and Our Future*. Portfolio, September 2021

Marjorie Perloff (Stanford University). *Infrathin: An Experiment in Micropoetics*. University of Chicago Press, September 2021

Robert C. Pozen (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) and Alexandra Samuel (Social Signal). *Remote, Inc.: How to Thrive at Work... Wherever You Are*. Harper Business, April 2021

Ronald Schuchard (Emory University), general editor. *The Complete Prose of T.S. Eliot: The Critical Edition*. Johns Hopkins University Press, April 2021

Kay Kaufman Shelemay (Harvard University). *Sing and Sing On: Sentinel Musicians and the Making of the Ethiopian American Diaspora*. University of Chicago Press, December 2021

Paul M. Sniderman (Stanford University) and Elisabeth Ivarsflaten (University of Bergen, Norway). *The Struggle for Inclusion: Muslim Minorities and the Democratic Ethos*. University of Chicago Press, October 2021

Keith Wailoo (Princeton University). *Pushing Cool: Big Tobacco, Racial Marketing, and the Untold Story of the Menthol Cigarette*. University of Chicago Press, October 2021

TSELIOT MS 0421, 1959

American Academy

From the first page of T.S. Eliot's Emerson-Thoreau Medal acceptance speech, "The Influence of Landscape upon the Poet," ca. 1959, featuring annotations by Eliot.

When I was informed ^{of the time placed at my disposal} ~~that~~ I should be allowed an hour for what I might have to say on this occasion, I was seized with apprehension. I most heartily wished to signify my appreciation of the honour which has been accorded to me by the Academy. Any allocution to that end should, I considered, be something quite new, fresh - even if not epoch-making. In any case, I do not keep a drawerful of unpublished lectures and sermons for repeated use, and when I have ^{undertaken to} ~~delivered~~ an address for the second time I have usually found it a painful experience; for I ^{am} ~~was~~ sure to come across some passages of which I had ^{have} ~~had~~ forgotten the meaning, and others where I ~~had~~ come to disagree with my own opinions. I wished

Established in 1958 to recognize distinguished achievement in the field of literature, the Emerson-Thoreau Medal is awarded to an individual for their overall literary achievement. The first recipient of the award in 1958 was poet Robert Frost (elected to the Academy in 1931).

In 1959, the award was bestowed upon poet, playwright, literary critic, and editor Thomas Stearns (T.S.) Eliot (elected a Foreign Honorary Member in 1954). Upon accepting the medal at the Academy's 1416th Stated Meeting on October 21, 1959, Eliot spoke about "The Influence of Landscape upon the Poet." He referenced the New England landscape, in particular, and its relationship to his own work. He also drew comparisons between himself and Robert Frost as New Englanders not by birth, but by *choice* (Frost hailed from California and Eliot from Missouri). Eliot ended his presentation by reciting "The Dry Salvages" from his *Four Quartets*, which, he said, "begins where I began, with the Mississippi; and that it ends, where I and my wife expect to end, at the parish church of a tiny village in Somerset."

Below is an excerpt from T.S. Eliot's acceptance speech after receiving the Emerson-Thoreau Medal:

"This is the Emerson-Thoreau Award: it brings to mind Concord in particular and New England in general. Then I reflected that my honoured predecessor, the doyen of American poets to-day, was Robert Frost, distinctly in the mind of everyone a New England poet. I then asked myself whether I had any title to be a New England poet, as is my elder contemporary Robert Frost, and as is my junior contemporary, Robert Lowell: and I think I have . . . Nevertheless, this seems the occasion for me to stake my claim to a New England status. I am used to dealing with the question of whether I am, qua poet, American or English; and usually can escape by pointing out that whichever Wystan Auden is, I am the other: though seriously my poetry, like that of other poets, shows traces of every environment in which I have lived."

Bulletin

of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences

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The views expressed in the *Bulletin* are those held by each contributor and are not necessarily those of the Board of Directors and Members of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences.

ONLINE

The Academy celebrated **Seamus Heaney's** birthday by sharing an audio recording of him reading "From the Frontier of Writing" and linking to a complete recording and transcript from his visit to the Academy in 1987.

In the words of poet and Academy Member **Henri Cole**, who listened to the recording, "After two words, his voice brings him back to life."



Seamus Heaney at a turf bog in Bellaghy with his father's coat, hat, and walking stick, 1986. Bobbie Hanvey Photographic Archives, John J. Burns Library, Boston College.

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