

Spring 2016

Kahn Chronicle: Spring 2016

Smith College, Kahn Liberal Arts Institute

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Three Student Fellows Talk About the Kahn Experience

Student Fellows add a vital component to Kahn Institute long-term projects, conducting research alongside faculty and adding an important perspective to topical discussions around ongoing research. For students it's a chance to deeply explore topics of their interest with the benefit of regular feedback from their fellow students and faculty in the projects.

Three Student Fellows in current projects recently commented on their Kahn experience.

Liz Tan '16

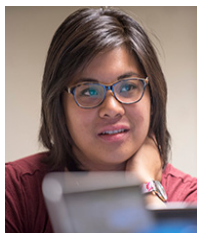
Major: History and Biological Sciences

Project: Play

My research explores the role of play in scientific experimentation in academia. I look at the relatively new field of synthetic biology, a combination of nanotechnology and engineering.

I think about synthetic biology as a field of science that is completely different in a student-oriented environment. A laboratory can act as an escape from reality by providing a space for creative problem solving. Playing in scientific research has changed from an activity that could be leisurely and work-oriented to an activity that absorbs an individual's attention without motive.

My synthetic biology presentation excited and alarmed other Kahn participants by prompting questions of morality surrounding increased accessibility to manipulating organisms and biomedical drug therapies. By building a working knowledge of biology research and the development of emerging technologies, my fellow "Players" thought critically about the increased likelihood of addressing global health issues, environmental sustainability, and modeling drug therapies.



Claire Bowman '16

Major: Economics

Project: Memory

For my research, I'm examining the connections between student debt and memory. Does the anxiety around debt create literal and figurative blocks in the way we remember? I scratch the surface of this question through economic and psychological perspectives.

I now see debt as the ultimate form of external social memory; it is a record of our choices within the technological and sociohistorical contexts of the past. By thinking about memory through such an exhaustive interdisciplinary lens, I can apply many different filters to my topic.

Besides the freedom of my research, I love interacting with professors as peers. Building a knowledge base alongside such academic powerhouses is a huge privilege.



Aisha Amin '17

Major: Neuroscience and Theater

Project: Memory

I am doing research into Verbatim Theatre. I am extending my research into writing a play that highlights mental illness behind bars.

I changed my research project completely half-way through because I wanted to write a play and my interests changed.

I've been surprised about how supportive faculty from other disciplines have been of my work.



Kahn Short-Term Projects 2016-17

The Kahn Institute will host faculty fellows for several short-term projects next academic year. Watch for calls for these projects beginning in the fall. Read more at: <http://www.smith.edu/kahninstitute/current.php>.

1. Practice

Organized by Judith Gordon, *Music*. A one-day project exploring the subject of practice, as an art, a science, and an essential part of ourselves as human beings. Practice, in all its complexity, is part of life. But what does it really mean to "practice something," and how are various forms of practice different and related? **Fall 2016**

2. Race and the Neoliberal University

Organized by Fernando Armstrong-Fumero, *Anthropology*, this project will consider the intersection between the neoliberalization of the academy and emergent forms of campus activism. How do these movements intersect? How should the issues and urgencies raised in both be addressed by faculty? What are the long-term consequences? **Fall 2016**

3. Robed Warriors: How Ordained Buddhist Clerics are Transforming Contemporary Culture

Organized by Jay Garfield, *Philosophy*, this project, taking place during four Saturdays through the fall and spring, will explore the impact of Buddhist monastics on health care and hospice services, the design of charitable NGOs, cognitive science, values education, feminism and on the envisioning of religious life. **Fall-Spring 2016-17**

Looking Beyond Gender Equality

A Q&A with 2016 Neilson Professor Martha Fineman

Martha Albertson Fineman, the 2016 William Allan Neilson Professor, is the Robert W. Woodruff Professor of Law at Emory University School of Law. Fineman is presenting three lectures in the spring Neilson Professor Lecture Series, themed "Looking Beyond Gender Equality: Vulnerability, Resilience and Social Justice." Fineman recently responded to questions for the Kahn Chronicle.

Kahn Chronicle: -What are the primary goals you hope to achieve at Smith this spring as Neilson professor?

Martha Fineman: I hope to complete a book manuscript while at Smith. The three lectures I give will form the heart of the book, which, similar to the lecture series theme, will be titled *Beyond Gender Equality: Vulnerability, Resilience, and Social Justice*.

Chronicle: Have we made progress, during your career, toward addressing human vulnerability as it relates to social justice?

MF: Of course progress has been made in addressing human vulnerability over the past several decades. The problem with progress is that it can always be undone and we see this has happened in social welfare areas, such as health and education, over the past decade. We are in need of a 21st century focused progressive political and social agenda that can confront the current obsession with neoliberal hyper-individualism and market supremacy.

Chronicle: What is one message you would hope audience members come away with from your three related Neilson lectures?

MF: I hope that the audience members will see that social and political policies built around the current mantras of autonomy and independence and stressing individual liberty only address some, limited areas of human experience and fail to ensure true equality of access and opportunity. Just policies would reflect the reality of our universal and constant shared vulnerability and recognize the role the state and its institutions play in providing the means for us to gain the resilience needed to mediate that vulnerability.

Chronicle: How might Smith women interested in social justice and activism incorporate your messages on the importance of vulnerability and resilience?

MF: When advocating for policies and practices under the banner of "social justice," I would hope Smith women would always remember that it is as important to be concerned with what is best for the community (broadly and inclusively defined) as it is to be concerned with the rights of the individual.



Neilson Lecture III

Thursday, March 24,
5 p.m., Neilson Browning
Room

"Vulnerability and Resilience: Crafting the Responsive State"

In her final Neilson Lec-

ture, Martha Fineman will argue for the need for a state responsive to human vulnerability, one that recognizes the need for humans to build resilience over the life course, and contrasting the state we now have with the responsive state that vulnerability theory imagines. Open to all.

Upcoming Spring Lectures Hosted by the Kahn

The following events are free and open to the public.

Thursday, March 31

5 p.m.
McConnell 103

"Memory and Imagination: Functions of Episodic Simulation and Retrieval"

Daniel Schacter, Professor of Psychology, Harvard



A discussion of the important function of memory in allowing individuals to simulate or imagine future experiences. In conjunction with **Memory: Form, Function, and Fallibility**.

Thursday, March 31

5 p.m.
Graham Auditorium, Hillyer Hall

"Predicated Internationalism: 'Peripheries' and the Global Work of Art"

Caroline Jones, Professor of History Theory & Criticism, MIT



An examination of predication in international art. In conjunction with the short-term project: **Future Fields: 'Global' Methodologies and Art of the Middle East**.

At the Kahn Institute, 2015-16

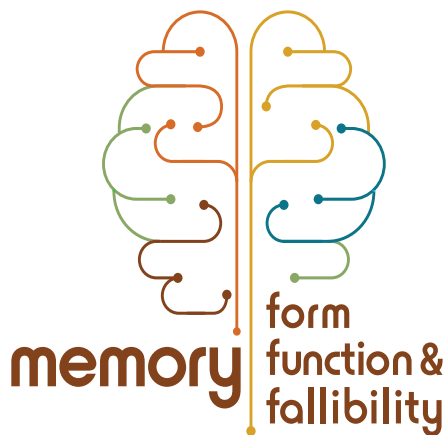
Mid-Year Project Reports:

Memory: Form, Function, and Fallibility

Organizers: Dawn Fulton, *French Studies*; Adam Hall, *Biological Sciences*

We had a productive series of discussions in the fall in the Memory seminar.

We began with a plenary discussion of selected readings on memory from a range of disciplines, followed by snapshots of the student fellows' projects at the second meeting. Thanks to a lecture already scheduled by the Study of Women and Gender program, we were able to organize a discussion with scholar Saidiya Hartman (Comparative Literature, Columbia University) on her work on the memory and history of the slave trade. Filmmaker and media artist Daniel Blaufuks also joined us for a public lecture and discussion on his work on representations of the Holocaust.



In the fall we also welcomed guest lecturers Steve Ramirez (Picower Institute for Learning and Memory, MIT) and Bekki Spencer (Dept. Psychology, UMass, Amherst). Dr. Ramirez presented his groundbreaking and award-winning work on creating false memories in mice using optogenetic techniques. Dr. Spencer shared her findings on the role of sleep in enhancing specific forms of memory consolidation.

The challenge of rendering narrative in the face of individual, collective, psychological, and neurological trauma has been a constant thread through our conversations thus far. In their project presentations, seminar fellows have illuminated the ways in which scholarly research, personal narrative, and artistic production intersect around questions of identity and selfhood, fragmentation and continuity. We look forward to hearing more from fellows in the spring and to welcoming additional guest speakers, including Smith alumna Su Meck on her recent memoir, *I Forgot to Remember*, and renowned scholar Daniel Schacter (Psychology, Harvard University) for a public lecture on March 31st. We will also be joined by Karen Remmler (Mount Holyoke College) discussing her work on transnational cultures of memory in the aftermath of atrocities, Mariette Monpierre (director of the autobiographical film 'Elza') and by Jon Crispin to present his photographs documenting the Willard Suitcases from the Willard Psychiatric Center.

Still to come, along with more such presentations and discussions, are a visit from journalist and author Diane Ackerman and a visit to the MacLeish Field Station for some varieties of outdoor play.

Play

Organizer: Michael Thurston, *English Language and Literature*

The Play project kicked off in September with a field trip to New York City. Ten of us (a group of faculty and students) visited the Imagination Playground in lower Manhattan to observe this innovative play space and to watch children play there. Some of us also got to talk with a supervisor of the playground about both children's play and the management of adults at the playground.

After a picnic on the High Line, we walked around Central Park to note differences in the construction of and the (explicit and implicit) control of activity within this quite different space devoted to leisure and play.

We followed the field trip in November with a lecture by Anthony Pellegrini, an educational psychologist and expert on children's play. After the lecture, Professor Pellegrini met with the project group for dinner and a couple of hours of lively discussion.

Our work could finally take on its more regular shape and focus when the colloquium began its weekly meetings at the end of January. After a couple of weeks devoted to discussion of some foundational readings—by Johan Huizinga, D.W. Winnicott, Pellegrini, and others—and to establishing some provisional definitions and key questions, we have explored play in several ways, from hearing about jazz improvisation from Professor Steve Waksman of the Music department and American Studies program, to hearing jazz improvised by members of the group to performing our own amateurishly improvised music and hearing about the interrelation of physical play and cognitive development in children from playground designer and occupational therapist Tom Murphy.

Chief among our means of exploration so far have been presentations of work in progress and the leading of interdisciplinary and wide-ranging discussions by faculty and student members of the group.

Still to come, along with more such presentations and discussions, are a visit from journalist and author Diane Ackerman and a visit to the MacLeish Field Station for some varieties of outdoor play.



A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR

The Kahn Institute as a Special Collection

As part of the library renovation process, I had the privilege of working this past fall with representatives of the library's various special collections as we thought about how the new building might ideally support these exceptional resources at the College. Under the direction of Beth Myers, Head of Special Collections, were Martin Antonetti from the Rare Book Room, Maida Goodwin from the Sophia Smith Collection, Nanci Young from the College Archives, and Robert O'Connell, Director of Discovery and Access. Together we considered the space and environmental needs of each collection, and the ways that staff, faculty and students will use them, now and in the future.

I like to think I was invited to join this group because the Kahn Institute is itself a special collection. The range of minds that come together in projects each semester represents a kind of living and evolving text, a text which draws not only from separate disciplines, but also from unique life experiences, character traits, and personal histories. Every participant in a project is both a reader of that text and a co-author in its making. And though

projects don't live on in hard-bound or digital form, they can impact participants deeply and permanently, like a great book or film.

Sitting with my special collections colleagues this fall, I've thought a lot about the appropriateness of housing the Institute in this central library space—the repository of old ideas and new ones; the center of College research and intellectual collaboration. What better or more appropriate place than a library for an Institute that nurtures inquiry and models the pleasures of engaging with “texts”—material, digital and human.



Rosetta Marantz Cohen, Sylvia Dlugasch Bauman Professor of American Studies, Department of Education and Child Study

Last Word: Two Longterm Projects to Watch for at the Kahn in 2017-18

Two long-term projects will be open for applications for Smith and Five College Faculty Fellowships in the fall:

Destroy then Restore: Transforming our Lands and Waters (2017-18)

Organized by Ann Leone, *French Studies and Landscape Studies*; and Drew Guswa, *Engineering and Director, Center for the Environment*

This year-long project will explore the dynamic interaction between human societies and the natural world, and the patterns of destruction and rehabilitation that characterize our relationship with nature.

War (2017-18)

Organized by Cornelia Pearsall, *English Language and Literature*; and Mlada Bukovansky, *Government*

This project will seek to bring together scholars across all three divisions whose work engages the idea of war in all its complex and varied forms, and with all its varied outcomes and consequences.

Calls for fellowship applications for *Destroy then Restore: Transforming our Lands and Waters*, and *War* will be distributed campuswide and among the Five Colleges in October.

Student Fellows to Present Research at *Celebrating Collaborations*

Eleven Kahn Student Fellows will present their research as part of this year's annual campus wide event, “Celebrating Collaborations: Students and Faculty Working Together,” taking place on Saturday, April 16, in Seelye Hall. Kahn Student Fellows will present in two groups: those in the project *Play* will give 15-minute presentations from 10:45 a.m.-noon; fellows in *Memory: Form, Function, and Fallibility* will present from 1:30-2:30 p.m.

Read the *Kahn Chronicle* Online:

www.smith.edu/kahninstitute/chronicle