

Spring 2008

Kahn Chronicle: Spring 2008

Smith College, Kahn Liberal Arts Institute

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The Kahn Institute "On the Road"

SOLAR DECATHLON

This fall both 2007-2008 year-long projects took to the road in search of inspiration. Our *Sustainable Houses, Homes and Communities* group was fortunate enough to have their project year coincide with the Department of Energy's bi-annual Solar Decathlon competition. As described on the DOE website, "the Solar Decathlon is a competition in which 20 teams of college and university students compete to design, build, and operate the most attractive, effective, and energy-efficient solar-powered house."

The Fellows set out for Washington DC on October 13, and spent the entire morning of the 14th touring several of the solar homes at the Decathlon's home base on the National Mall. Upon their return, they devoted their October 23rd colloquium to a follow-up discussion of challenges, achievements and failures of the designs, and their relevance to the Fellows' individual research projects.

Although not all the Fellows were able to attend the weekend trip, those who did join were enthusiastic about the experience.

Student Fellow Annie Parker AC '08 remarked on both the intellectual value and importance of the group experience: "To see the diverse ways in which people solved the same problems while operating under the same restrictions with so much creativity and imagination was incredible. Going as a group added dimension to the experience, especially through hearing reactions from faculty of varying disciplines."



Penn State's Entry in the Solar Decathlon
(photo by Piper Hanson)

Organizing Fellow Nat Fortune (Physics) remarked on the trip's incredible relevance and value as it provided not one, but a series of case studies for the Fellows to dissect and analyze upon their return to Smith. The respective successes and shortcomings of the entries will be revisited in the project's spring semester, when the Fellows will work collaboratively on Fortune's own portable modular miniature house project (*see page 11 for details*).

OLD NEW-GATE PRISON AND COPPER MINE

In late September, the *Undergrounds* Fellows set out on a day trip to the Old New-Gate Prison and Copper Mine in Granby, CT, where the tunnels left by miners burrowing deep underground in search of copper ore became Connecticut's first prison for "serious criminals" (burglars, horse thieves, counterfeiters and forgers) in 1773.



Old Prison Wall
(photo courtesy of Old New-Gate Prison)

Organizing Fellow Michael Thurston (English Language and Literature) comments below:

"Our visit to the Old New-Gate Prison and Copper Mine included a wonderfully campy video by a longtime guide to the site, complete with historically inaccurate tall tales, and plenty of time to tour the surface sights – the ruins of prison buildings, a collection of artifacts and exhibits, and breathtaking views of the surrounding countryside. The most important official experience we all had during the excursion, though, was the twenty minutes or so we spent underground, walking, sometimes in a crouch and/or holding on to handrails, through the old mine tunnels and galleries. It was dark, it was cold (twenty degrees or so cooler than topside), it was damp, and it was easy to imagine getting lost down there if the lights were suddenly to go out. That twenty minutes of real subterranean experience made the underground real and made it easy to see why so many people in different times and places imagined Underworlds: if Hell were anywhere, it might be someplace like an eighteenth-century copper mine! I said 'official' above, though, because one other important element of the trip was the chance to talk informally amongst ourselves, to get to know each other. That, I think, has paid dividends every bit as important as anything else from the trip as we've worked together over the last three months."

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Who's Who at the Kahn Institute

Rick Fantasia
Director
Chair, Advisory Committee
Professor of Sociology

Chrissie Bell
Administrative Coordinator

Hana Boston-Howes
Project and Publicity Administrator



Advisory Committee 2007-2008

Patrick Coby, Professor of Government

Robert Dorit, Associate Professor of
Biological Sciences

Dawn Fulton, Associate Professor of
French Studies

Mary Harrington, Tippit Professor in
Life Sciences, Psychology

Christopher Loring, Director of Libraries

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ANNOUNCEMENTS



*"Undergrounds Underworlds" (2007-08 Long-Term Project) Fellows
at their weekly colloquium meeting*

KAHN FACULTY FELLOWSHIPS AWARDED FOR 2008-2009

The following Smith, Five College, and visiting faculty members have been awarded Fellowship in connection with the two long-term Kahn projects for the 2008-2009 academic year: *Deceit: The Uses of Transparency and Concealment* and *A Festival of Disorder*.

DECEIT: THE USES OF TRANSPARENCY AND CONCEALMENT

Organizing Fellow:
Mlada Bukovansky (Government)

Mary Ellen Birkett (French Studies)
Paula Debnar (Classics, Mount Holyoke
College)
Jennifer Hall-Witt (History)
Nicholas Howe (Computer Science)
Trish Jackson (Advancement)
Barbara Kellum (Art)
Chester Michalik (Art)
Suleiman Mourad (Religion)
Candice Salyers (Dance)
Patricia Skarda (English Language and
Literature)

A FESTIVAL OF DISORDER

Organizing Fellows:
Elisabeth Armstrong (Program for the
Study of Women and Gender)
Marjorie Senechal (Mathematics /
History of Science and Technology)

Michael Albertson (Mathematics)
Debra Boutin (Mathematics, Hamilton
College)
Jennifer Guglielmo (History)
Michelle Joffroy (Spanish and Portuguese)
Gillian Kendall (English Language
and Literature)
Reyes Lazaro (Spanish and Portuguese)
Sandra Matthews (Film and Photography,
Hampshire College)
Albert Mosley (Philosophy)
Janos Pach (Computer Science, NYU;
Neilson Professor 08-09)
Donna Riley (Engineering)

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

2008-2009 STUDENT FELLOWSHIP APPLICATION DEADLINE: FEBRUARY 29

Student Fellowship applications in connection with the two long-term projects for 2008-2009 — *Deceit: The Uses of Transparency and Concealment*, organized by professor Mlada Bukovansky; and *A Festival of Disorder*, organized by professors Elisabeth Armstong and Marjorie Senechal — must be received by Friday, February 29, 2008.

Kahn Student Fellows will participate, along with Faculty Fellows, in the weekly research colloquium, as well as various special events organized by the project's Fellows throughout the academic year. Each student will be expected to participate in all of the Institute functions associated with the project she is awarded a Fellowship in, and therefore must be able to commit to that project's weekly schedule for the entire academic year:

Deceit: The Uses of Transparency and Concealment

Research Colloquium - Fridays, 10:00am-12:00pm
Lunch - Fridays, 12:00-1:00pm

A Festival of Disorder

Research Colloquium - Tuesdays, 3:00-5:00pm
Dinner - Tuesdays, 5:00-6:00pm

Kahn Fellowships require a real commitment to scholarship, and that means developing a research question closely related to one of the yearlong projects and spending the Fellowship year conducting the actual research. Most students will not have had much experience defining a research topic or generating original research; therefore, the Kahn Institute has developed a two-part research orientation program for Student Fellows that consists of an introduction to available research tools in May, followed by a weeklong research workshop in August designed to help students develop and refine the focus of their research projects. Student Fellows will be expected to read five or six of the key works in the field of their topic over the course of the summer and to develop at least three significant research questions (of not longer than two pages each) in preparation for the workshop.

Student Fellowships carry a stipend of \$3,000: \$1,000 disbursed in two equal installments over the course of the summer; \$2,000 disbursed in equal bi-weekly payments following the 2008-2009 student payroll schedule. Please note that Kahn Student Fellows are not permitted to hold any other on-campus job during the course of the academic year.

Up to ten Student Fellowships will be awarded in connection with each of the two year-long projects. Students interested

in applying to become a Fellow in either of these projects are strongly encouraged to attend the project's informational meeting (to be held in the Kahn Institute Fellows' Lounge, Neilson Library, 3rd Floor South):

✂ STUDENT INFORMATIONAL MEETINGS ✂

Deceit: The Uses of Transparency and Concealment

Thursday, February 7 @ 5:00pm

A Festival of Disorder

Monday, February 11 @ 5:00pm

Students may also contact any of the Faculty Fellows (see page 2) to learn more about the project.

Student Fellowship applications should be submitted via email to kahninst@smith.edu, and each application must include:

- a paragraph or two explaining why you are interested in joining the project and the potential questions you would like to explore;
- your current resume, including your preferred contact information; and
- a copy of your transcript (which can be requested online using BannerWeb).

Please note that students may apply for only one project during a given year. The Kahn Institute will send a confirmation email acknowledging receipt of each application. Student Fellowship notification letters will be mailed out immediately after Spring Break.



'Sustainable Houses, Homes and Communities' (2007-08 Long-Term Project) Fellows enjoy some lunch at their weekly project meal

SPOTLIGHT ON STUDENTS

"ENVISIONING SUSTAINABILITY"

A CREATIVE KAHN COLLABORATION

by Dana Gould '08, Student Fellow,
Sustainable Houses, Homes and Communities
Major - Landscape Studies & Studio Art

(in response to questions posed by Hana Boston-Howes,
Kahn Project & Publicity Administrator)

"Tell us a little bit about your project."

My project is a collaborative drawing project with the other Kahn Fellows in *Sustainable Houses, Homes and Communities*. I am creating a drawing series based off of discussions with each individual Kahn Fellow, as well as the group as a whole. Each project is intended to be treated as individual, but with some common formal element running throughout to tie the series together as a cohesive unit. While this is a collaborative project, the drawing series is intended to stand alone and be viewed as a separate work away from my co-Fellows' projects. Recycled and sustainable drawing materials will be researched and used whenever and wherever possible. My hope is to create a body of work depicting certain aspects of sustainability and sustainable living.

"In what ways do you feel your project embodies the spirit of the *Sustainable Houses, Homes and Communities* project, or that of the Kahn Institute in general?"

The essence of my project is collaborative. In order to create my drawing series, I need to work alongside both students and faculty and across disciplines. It will create a body of work thoroughly specific to this Kahn experience, something I could not create on my own or in any other environment. In many cases, especially considering the other members of my Kahn project, I am attempting to combine both the arts and the sciences. It's very exciting. I cannot wait to see where this goes.

On another level, I am researching sustainable art materials and trying to figure out what sustainable means for art in general, and for my art practice specifically. Will it mean recycled paper, locally made paper or paper that is archival and will require little conservation later on? At this point, I am still laying the groundwork by researching both materials and theories on the subject so that I approach the project in the most effective way possible.



*"Sustainable Houses, Homes and Communities" Student Fellow Dana Gould '08
at the project's weekly colloquium meeting*

"How will the creative process progress – will you meet with the other Fellows regularly, and will they have a say in the finished product?"

I am currently communicating with the group on how the collaborations will work. As I have it envisioned, I would like to have several individual meetings as well as regular check-ins with the group as a whole. Each project and each Fellow will be treated individually. With some people, I can see a closer collaboration due the nature of our two projects than with others. In the end, however, the drawings will be my own project, a complement to their work.

"What kinds of reactions have you gotten from other Fellows in the project?"

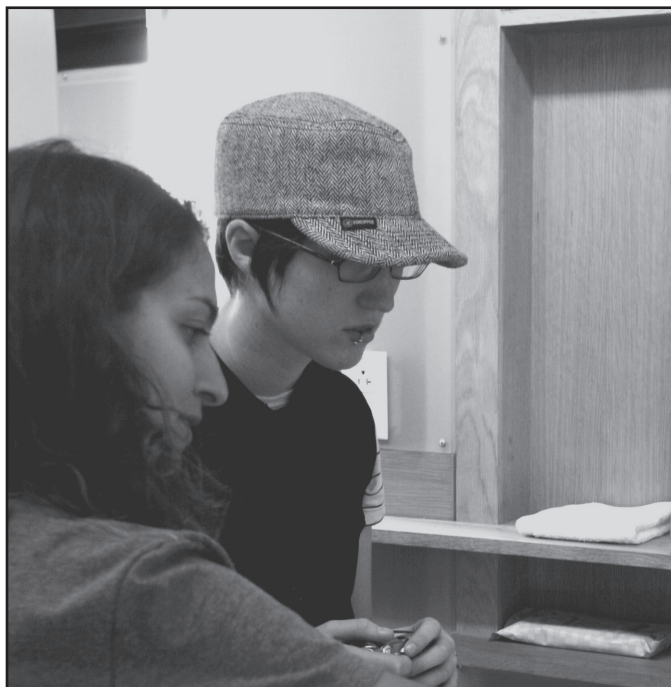
I remember when I initially proposed doing a drawing project of some kind, people were very enthusiastic and offered a lot of suggestions and ideas. But when I decided that I wanted to document the actual Kahn projects being done around me, I was actually nervous proposing it. I don't know why, it was really silly

SPOTLIGHT ON STUDENTS

actually. I remember sending out an email proposing it and going over it several times to make sure it sounded right. And then, of course, all the reactions I have received have been absolutely positive and supportive. They seem just as excited as I am. It's really great; people definitely have ideas about how these collaborations could work to our mutual benefit, which I'm really excited about.

“Do you plan to display your work once you finish?”

I do. However, I have yet to explore my options thoroughly as to where and when. I feel nervous about looking for a space. I know that Jannotta, the student gallery, is thoroughly booked for next semester. I was thinking that I'd look into the Campus Center gallery space, which might actually work better as it would be open to a wider community beyond the art department, which is really what my project is all about - accessibility and collaboration. After that, I don't know. I'm open to suggestions!



Dana inspects Carnegie Mellon's entry at the “Sustainable Houses, Homes and Communities” field trip to the 2007 Solar Decathlon
(photo by Piper Hanson)

“Do you have any plans to revisit this project once the academic year is over?”

I think it depends on how the project continues to go over the semester, but the way that art works, even if I weren't to revisit this particular body of work, the things that I learn in this project with definitely help me in later projects. But I do believe that I will continue the project or revisit it in some way after I graduate in May.

CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR FORMER FELLOWS!

KRYSTAL BANZON

Krystal Banzon '07 (Student Fellow, *Narrative: Identity*, 2006-2007) was awarded a Fulbright Fellowship. She is currently in the Philippines pursuing her research project, “Postcolonial Filipino Theater as a Space for Transnational Understanding.”



SULEIMAN MOURAD

Suleiman Mourad (Faculty Fellow, *Pierre Bourdieu in Algeria: Research, Representation, and Commitment*, 2007) won a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Humanities earlier this year. Mourad is studying Mu'tazila, a famous school of Islamic theology.



MARJORIE SENECHAL

Marjorie Senechal (Faculty Fellow, *Form and Function*, 2005-2006; Organizing Fellow, *Visual Languages*, 2004-2005; Kahn Senior Fellow), Louise Wolff Kahn Professor Emerita of Mathematics and the History of Science and Technology, was the recipient of the 2007 Smith College Honored Professor Award. She was recognized for her teaching and scholarship, as well as her role as Founding Director of the Kahn Institute (1998-2005).



CHAired PROFESSORSHIPS

Three former Kahn Fellows were named to chaired professorships in 2006-07. **Marsha Kline Pruett** (Faculty Fellow, *Marriage and Divorce*, 2006-2007) of the School for Social Work was named the Maconda Brown O'Connor '85 Professor. **Deborah Haas-Wilson** (Organizing Fellow, *Biotechnology and World Health*, 2004-2005) was named the Marilyn Carlson Nelson '61 Professor of Economics. **Sharon Cadman Seelig** (Faculty Fellow, *Life-Writing Through Difference*, 2004) was named the Roe/Straut Professor in the Humanities.

2007-2008 LONG-TERM



by Nathanael Fortune, Associate Professor of Physics
& Ann Leone, Professor of French Studies and Landscape Studies
Organizing Fellows

The Kahn Institute's *Sustainable Houses, Homes and Communities* project has been delightfully rewarding and productive. We have a remarkably cohesive, well-engaged and insightful group of participating Fellows and eagerly look forward to the coming spring semester.

We began the fall semester with a broad three-week survey of issues related to sustainability. In our first week, we discussed peak oil, global warming, and rising energy demand, the enormous impact of building construction and operation on energy demand and the climate, and the redesign of whole communities and cities to be more sustainable in their energy demands. In the second week, we took a closer look at urban environments, their historical trajectory, and the difference between preservation and sustainability. And in the third week, we both expanded our discussion of sustainable communities to encompass the broad scope of ideas of landscape architecture.

Our third week also featured our first guest speaker and public lecturer: **Marcus de la fleur**, a registered landscape architect, who delivered a talk entitled, "One Drop at a Time: New Resourceful Paradigms for the Small Scale."

de la fleur's surprising and inspiring talk illustrated the practical application of landscape architecture to individual green roofs and gardens for stormwater management, and kicked off a multi-week discussion of practical examples of sustainable practices.

The fourth week featured a panel of local farmers and fellow advocates for sustainable agriculture, followed by a dinner by a local chef known for heart-healthy meals prepared from local ingredients. Key to this week was a discussion of the conditions that allow community supported agriculture to become sustainable (or prevent it).

And in the fifth week, we took a weekend field trip to Washington DC to tour the Department of Energy's 2007 Solar Decathlon Sustainable Solar House Contest. This was followed up in the seventh week with a recap of the Solar Decathlon contest results and a broad-ranging discussion of the assets and liabilities of the house designs from a sustainable perspective.

In between, we took a moment during the sixth week to return to the broader issues of sustainability, restoration, preservation and environmental stewardship with a challenging and engaging colloquium visit and public presentation by **David Lowenthal**,

professor emeritus of geography at University College London, on the topic of "Reclaiming the Future."

Now that we were familiar with many of the challenges to sustainable building and community design (as well as some proposed solutions), we turned our attention during the next two weeks to our own community; Northampton and Smith College.

Thus, in the eighth week, we met with the architects and project manager for the award-winning energy-efficient Smith College Conway House for Ada Comstock scholars with children: **Tom Douglas** and **Jody Barker** from Douglas Architects, and **Gary Hartwell** from the Smith College Physical Plant. Following a discussion of their design challenges and successes, we were treated to a well-received guided tour of Conway House.

In the ninth week, we reviewed the proposed "Sustainable Northampton" planning document currently under consideration by the city, and attended a public hearing on the plan held that same week.

We devoted most of the remainder of the semester, weeks 10 - 13, to progress reports and research updates by each of the Kahn Fellows, taking about 20 - 30 minutes per project to educate each other and provide feedback. These presentations turned into a series of lively seminars, animated by the connections - and sometimes revealing collisions - among our varied interests and expertise in sustainability-related topics.

In our final week, we moved from consideration of individual sustainable projects on the house, home and community level to a fascinating discussion of what it takes to persuade a community to adopt sustainable behaviors. We looked at this through the lens of social psychology/marketing, considering several case studies of productive and unintentionally counter-productive efforts to encourage sustainable behavior.



"Sustainable Houses, Homes and Communities" Faculty Fellows at their colloquium meeting
L-R: Ann Leone, James Lowenthal, Paul Voss, Nat Fortune

PROJECT UPDATES

UNDERGROUNDS *Underworlds*

by Kevin Rozario, Assistant Professor of American Studies
& Michael Thurston, Associate Professor of
English Language and Literature
Organizing Fellows

The *Undergrounds Underworlds* colloquium began its work this fall by going underground – literally. After a couple of initial sessions focused largely on introductions and the definition of key terms (the latter a project that continues), we spent a Friday morning at the Old Newgate Prison and Copper Mine in Granby, Connecticut. Our visit was preceded by an informative and useful presentation by project Fellow **Larry Meinert**, who led us through excerpts from Agricola's Renaissance treatise on mines and introduced some of the geology of excavation. The excursion gave us not only an opportunity to get to know each other outside the seminar room but also, and crucially, a shared experience of subterranean space. While much of our later work has focused on mythological and metaphorical undergrounds and underworlds, the twenty minutes or so we spent together seventy feet below the surface, in the dark and the cold and the damp, has kept the reality of the underground as an important frame of reference for us.

Our intellectual (as opposed to experiential) work began in earnest with visits by two authorities on the human transformation of underground spaces in Europe during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. **David Pike**, author of *Subterranean Cities*, a book on graveyards, sewers, and subways in London and Paris, spoke with us about both specific sites and about the theoretical issues raised by the role these sites played in the development of European modernity. Following our fruitful conversation with Pike, we met with **Rosalind Williams**, a well-known professor at MIT who works to bridge scientific and humanistic discourses and author of the influential *Notes on the Underground*. This discussion, organized around key points in the afterword Williams has written for a new edition of the book, helped us to confront something we had already intuited: our topic is vast and multifaceted. We decided, therefore, that we should spend some time during the fall semester exploring the topic from a series of different perspectives. During one session, we discussed the history of Hell from the epic of Gilgamesh through the contemporary film *Constantine*. In another, we engaged underground culture in the form of avant-garde dance and music performance.

An important moment in the colloquium's development came during a discussion with students at the end of a session during which they made brief presentations on their projects in progress. It became apparent that some references to the work of Walter Benjamin during the conversation with David Pike some weeks earlier had troubled many of the students because that theoretical vocabulary was unfamiliar to them. Benjamin's terms had worked their way into some of our



"Undergrounds Underworlds" Student Fellows
Lauren Vollono, Rebecca Mueller and Andrea Gohl

subsequent meetings as well, so we decided to spend some time on his work to develop a shared set of questions for our focus on history and culture. Benjamin struck us as especially useful because he was a thinker who theorized the relationships between aesthetic and political undergrounds or avant-gardes. Because Benjamin's ideas had arisen partly out of his study of nineteenth-century Paris, and because we had come to realize the importance of Paris for our colloquium generally, we spent a session in the Paris sewers, guided by **Betty von Klemperer**, who talked with us about Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*, and by **André Dombrowski**, who presented some of his work on Parisian images from the period. There followed two weeks devoted to philosophical readings – first by Benjamin, then by Theodor Adorno and Peter Burger (our discussion of the latter informed by **Ombretta Frau's** presentation on Futurism as a paradigmatic avant-garde). These two meetings were exhilarating; the entire group was thinking hard and working together to understand and then critique these readings.

Armed now with a sophisticated (and critically questioned) theoretical vocabulary, we headed underground again with a visit by choreographer **David Dorfman**, who presented his "talking dance," *Underground*. The piece, which refers to the Weather Underground of the 1960s and 70s, brought together our interests in art and politics, and our discussion of it led seamlessly into the discussion of political undergrounds with which we concluded the semester. The group met on a Thursday night to view Pontecorvo's *The Battle of Algiers*, which represents a nationalist rebellion as an underground movement even as it interprets the culturally and politically dominant forces of colonial occupation as an underground of sorts. Our Friday discussion, led by two students, connected the Algerian setting to political rebellions in Latin America and elsewhere and helped us to think critically about the applicability of "underground" to movements aimed at radical political transformation.

We finished the semester not with many answers but with much sharper questions, with a problematic (in the positive, critical sense) understanding of our colloquium's organizing terms, and we look forward to the spring semester's work.

SPRING 2008 SHORT-TERM PROJECTS

PORTRAYING SCIENTIFIC DISCOVERY: THE SITUATION AND THE STORY

MARCH 28-29, 2008

Organizing Fellows:

Carol Christ (English, President of the College)

& Marjorie Senechal (Mathematics, History of Science & Technology, Founding Director of the Kahn Institute)

The surprising popularity of books, plays, and films like *Arcadia*, *Proof*, *Copenhagen*, *Einstein's Dreams*, and *A Beautiful Mind* reveals a large and growing public for the great ideas of mathematics and science, and the human stories behind them; science as human culture, and the quest for scientific understanding as human creativity. Perhaps our society isn't so anti-intellectual, anti-science after all!

But do these works show that literature can build two-way bridges between the two cultures, bridges that people will actually cross? Or are these bridges illusions? When scientific discovery, and the discoverers, become subjects of novels, plays, films, and even operas, what happens to the science? "Everything should be as simple as possible, but not more so," Einstein is said to have said. But if a novel, play, film or opera is a science lesson in disguise, what happens to the literature? Does insistence on scientific accuracy in concept and detail compromise the literary imagination? What happens to science when the forms of art represent it and speak for it?

Adapting the terms drawn from Vivian Gornick's book, *The Situation and The Story*, we find it useful to distinguish between the raw material of a scientific discovery, the science and scientists – including the ideas, scientific context, practices and institutions, and the story the writer tells. The tension between the situation (the science and the scientists) and the story (the way the science and the scientists are portrayed) is the conundrum we wish to explore. Consider the example of *Dr. Atomic*, an opera about the physicist Robert Oppenheimer, which premiered in San Francisco in 2005, to great acclaim. Though a work of fiction, most of the libretto was adapted verbatim from actual documents. But not all of it. The opening chorus sang:

Matter can be neither created nor destroyed
but only altered in form.

Energy can be neither created nor destroyed
but only altered in form.

The president of the American Physical Society, attending a rehearsal, protested vociferously: these statements contradict Einstein's equation, $E = MC^2$! Without it, there could have been no atomic bomb, no *Dr. Atomic*, and no *Dr. Atomic*. The startled and chagrined librettists promised to rewrite the lines, but they didn't – at least not by opening night. Should they have rewritten them? Even if, in their judgment, it would be to the detriment of the opera qua opera? Who grants poetic license, and how much, and why?

On first reflection, it would seem that non-fiction books about science would be free of this tension. After all, isn't their purpose to provide clear and accurate exposition of their subjects? Yet non-fiction books – such as *Chaos*, *Incompleteness*, and *The Discoveries: Ten Breakthroughs in Twentieth Century Science* – also tell stories created out of raw materials, and thus reflect a set of choices. Moreover, writing for a non-scientific audience requires some simplification. Much as scientists lament the state of scientific literacy in our country, they are often highly critical of books attempting to educate the public about scientific ideas and the process of scientific discovery through such stories, claiming that their writers exaggerate or underplay key features, or get the science wrong.

In this short-term project we will explore the tensions between the situation and the story in portraying scientific discovery through case studies and in-depth discussions with a panel of eminent scientists, writers, and scientist/writers. Joining us will be Rebecca Goldstein, philosopher, and author of *Properties of Light: A Novel of Love, Betrayal and Quantum Physics* (Houghton Mifflin, 2000) and *Incompleteness: The Proof and Paradox of Kurt Godel* (W.W. Norton, 2005); Jesse Cohen, writer, freelance editor and series editor of *The Best American Science Writing*, an annual anthology published by HarperCollins, and an editor of W.W. Norton's *Great Discoveries* series; Dick Teresi, author of *Lost Discoveries: The Ancient Roots of Modern Science--from the Babylonians to the Maya* (Simon & Schuster, 2003) and cofounder and former editor of *Omni* magazine; and Robert Osserman, author of *Poetry of the Universe* (Anchor, 1993), special projects director at Mathematical Sciences Research Institute, Berkeley, CA and professor emeritus, Stanford University.

The format will be an intense weekend workshop, Friday afternoon through Saturday afternoon. The workshop will have both public and closed sessions. Faculty participants will be asked to read, in advance, selected chapters of pertinent books written by, or edited by, the panel speakers and possible additional chapters or articles. Faculty applications should be submitted to the Kahn Institute's Director (via email to rfantasi@email.smith.edu) by the Friday, February 22, 2008 deadline. Faculty Fellows will receive a stipend of \$500 for their participation.

SPRING 2008 SHORT-TERM PROJECTS

THE NATURE AND USES OF MEMORY

JANUARY 22-23, 2008

by Nicolas Russell (French Studies)

Project Fellows:

James Carroll, Afro-American Studies

Adam Hall, Biological Studies

Maria Harrette, Spanish and Portuguese

Melissa Mueller, Classics, University of Massachusetts, Amherst

Nicolas Russell, Organizing Fellow, French Studies

Nancy Sternbach, Spanish and Portuguese

Dominique Thiebaut, Computer Science

This Kahn Institute short-term project will focus on the different ways we define and discuss memory. Memory is an important subject of study in a wide range of intellectual domains; however, different intellectual disciplines ask different questions about memory, and at times, it is not at all clear that they are even talking about the same thing. The goal of this project is to have an interdisciplinary discussion in which the participants can compare the questions, concepts, and methods they use in thinking about memory to those used by others in other disciplines. My own work has focused on the concepts of personal and collective memory in early modern France (1500-1800) and has itself been interdisciplinary to a certain extent: theories and research from other fields – such as cognitive science, sociology, historiography, media studies, and philosophy – have helped me to answer some of my own research questions. However, impromptu discussions about memory with colleagues in various fields have given me a different interdisciplinarity experience. On a number of occasions, such conversations have pushed me to rethink some of my own assumptions and questions. It is this kind of interdisciplinary exchange that I am interested in fostering, for myself and for others, through this Kahn project.

To lay the ground work for this project we would ask participants to think about a set of questions, from their own point of view. What is memory and what roles do we ascribe to memory in the intellect and in society? How do we use memory as a metaphor and what metaphors do we use to understand memory? To what extent and in what sense can we say that memory extends beyond the mind – in computers, archives, social groups, genes? The questions are very broad and are meant as a heuristic tool rather than a task list to complete. Perhaps they will strike some participants as the “wrong questions,” which in itself would be very interesting.

Before meeting, the participants will also read a series of texts on memory, divided into two groups and collected in a course pack. The first group of texts will introduce specific technical terms (e.g. distinctions between ROM and RAM or between procedural, semantic, and episodic memory). The second group of texts will present a set of thought-provoking problems or approaches to the concept of memory in different intellectual domains. Project Fellows have suggested readings which (1) introduce technical terms they may want to use during group discussions, (2) present a thought-provoking problem, or (3) give an overview or introduction to their field's (or sub-field's) approach to memory. Some of these are included in the project's course pack, while others will be added to a supplemental bibliography, distributed to the group.

The project will take place January 22-23, 2008 and will consist of a discussion among the participants which will bring together the general questions at the origin of this project, the readings, and the Fellows' presentations of their own work.



*“Undergrounds Underworlds” (2007-08 Long-Term Project) Faculty Fellows, L-R:
Steve Waksman, Maura Donohue, Bosiljka Glumac, André Dombrowski*

UPDATES ON NEW PROJECT FORMS

OPEN LABS / OPEN STUDIOS

NOVEMBER - DECEMBER 2007

Organizing Fellow:

Thomas Ciufu (Sherman Fairchild Artist in Residence for Arts and Technology)

As part of our initiative to explore new project forms, the Kahn Institute was pleased to sponsor *Open Labs / Open Studios*, the brainchild of Organizing Fellow **Thomas Ciufu**. For Ciufu, the Sherman Fairchild Artist in Residence for Arts and Technology, the concept sprung from his work as part of the Arts and Technology Working Group, an interdisciplinary group of faculty, staff and students seeking to explore issues and ideas located at the intersection of art and technology. From the outset, a Kahn project seemed to provide the perfect forum for the group's overarching goal of fostering interaction, inquiry, research and practice across boundaries that typically divide the sciences and the arts. Further, it was hoped that the project would serve as a seed for future collaboration, group work, or team teaching across departments.

In conceptualizing and organizing *Open Labs / Open Studios*, Ciufu felt it would be important for the Fellows to visit each other's actual labs and studios, rather than simply discuss their work out of context. By arranging each project meeting around a visit to the presenting Fellow's working space, the participants were able to demonstrate aspects of their working practice that might otherwise be impossible to illuminate. Following each presentation with a meal gave further opportunity for discussion, and did much to create a lively, informal environment in which faculty members could exchange ideas freely, and further probe questions and possibilities raised by the day's events.

The presentations themselves ranged widely in disciplinary and topical focus. Week One was led by Ciufu himself in his work space in Seelye, and touched upon his various ongoing sound art projects, computer mediated performance projects, and the field of acoustic ecology. Week Two was led by Professor of Dance **Rodger Blum**, who discussed the use of media technologies in dance, including software for choreography design. In Week Three, **Reid Bertone-Johnson**, Lecturer in Landscape Studies, demonstrated his use of digital imaging technologies for presentation of design work to clients, sparking a larger discussion of representation of location through image and sound. The final project week was co-led by Spencer T. and Ann W. Olin Professor of Computer Science **Joe O'Rourke**, and Associate Professor of Computer Science **Judy Franklin**. O'Rourke's presentation focused on rapid prototyping, three-dimensional printing and scanning, and his use of laser cutting technology. His pursuit of an NSF grant recently allowed the college to purchase both a 3D printer and a laser cutter, both of which have become hugely popular among students in both the sciences and the arts. Franklin then presented her research in machine learning techniques and algorithmic composition, focusing on her efforts to create computer systems that can improvise in the musical domain.

Feedback from the Fellows in the project has been overwhelmingly positive. **Candice Salyers**, Lecturer in Dance, praised the success of the project in helping the Fellows to develop a shared vocabulary: "To hear the language with which colleagues in different fields describe their work helps elucidate the connections between seemingly diverse research. Whether others' words could be applied literally or metaphorically to one's own work, our conversations expanded the frame for understanding the larger world within which we are all working. It was wonderful to visit studios and labs all over campus and therefore to discover research, resources and interests that I did not know existed within the Smith community. I have plans to work with at least one of the other members of this group. That is perhaps the most exciting part of this experience – the continued connection with other faculty who share a range of interests and expertise."

According to **Dominique Thiebaut**, Associate Professor of Computer Science, the project "created a convivial environment to observe each other's working tools, how computing equipment was used in an artistic environment, and how some of us were using similar techniques in visual and musical environments. It was a party of discoveries: discovering new colleagues, discovering new places on campus, and discovering how our research and teaching computing technology can be used in such interesting ways." His sentiments were echoed by Professor of Philosophy **Albert Mosley**, who stated that he "found the project interesting and informative about how Smith faculty are integrating their respective areas of expertise with digital technology. My particular interest was in the digital simulation of music and composition, addressed specifically by Tom Ciufu and Judy Franklin. However, the projects also included landscape design, dance, and three dimensional modeling - areas I had little background or knowledge in."

SPOTLIGHT ON FACULTY



DONALD ROBINSON

Clark Professor Emeritus of Government and American Studies

In 2003-2004, Catherine Newbury and I were co-organizers of a Kahn Institute project entitled *Problems of Democracy*. Together with other faculty and student Fellows of the project, drawn from a wide variety of disciplines, we held conversations that were rich, often deep and wide-ranging. We noted that the idea of government of and by the people is an aspiration widely shared in the world at this time, but we were determined to examine the practice of democracy unsentimentally and to assess its prospects realistically. With the help of distinguished visiting scholars from a host of major universities, we examined village-level democracy in western and South Africa, Pakistan, India, Iran and Guatemala. We studied how women were demanding a more effective role in governance and how peasants mounted resistance to dictators in Latin America. We looked at how economic conditions affect the prospects for democracy and how concentrations of wealth bend the aspiration of people to govern themselves.

My own project was a study of town-meeting democracy in rural New England, specifically in the village of Ashfield, Massachusetts, where I had served as an elected member of the select board in the 1990s. The interdisciplinary and international framework of the Kahn project helped me to conceive my own project in those terms as well. I decided to consider the philosophical dimension, paying careful, critical attention to de Tocqueville's writings about the conditions and practice of democracy in America; and by studying ancient Athens in the age of Pericles I was able to make comparisons between democratic processes in ancient Athens and in eighteenth century Ashfield.

Research for the Kahn project led to a book that is now nearly ready for publication. Its focus is an examination of a two century old form of democratic decision-making as it confronts very contemporary problems. For example, Ashfield's main project of public works during the 1990s was to build a sewer system. The "green" mentality loomed large among the town's populace, and so town meeting voted overwhelmingly to adopt an "innovative" technology called solar aquatics to treat waste water as nature does, using bio-organisms to consume the foul matter, thereby purifying the water. It seemed to work, but at a cost of over \$7 million [!], paid for by federal and state funds to encourage innovation, and Ashfield residents now have among the highest cost for sewerage bills in the Commonwealth. Within the context of our Kahn project, we asked Steve Tilley of the Smith biology department, to do a careful study of this technology and he concluded that it wasn't very innovative at all and that the plants in the tanks made little if any measurable contribution to the purifying process.

In this way, our *Problems of Democracy* Kahn project not only encouraged my research on the New England town meeting process; it can also be seen as having made a contribution to the democratic process itself!

NATHANAEL FORTUNE

Associate Professor, Physics



PORTABLE MODULAR MINIATURE HOUSE PROJECT

During the current academic year, Greg Young (of the Center for Design and Fabrication) and I have been designing and constructing a portable modular miniature house for energy-efficiency tests and simulations. Our goal is to create such a house that can be readily constructed and assembled using ordinary materials and tools, that is easy to modify for different locations and climates, and that is affordable to transport and construct.

This prototype house is being assembled out of individual 4 ft x 8 ft modular panels that we have been constructing in the shop out of ordinary building materials; when fully assembled it will be 12 ft wide x 8 ft deep x 8 ft high on the exterior (not including a sloped shed roof). The size was chosen to reduce construction waste by using standard size materials, and to ensure that the modules are sufficiently small in dimension and light in weight to be readily moved through the small elevator and exterior doors of McConnell.

The panels are designed to be readily modifiable to simulate different thermal conditions. We can change the number of windows and the type and amount of insulating material used to measure changes in rates of energy flow (and amount of energy required to heat the house) in a controlled indoor environment, then reassemble the house outdoors and change the number and location of windows to measure the passive solar thermal properties of the building.

Because we want the house to be able to be taken apart and reassembled, we have been developing various methods of air-sealing the panels in a way that eliminates (or greatly reduces) draftiness due to air infiltration, but still allows the panels to be taken apart afterwards. Following testing this spring, we will work on adding weatherproof exterior facings and hope to reassemble the house on the patio outside the Kahn Institute for solar measurements.

A WORD FROM THE DIRECTOR

A DECADE OF FREE LUNCHES

It's hard to imagine that it's been that long, but 2008 represents the 10th anniversary of the Kahn Liberal Arts Institute. It's been quite a run. The Institute was launched in 1998 with *Ecologies of Childhood* (organized by Peter Pufall, Department of Psychology and Richard Unsworth, Department of Religion), the first of its year-long projects. Since then the Kahn Institute has spawned some 32 collaborative projects (33 by the time you're reading this and with several more to come by the Fall of '08). 17 of these have been full year-long efforts and 15 have been short term projects lasting for one day or several. All Kahn projects are normally led by one or two faculty Organizing Fellows, scholars who have taken the initiative to plan a program around a broad set of intellectual questions linked to their own research and who have stepped forward to offer intellectual leadership to the other participants of the project. Altogether, some 400 Fellows have participated in Kahn projects, including about 300 faculty members from over 35 different departments and programs and 130 students who have been drawn from virtually every major offered by the College. In addition, many more faculty, students, and community members have attended events sponsored by one of the Kahn projects.

However, I think it is important to recognize that the impact of the Kahn Institute on Smith College has gone well beyond the numbers of participants, the variety of collaborative projects, or even the range of lectures, performances, films and panels that the Institute has made available on campus. I would suggest that the main effect that the Kahn Institute has had has been symbolic; namely that it has been able to set a good and important example. An example of what? Well, of inefficiency. Yes, that's right, of inefficiency, for what the Kahn Institute creates, above all, is the time and space that scholars need for contemplation, for discussion, for debate, and for intellectual "fellowship". These are things that are increasingly treated as inefficient in higher education and so have become rare in the daily round of our overly busy lives as teachers, as meeting goers, and as email recipients and correspondents. In a certain way then, the Kahn Institute might be seen as a kind of academia-in-aspic, a preserve of the ideal of a scholarly life, although it is one that must not be considered wasteful or extravagant, but as something that a lively intellectual life absolutely requires to sustain itself.

Indeed, while it may sound somewhat quaint, such a preserve is actually quite revolutionary in the context of an academic environment that has been so thoroughly infused with the culture of business. Everywhere in higher education the language of market share, of productivity, competition, branding, etc. have become part of a new lingua franca that tends to marginalize and exclude the

kind of deliberative and contemplative intellectual experience that Kahn projects seek to foster. It is a language that can even be heard from some who normally take an "oppositional" stance in their personal scholarly work yet who are remarkably uncritical of the cult of business operating unfettered in their own institutions.

At the Kahn Institute we seek to encourage the inefficiencies of academic culture by providing scholars with the time and space for experimentation, for risk, for talking across boundaries, and for making unlikely connections and weird juxtapositions. That's about how one might characterize Thomas Ciufo's *Open Labs/Open Studios Project*, for example. It was planned out in a relatively short time, it ran over the course of several weeks in November and December, and it brought scientists and artists together to visit each others labs and studios where they talked together about what they do in these spaces and why. Unlikely connections were indeed made [see article p.10 in this issue] and while it is possible that nothing tangible will come of them, something might. Either way, we think it worth the effort and expense to create that kind of opportunity for discussion and reflection. In that spirit I urge the members of the faculty to think broadly and differently and at "funny angles" as you think about ideas for a Kahn project that will help you advance your work.

Milton Friedman was fond of saying that "there's no such thing as a free lunch", a phrase routinely echoed by others of his persuasion. It was an expression with roots in the 19th century saloon tradition of a "free" lunch to the customer in exchange for the purchase of a drink, and Friedman et. al. have used it to build an economic theory around the basic idea that you don't get something for nothing (the exception being those fortunate recipients of no-bid military contracts).¹ Well, at the Kahn Liberal Arts Institute we very much believe in a free lunch. And, to be exact, we have hosted 457 of them over the past ten years (made possible by the Louise W. and Edmund J. Kahn Fund for Faculty Excellence, of course). We hope you will join us for lunch sometime soon.



P.S. I'm pleased to tell you that while I'm on sabbatical leave in 2008-09, Rosetta Cohen, Professor of Education and Child Study, will be writing in this space as the Acting Director of the Kahn Institute.

¹Milton Friedman, *There's No Such Thing As A Free Lunch* (LaSalle, Ill.: Open Court, 1975).



Rick Fantasia
Director

*The Kahn Institute might be seen
as a kind of academia-in-aspic*