

Fall 2008

## Kahn Chronicle: Fall 2008

Smith College, Kahn Liberal Arts Institute

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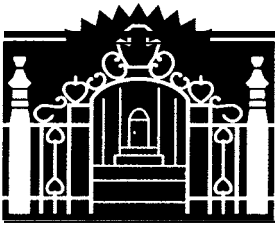
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# KAHN CHRONICLE

KAHN LIBERAL ARTS INSTITUTE, SMITH COLLEGE

Volume 10, Issue 2 • Fall 2008

## LOOKING BACK...TEN YEARS AT THE KAHN INSTITUTE

*This year the Kahn Institute embarks on its tenth year of enriching faculty scholarship and the intellectual life of the College by supporting collaborative research. In reflecting on the past decade, we asked our former project Fellows to share some thoughts about their experiences at the Institute. Here is a sampling of the responses we received. More responses can be found on the Kahn Institute's Web site at [www.smith.edu/kahninstitute/lookingback.php](http://www.smith.edu/kahninstitute/lookingback.php).*

"Simply put, the Kahn Institute project helped me turn what I expected would be an article into a book. I am about to submit the final manuscript to the University of Texas Press."

— DONNA ROBINSON DIVINE  
MORNINGSTAR FAMILY PROFESSOR OF  
JEWISH STUDIES & PROFESSOR OF GOVERNMENT  
THE ANATOMY OF EXILE (2000-2001)

"Participating as a Faculty Fellow in the *Marriage and Divorce* project was one of the most intellectually rewarding experiences of my academic career. I was able to break ground on a long-standing research interest in African-American folklore and the values and attitudes toward love and marriage as reflected in that lore. The opportunity to engage in the interdisciplinary exploration of multiple aspects of marriage and divorce was phenomenal."

— ADRIANNE ANDREWS, LECTURER IN  
AFRO-AMERICAN STUDIES & OMBUDSPERSON  
MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE (2006-2007)

"Participating in a Kahn Institute project has been my most rewarding academic experience at Smith. Even better, it was rarely what I expected to learn! There was a genuine interest and enthusiasm for each other's projects, and a real regret that the year had to end. I learned something that advanced my understanding of sustainable houses, homes, and communities every week. The flexibility and experience of the Kahn staff

were key to making this happen. They provided significant administrative support. The key challenge during the year was finding time for our projects. Going forward, the key challenge will be how to sustain my research in this field now that I've received a jump start."

— NATHANIEL FORTUNE PROFESSOR OF PHYSICS  
SUSTAINABLE HOUSES, HOMES, AND COMMUNITIES  
(2007-2008)

## KAHN STUDENT FELLOWSHIPS AWARDED FOR 2008-2009



The following Smith students have been awarded Fellowships in connection with the 2008-2009 long-term Kahn Institute project *Deceit: The Uses of Transparency and Concealment*, organized by Mlada Bukovansky (Government).

- Jessye Brick '09
- Meredith Byers '10
- Ling San (Loretta) Cheung '09
- Christa Daly '09
- Samaiya Ewing AC '09
- Emily Floyd '09
- Carina Ho '09
- Dara Kaye '09
- Mikaela Mroczynski '09
- Elizabeth Pusack '09

Student Fellows will join their Faculty colleagues in exploring the tensions between deceit and truthfulness, between concealment and transparency, in a variety of contexts. Each Fellow will bring a case or set of problems particular to their discipline, and members will work collaboratively to explore the broader philosophical, ethical, cultural, and linguistic questions evoked by human practices of deception.



Students awarded Fellowships in connection with the long-term Kahn project *A Festival of Disorder*, organized by Elisabeth Armstrong (Program for the Study of Women and Gender) and Marjorie Senechal (Mathematics and History of Science), are:

- Julia Baker '09
- Olivia Cummings '09
- Emma Ensign '10
- Molly Hamer '10
- Naho Hashimoto '10
- Hanna Leung '09
- Jeannette Quinn AC '09
- Anna White-Nockleby '09
- Lillian Wilson '10
- Emily Wolf Roubatis '09

Toward the end of the 20th century, scientists in many fields discovered that 'disorder' isn't random; it's a maze of subtle patterns with revolutionary implications. Disorder can be both illuminating and courageous. Change—social, artistic, scientific—is fueled by disorder, by distrusting and defying received and perceived patterns. The *Festival of Disorder* project will turn order upside down as participants probe the vast order/disorder spectrum.

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## Who's Who at the Kahn Institute

### Director & Staff 2008-2009

Rosetta Cohen

Interim Director (2008-2009)

Chair, Advisory Committee

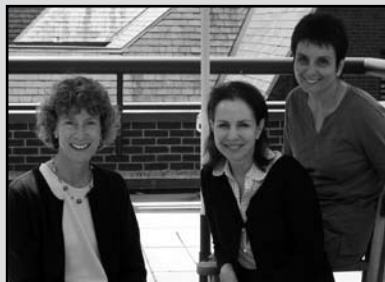
Professor of Education and Child Study

Chrissie Bell

Administrative Coordinator

Kara Noble

Project and Publicity Administrator



From left to right, Chrissie Bell, Rosetta Cohen and Kara Noble. Photo by Hana Boston-Howes

### Advisory Committee 2008-2009

Patrick Coby, Professor of  
Government

Rosetta Marantz Cohen, Professor of  
Education & Child Study, Chair

Robert Dorit, Associate Professor of  
Biological Sciences

Dawn Fulton, Associate Professor of  
French Studies (Sabbatical leave 2008-2009)

Mary Harrington, Tippit Professor in  
Life Sciences, Psychology

Christopher Loring, Director of Libraries

William Oram, Helen Means Professor,  
English Language & Literature

Andrew Rotman, Associate Professor  
of Religion

## How to Contact the Kahn Institute

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Web: [www.smith.edu/kahninstitute](http://www.smith.edu/kahninstitute)

# ANNOUNCEMENTS

## KAHN INSTITUTE STAFF NEWS

We are pleased to introduce two new members of the Kahn team. Rosetta Marantz Cohen will assume the role of Interim Director for the 2008-2009 year while Rick Fantasia is on sabbatical. Rosetta is Professor of Education and Child Study at Smith, and was a Faculty Fellow in the 2006-2007 Kahn project *Narrative.Identity*. This fall we also welcome Kara Noble as the Institute's new Project and Publicity Administrator. She joins us from the Music Department, where she worked as the Events Coordinator for several years.

Sadly, we must bid adieu to Hana Boston-Howes, who served as Project and Publicity Administrator from 2006 to July 2008. She has moved to the balmy climes of St. Paul, Minnesota, where her husband will attend veterinary school.

## FACULTY INFORMATION SESSIONS FOR 2009-2010 PROJECTS

Faculty Fellowship applications are now being accepted for the Kahn Institute's 2009-2010 year-long projects. More information about these projects will be available at the following open meetings for interested faculty. Lunch will be provided at each session. Project descriptions can be found on page 5 or on our Web site.

### Telling Time: Its Meaning and Measurement

Organizing Fellows:  
Bosiljka Glumac (Geology) and  
Richard Lim (History)

Faculty Informational Meeting:  
**Thursday, September 18, 12:00 pm**

### Wellness & Disease

Organizing Fellows:  
Mary Harrington (Psychology) &  
Benita Jackson (Psychology)

Faculty Informational Meeting:  
**Monday, September 22, 12:00 pm**

All Faculty Fellows receive research grants of \$3,000 and, if they wish, student assistants for their project year. Junior faculty (only) have the option of choosing either a research grant or one course release during the project year.

Faculty Fellowship applications should include a brief statement of your interest in the project and what you hope to contribute. They should be submitted to the Interim Director, Rosetta Cohen, via email ([rcohen@email.smith.edu](mailto:rcohen@email.smith.edu)) or by campus or U.S. mail. Faculty must be able and willing to attend the weekly research colloquia for the **entire academic year** to be awarded a Fellowship.

The application deadline for these two Kahn Institute long-term projects is **Friday, October 17, 2008**.

## SHORT-TERM PROJECT FACULTY FELLOWSHIPS FOR 2008-2009

Calls for Faculty Fellows for the following 2008-2009 short-term projects will be mailed to faculty at the beginning of the fall semester. Faculty who are interested in applying for Fellowships for these projects should email the Kahn Institute's Interim Director, Rosetta Cohen ([rcohen@smith.edu](mailto:rcohen@smith.edu)).

### Translating, Preserving & Promoting Minority Languages

Organizing Fellow:  
Fernando Armstrong-Fumero  
(Anthropology)  
Email: [farmstro@email.smith.edu](mailto:farmstro@email.smith.edu)

### The Aesthetics of Data & Its Analysis

Organizing Fellow:  
Dominique Thiebaut  
(Computer Science)  
Email: [dthiebau@email.smith.edu](mailto:dthiebau@email.smith.edu)

### How Useful Is the Science of Learning?

Organizing Fellows:  
Al Rudnitsky  
(Education and Child Study) and  
Glen Ellis (Engineering)  
Email: [arudnits@email.smith.edu](mailto:arudnits@email.smith.edu)  
Email: [gellis@email.smith.edu](mailto:gellis@email.smith.edu)

More information about these projects can be found on pages 3 & 4 of this newsletter or on the Kahn Institute Web site. Faculty with questions about specific projects are encouraged to contact the Organizing Fellows.

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# 2008-2009 SHORT-TERM PROJECTS

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## TRANSLATING, PRESERVING AND PROMOTING MINORITY LANGUAGES

Organizing Fellow: Fernando Armstrong-Fumero (Anthropology)

Current debates regarding bilingual education and cultural democracy underscore the complex experience of speakers of minority languages in the global politics of national identity and multiculturalism. This project will allow Fellows to discuss how to engage and work with languages and literary traditions that are peripheral to contemporary flows of cultural and financial capital and global media. This can include minority or indigenous languages, as well as languages that represent the dominant speech of post-colonial nation-states even if they are marginalized within the trans-national circulation of media and texts. Our primary goal is to compare how language policies and ideologies, translation and literary diffusion have been experienced by communities in the geographical areas where participants have expertise.

This project will include three topically organized workshop sessions, a public mini-symposium, and a wrap-up session. In the initial three sessions, Fellows will prepare brief, informal presentations for discussion touching on the central topic of the day. Fellows can also propose readings to be discussed at these sessions. The session topics will be:

**Translation:** Accuracy of translation from one language to another is a classic concern for literary, ethnographic and linguistic studies. These problems are often compounded in

the case of minority languages and marginal literary traditions in which texts are composed with rhetorical patterns and other structural logics that are not as well-documented by secondary or critical literatures. In this session, Fellows will present on the state of primary and secondary sources for their respective research languages or areas, and on the general quality of existing English translations.

**Standardization and Canonicity:** The standardization and alphabetization of languages that have previously lacked a widely-recognized orthography and literary canon is a recurrent problem in policies geared towards the recognition and revitalization of minority speech-forms. In this session, Fellows will explore the potentials and problems of standardization and canon formation in different regions.

**Multiculturalism & Linguistic Democracy:** Discussions about the representation of minority languages have been a significant component of larger debates regarding multiculturalism and ethnic pluralism. This session will allow Fellows to examine some of the broader political, social and ethical implications of the issues discussed in the previous sessions.

**Mini-Symposium:** The Case of Yucatec Maya: This public event will feature three authors who write in the Yucatec Maya language, which is the primary language of

close to a million people in the Mexican states of Yucatán, Campeche and Quintana Roo. They will present their work, which focuses on different aspects of language revitalization, the recording of traditional oral narrative, and the expansion of Maya into the mass media. During an extended lunch session with the authors, Fellows will explore the case study presented in the public session in terms of the issues of translation, standardization and cultural democracy that they will have covered in the previous sessions.

This project will interest faculty in the different language departments, in Anthropology, and in the various ethnic studies programs, as well as faculty from History, Government, or Sociology.

### PROJECT SCHEDULE:

#### Initial workshop sessions:

- Friday, October 10, 2-4 pm
- Friday, October 24, 2-4 pm
- Friday, November 7, 2-4 pm

#### Public mini-symposium:

- Friday, November 14, 7 pm  
Neilson Browsing Room

#### Wrap-up session:

- Saturday, November 15, 2-4 pm  
(preceded by lunch at 12:30 pm)

## HOW USEFUL IS THE SCIENCE OF LEARNING

Organizing Fellows: Al Rudnitsky (Education and Child Study) & Glenn Ellis (Engineering)

Is teaching an art or a science? Over the past decade, the "science of learning" has emerged as an area of growing importance in the field of teaching and learning research. Advances in our understanding of how, why and when we learn best are forming the basis of a large literature, mostly shared only among other cognitive scientists. Little of this literature filters down into classrooms; college and university faculty in fields outside of the learning sciences are rarely exposed to it. Indeed, studies show that pedagogy, especially on the post-secondary level, has changed little over the last decades, even as the body of material generated by "learning scientists" grows in scope and specificity. Researchers in the area of learning science complain that faculty still reduce subject matter to "propositions or procedures that can be directly taught and tested" instead of embracing better strategies—often defined as "teaching for understanding."

In this project, we wish to explore the question of how and whether the learning sciences can influence and deepen college teaching. What new understandings about the science of learning most closely impact

the work of college faculty? Does this literature address pedagogy in one discipline more than others? If this body of research really can help us think more critically and productively about our teaching, why has it not made its way more commonly into college classrooms, where "theory" is—theoretically—most valued and respected?

This project will consist of three afternoon conversations followed by an evening meal. Each session will be centered on a shared reading that highlights several core ideas in this new literature. We would like to bring together a diverse group of faculty from many fields to consider and critique these theories from their own disciplinary perspectives. As a group of college faculty we hope to determine whether the new science of learning has something to offer us.

### PROJECT SCHEDULE:

- Tuesday, Wednesday & Thursday, January 13, 14 & 15, 2009
- Workshop 4-6 pm, followed by an evening meal

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# 2008-2009 SHORT-TERM PROJECTS

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## THE AESTHETICS OF DATA AND ITS ANALYSIS

Organizing Fellow: Dominique Thiebaut (Computer Science)

The amount of data collected and available today in our various fields of research has reached such a scale that we are lacking tools to allow us to fully explore the data. It is not uncommon for data sets to measure in millions or billions of items. What used to be story-driven research—ask the question first, and then use the data to answer it—seems like it is becoming data-driven research: gather the data, explore it along some of its multiple dimensions, and see what kind of story is being told. This shift should be taken with care, as one should bear in mind that there is no “raw” data; data is collected for a purpose, and that pre-existing purpose may influence its analysis and visualization. This is not a new phenomenon. One only has to look at *Mappae Mundi*, a set of medieval maps from the 11th century, to see how the influence of the Christian views of the time significantly distorted the visualization of the world.

As technology evolves and allows us to garner new types of data in larger quantities, we find we lack tools to explore and render the data. New tools are conceived, putting the tool creators in the position of design artists who face the challenging task of mixing science, art and technology with the “goal of using beauty and elegance as a path to clarity and analysis”.<sup>1</sup> Visualization, in particular, is experiencing a boom, as demonstrated in the

recent Museum of Modern Art exhibit *Design and the Elastic Mind*. Examples of stunning visual (computer-assisted) displays appear regularly in specialized magazines such as *Seed* or *Wired*, as well as in news publications such as *The New York Times* or *Harper's*. All of these create new aesthetic standards.

Unfortunately, there is often a lack of reusability of visualization tools generated to simplify the process of rendering this explosion of huge data sets. In many ways we are at a frontier where tools are invented as the data are gathered. Great design and programming skills are applied to create tools to visualize one particular set of data, the work is published, then those tools are set aside and the cycle is restarted for a new set of data. Lacking reusability and verification on different data sets, we run the risk of sacrificing clarity and analysis in the name of elegance and the aesthetics of design, and possibly the risk of presenting erroneous information. It is as if one had to reinvent the wheel every time a new project is conceived. Some, however, argue that elegance and utility need not be antithetical, and assert it is not necessary to consign new technological tools to virtual landfills.

The goals of this Kahn workshop are to explore the new challenges of data analysis

and visualization; to discover, develop and refine categories of visual thinking, and to examine the processes involved in each. Our guest speaker will be Colin Ware, Director of the Data Visualization Lab at the Center for Coastal and Ocean Mapping at the University of New Hampshire. Dr. Ware specializes in advanced data visualization and has a special interest in applications of visualization to ocean mapping, combining interests in both basic and applied research. He has advanced degrees in both computer science and the psychology of perception. Ideally, participants would include perceptual psychologists and neuroscientists, designers, people interested in visual and spatial metaphors in language, computer scientists, artists, dancers and choreographers. Fellows will present their intellectual interests, concerns, and experience with how the aesthetics of data analysis is expressed and represented in their fields.

<sup>1</sup> Paola Antonelli, *Design and the Elastic Mind*, in *Design and the Elastic Mind*, by Hugh Aldersey-Williams, Peter Hall, Ted Sargent, and Paola Antonelli, D.A.P./Distributed Art Publishers, Inc.

### PROJECT SCHEDULE:

- Saturday, October 18, 9 am-4 pm
- Saturday, October 25, 9 am-4 pm

## PROPOSING A KAHN PROJECT FOR 2010-2011 (AND BEYOND)

Developing future faculty and student collaborative research projects is a central focus at the Kahn Institute. While ideas for Kahn projects germinate in many different ways, all originate with members of the Smith faculty. The only requirement for projects is that their central research questions be framed broadly enough to appeal to a variety of disciplinary perspectives. If you have an idea, no matter how preliminary, we invite you to consider proposing a project for the 2010-2011 academic year (or beyond).

Proposing a Kahn project is a three-step process:

1. Discuss your preliminary ideas with the Institute's Director or a member of the Advisory Committee as early in the fall semester as possible. The Institute can assist you with brainstorming and making connections with other faculty members with complimentary research interests.
2. Once your plans have achieved sufficient focus and depth, send a one-page Letter of Interest to the Director via email (rcohen@email.smith.edu). Your letter should articulate the issue you wish to study and the questions you seek to pose. The deadline for submitting letters for 2010-2011 projects is **Friday, October 17, 2008.**

3. After reviewing your letter, the Director and/or an Advisory Committee member will work with you to expand it into a formal proposal. This proposal will focus on the questions you seek to address, your anticipated approach to them, and what you hope to accomplish during the course of your project year. It will also include a list of potential faculty and outside participants. The deadline for full proposal submissions is **Friday, December 5, 2008.**

Although Kahn projects have traditionally been developed as year-long collaborations, a shorter-term project can be an excellent forum for more preliminary research and discussion. Short-term project topics also often serve as seeds for future long-term projects. There is no deadline for short-term project proposals; they will be considered on a rolling basis.

Alternative project plans will also be considered to provide new contexts for faculty to explore research topics. Proposals for alternative project structures and schedules should follow the procedures and deadlines laid out above for long-term projects.

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# 2009-2010 LONG-TERM PROJECTS

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## TELLING TIME: ITS MEANING AND MEASUREMENT

Organizing Fellows: **Bosiljka Glumac** (Geology) & **Richard Lim** (History)

**T**ime matters, but we are not always fully conscious of how it matters. This long-term project will explore the definition, determination, meaning, and significance of time. We are interested in the ways temporal and temporality shape materials, events, and processes, as well as how we perceive, analyze and create discourses using them. The aim of the project, therefore, will be to understand both the effects of time on things and the implications of the temporal dimension for our ways of seeing and interpreting the world and our place in it. The project will consider a broad range of questions. Some will treat the metrics of time: How do we tell the age of ancient objects and materials? How do we determine the temporal sequence of past processes and the rates at which changes occurred? Other questions may concern the temporal lens as a way of seeing: What role does the measurement of time play in shaping our respective intellectual disciplines? Why do temporal contexts and relationships matter in our interpretations and analyses, and how do they shape our appreciation of the past, present and future? Can knowledge of the historical dimension

ever have a distorting effect on our analyses?

The practice of archeology may provide us with an apt metaphor for this project, for while we are interested in the discovery and measurement of past time, we are also interested in the archaeology of knowledge itself. While the temporal dimension is surely present in all facets of human life and in the intellectual endeavors of every academic discipline, it is never analytically neutral. For example, traditionally, time is determined by observing the movement of the earth, the moon, the sun and other stars, while modern approaches use atomic clocks and quasar observations. But do they tell the very same “story” of time? Astronomers and geologists use the concept of “deep time” to express time in millions and billions of years. Timing of historical events, on the other hand, is stated in millennia, centuries, decades and years. Biologists study organisms with life cycles of 24 hours or shorter, an athlete can win a race by a hundredth of a second, and time can be measured in billionths of a second. How is our perception of time influenced by such an enormous range of temporal scales?

Historians who work on cultural memory and how societies remember (and invent) the past have introduced doubt into the conventional understanding of human history as a neutral, continuous unfolding of events and processes from the past to the present. What about the storytellers? To what extent (and to what intellectual end) has the “historical record” of an event been a story told by those with a stake in how it has been represented? Have those who tell the story of time, whether archeologists, paleontologists, or cultural historians, been predisposed by their training to only look for things in certain ways, but not others? What are the implications of such methodological blind spots? A premise of this project is that our own intellectual practices would be enriched and deepened by a greater awareness of how telling and invoking time shapes our own work, as well as an appreciation of the variety of temporal understandings and practices across other disciplines.

This project will be “about time” and is open to scholars whose work navigates its course and who wish to consider its promises, problems, and prospects.

## WELLNESS AND DISEASE

Organizing Fellows: **Mary Harrington** (Psychology) and **Benita Jackson** (Psychology)

**T**his project will consider the presence of illness and disease in our history, our culture, our social arrangements, and in our mental constructions. Disease will be viewed not only in epidemiological terms, but also in the ways it insinuates itself in our psyche, our cultural imagination, and our institutions, and how we have come to habituate ourselves to it.

For example, the hold cancer has on our cultural imagination may be as powerful as the one that it exerts on the bodies of cancer patients. While cancer looms over all of us as an incurable disease in potentia, it also exists as a powerful symbolic metaphor. Cancer can seem to lurk everywhere in our physical environment, making a risk out of the foods we eat, the places we work, and technological forms and processes we have come to depend upon. Cancer sometimes seems ubiquitous, but serious diseases of all kinds punctuate the background and foreground of our everyday lives, and are treated as much by our prejudices and our moral judgments as by our medical procedures. Thus, sexually transmitted diseases impose themselves on our most intimate relations and often carry harsh moral

stigma. Diseases that are born by conditions of economic poverty magnify unfairness because health and medical treatment are among the deprivations experienced by the poor.

To a certain degree, illness exists in close association with its obverse, and it cannot be fully understood apart from the ways that wellness is experienced and represented as a state of mind, a condition of the body, a discursive narrative, and a practice. In this project, we will treat states of disease and wellness not only as physiological and epidemiological realities, but as complex historical, psychological, and socio-cultural processes. The specific questions that will be asked about illness and wellness will, of course, be determined by the specific research and intellectual inclinations of the Fellows. Some may be of an epistemological nature. For example, how might our understanding of the biology of disease affect the experience of being ill? We may want to ask questions about how diseases sort themselves out in a population, in social and demographic terms, and what factors play a role in determining this. We might ask about the ways health care delivery varies across different social groups, both in the U.S. and across

borders. Some may be interested in how the media influence our ideas about disease and the factors that influence how the media treats disease. We will want to know how our sense of well-being is shaped by the experience of being ill. Does surviving cancer alter psychological identity? What influences shape the degree of hope and optimism or isolation and loneliness a cancer patient feels?

While the work of some project Fellows may be directly related to a particular disease, others may bring research interests that focus on treatment, through traditional or alternative medical practices, practitioners, or institutions. Still others may be interested in conditions that produce health and well-being, such as improvements in environmental pollution or the process and problems of health education in more- and less-developed societies, or the efficacy of movements that raise awareness of disease. Whatever questions our intellectual backgrounds may predispose us to ask, this project promises an extended cross-disciplinary dialogue that will help us all think more broadly and in new ways about wellness and disease.

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# 2007-2008 PROJECTS

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## UNDERGROUNDS *Underworlds*

by Kevin Rozario  
Associate Professor of  
American Studies &  
Organizing Fellow

The spring semester of 2008 brought the *Undergrounds Underworlds* project to a successful conclusion. During the fall, the group developed an impressive rapport and the colloquium had become an exciting space for rigorous and vigorous debates about undergrounds and underworlds. After a couple of months of introductory work defining the terms of our inquiry, discovering differences as well as intriguing analytical and methodological correspondences between the many disciplines represented in the group, we concluded the fall semester by establishing a theoretical vocabulary to deepen our discussions, to establish bridges across our various disciplines, and to ensure that our conversations built productively on each other week by week.

To launch the second semester we began with a reading of key works weaving scientific, cultural, and historical inquiries (including a foundational essay by William Cronon that carefully linked geological, environmental and social perspectives). We also sponsored a showing of the classic 1927 silent gangster movie Josef von Sternberg's *Underworlds*, with live music by the Alloy Orchestra, for a packed house at the Academy of Music Theatre. Michael Thurston and Kevin Rozario offered presentations on the history of social and criminal underworlds as well as avant garde cinema to situate the movie as a text that revealed convergences between underworld mythologies, artistic undergrounds, and subterranean social worlds.

We had dearly hoped to follow this with a field trip to Howe Caverns in New York but were foiled by winter weather. A smaller group was able to visit the caves at the end of the semester thanks to the organizational work of Bosiljka Glumac who also arranged and hosted a conference on the geology of caves at Smith College. We were fortunate that several participants visited our seminar. Stephanie Schwabe, for example, shared her experiences exploring dangerous underwater caves; it was striking to realize the correspondence between her motivations—the quest for intensity, danger, knowledge—and the claims made by Cronon that undergrounds had long been spaces that encouraged adventure, scholarly inquiry, and the defamiliarization of everyday outlooks. Noticing the extensive use by speakers at the conference of artful photographs, and the circulation of underworld metaphors through some of the talks, we realized once again how thoroughly interconnected cultural and scientific underground explorations were.

Other highlights of the semester included a visit from the influential “underground” hip hop performer Boots Riley (of The Coup) who

led a fascinating discussion about his attempts to connect underground musical styles with a radical activist agenda that owed something to the underground political movements of the 1960s and 1970s. He also offered a well-attended public lecture/performance at John M. Greene Hall, co-sponsored by the Smith Association for Class Awareness. Our last visitor was the writer Barbara Hurd, who offered a public reading of her work (including imaginative retellings of her spelunking adventures) and later led a seminar discussion on cultural and material undergrounds. We concluded the year with a viewing and discussion of Guillermo del Toro's recent movie *Pan's Labyrinth*, which brought together nearly all of the themes of the project: underground adventures, underworld mythology, underground political activity, etc. The resulting discussion made it clear just how valuable an interdisciplinary perspective was to all of us seeking to explain the enduring resonance of underground and underworld spaces.



*Undergrounds Underworlds Faculty Fellows. From left to right Steve Waksman, Kevin Rozario and André Dombrowski. Photo by Jim Gipe.*

Indeed, while visiting scholars and performers helped to energize and frame discussions, the presentations of work by seminar participants (and the conversations that ensued) may have been the most exciting outcome of the year's activities. Presentations on a variety of topics (reading the physical history of underground spaces, theorizing underground guerilla activities, examining digital undergrounds in the age of new media, theorizing the aesthetics and politics of avant garde dance, exploring the activities of underground Polish mathematicians under Nazi occupation in World War II, linking diagnoses of hysteria and shell-shock through an analysis of the trench warfare of the First World War, considering homologies between cultural undergrounds and queer closets, and many more fascinating topics proved to be exciting, illuminating, and inspiring. Members of the project (faculty and students alike) pushed and challenged each other with a vigor rare at Smith College, and did so with extraordinary good humor and mutual respect. A very impressive panel of papers by Candace Clement, Maura Donahue, and Elizabeth Williams for Collaborations Day (and the lively discussion that it produced) was an exhilarating public demonstration of the sort of intellectual work the group had been undertaking all year.

Many of us were sorry when the project concluded, but most of the participants have already put together proposals and abstracts of essays for submission to an edited collection on Undergrounds and Underworlds that we hope to publish as a durable collaborative record of our inquiries.



by Nathanael Fortune  
Associate Professor of Physics & Organizing Fellow

The goal of our project was to work as an interdisciplinary team in identifying and overcoming material and design obstacles to sustainable houses.

Building a sustainable house became the rallying point for broader consideration of ways to construct places differently in the world. Faculty and student Fellows contributed their skills and expertise in a wide array of disciplines, but all moved beyond their own fields to explore overarching questions: What makes the resources that support a community sustainable? How can buildings be designed and produced to maintain ecological balance? How does an environmentally-sustainable, net-energy producing house become an emotionally sustaining “home”? What factors make a collection of individual homes into a community?

Some of our group events included:

- Visits from local farmers and advocates for sustainable agriculture to discuss difficulties in local farming.
- Discussion of Northampton’s “Sustainable Northampton” plan, with particular attention to energy and transportation.
- A review of why efforts to promote resource conservation and sustainability often end up doing the opposite.
- A weekend field trip to the Department of Energy’s “Solar Decathlon” Solar House contest in Washington, DC.
- Presentations and tours with architects, landscape architects, and project managers involved with sustainable design at Smith, in the Valley, and at a national level.

Student Fellows were innovative and productive. Rachel Brown (Mathematics) studied the history and renewed relevance of clotheslines and by-laws that prohibit them. Jessica Wilbarger (Engineering) developed her design for processing household organic waste on-site. Ji Ying Zhao (Biochemistry) studied how agricultural practices affect soil degradation and food production in northern China. Dharana Rijal (Mathematics) examined how the rating criteria for green buildings affect decisions and incentives to make sustainable choices. Najia Ahmed (Engineering) explored how solar energy might provide electricity to Pakistani villages. Dana Gould (Studio Art) explored sustainable art practices, while Piper Hanson (Sociology) made a series of infrared photographs that revealed hidden heat losses. Annie Parker (Economics) wrote the first draft

of a children’s book in which a young girl wishes all the garbage in the world would return to the people who had thrown it away.

Faculty Fellows found new possibilities for collaboration, many of which centered around the construction and siting of a 96-square-foot sustainable house. Susannah Howe (Engineering) and Michele Wick (Psychology) explored how the interior of a house can offer a welcoming environment and promote collaboration and creativity, a collaboration that sparked their proposal for a new first-year seminar. Their sketches and designs, coupled with those of Kirin Makker (Architecture), will be the basis for construction of the house’s interior. Ann Leone examined the siting and setting of the house as part of a vernacular landscape. Paul Voss (Engineering) reported on his current project—developing a kit for experiments on energy efficient building design using the scientific method and scale model development—and contributed greatly to our understanding of the construction, energy efficiency, and aesthetics of sustainable homes. James Lowenthal and Paul Voss applied their understanding of energy transport and scientific problems in general to the “big picture” sustainability issue of transportation in and between communities. Kirin Makker (Architecture) produced an exhibit of two- and three-dimensional pieces that highlighted alternative approaches to defining “significance” in our built environment by bringing attention to the embodied energy of materials. Nat Fortune began construction work on the actual house in his Physics course, *PHY100: Solar Energy and Sustainability*, as a way of researching new methods of reliably constructing small, portable houses out of panels that are easy to build and manipulate. We are hoping to place the house on campus during the coming year while measurements of its passive solar performance take place.

Participating in a Kahn Institute project has been one of our most rewarding academic experiences at Smith. Every week, we learned something that advanced our understanding of sustainable houses, homes, and communities. We believe this kind of free-wheeling and collaborative exploration of related issues to be a critical foundation for any long-term advances—scientific, cultural, psychological—in sustainability, and are grateful for the opportunity the Kahn provided.



*The Sustainable Houses, Homes & Communities Fellows pose with their weaving (which can be viewed at the Kahn Institute) at the final colloquium meeting.*



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# A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR

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## KAHN, JOHN DEWEY, AND ME

It is mid-July and I am sitting in Rick's office here at Neilson, thinking about how my new responsibilities at the Kahn Institute have brought me back, both practically and philosophically, to the very start of my career as a high school English teacher at an extraordinary, alternative school in New York City. The Kahn Institute and that school—the Calhoun School—have much in common. Here are some similarities between the two:

Like Kahn, with its comfortable couches and open spaces, Calhoun was housed in a large, open room, sun-filled and beautifully furnished. There, “specialist teachers” in all the academic subjects sat at individual seminar tables separated from one another by only waist-high bookshelves. Each day we waited in our areas to receive questions from curious and motivated students who moved about, from space to space, speaking about their research or reading, working silently, or getting advice on where they might go next. The workday was completely unstructured and open-ended, and interdisciplinary inquiry came naturally. If a student was reading Blake at my table and she came up against an image that suggested something we didn't know about the chemical properties of a particular flower, she could easily get clarification by dashing over to Calhoun's resident chemist, John Roeder, fiddling with his beakers in the lab area. The school was built on principles of absolute democracy. In an effort to break down traditional power relations, all faculty and staff were addressed by their first names, and teachers and students spent long hours in one-on-one conversations that moved back and forth between schoolwork and personal ruminations. Teachers and students routinely created and composed together, and the school produced all kinds of wonderful collaborations; I once wrote lyrics to a student's musical composition that was then performed by a trio of faculty and students. Another time, a student with an interest in physics, and another in art, collaborated on a beautiful “floating trireme” (with input from a Latin teacher obsessed with ancient nautical vessels) that could shepherd raw eggs, unharmed, from the school roof to the patio. All this collaboration came about naturally through the daily connections and conversations that transpired in the open space.

Calhoun's curriculum approach had its theoretical basis in the work of John Dewey. The school's founder had been a scholar of Dewey at nearby Teachers College, and had constructed a mission statement built on three basic Deweyan principles: The first concerned the students' motivation to study. “Meaningful learning,” wrote Dewey, “must always grow out of voluntary disposition and interest.” Nothing got learned in a permanent way, he asserted, through coercion or bribery. The second principle concerned the interactions of teachers and students: “In all activities,” Dewey admonished, “the teacher must be a learner, and the learner, without knowing it, a teacher—and the less consciousness, on either side, of either giving or receiving, the better.” Finally, the issue of knowledge-connections stood as a fundamental basis of all Deweyan curriculum: “All meaningful learning is interdisciplinary by nature,” he famously proclaimed; and the more deep the study, the more broad the connections.<sup>1</sup>

The second major influence on Calhoun's method and philosophy was the work of William Heard Kilpatrick. Kilpatrick, another early disciple of Dewey's, became famous for a 1918 article entitled “The Project Method,” in which he attempted to operationalize and simplify Dewey's method so it could be applied to real classrooms in real schools. Kilpatrick envisioned an entire year's curriculum built out of what was essentially a series of Kahn projects. Drawing on the research of psychologists like Edward Thorndike and G. Stanley Hall, Kilpatrick proposed having students and teachers formulate self-initiated projects around which deep investigations could take place. The two critical criteria for defining these projects were that they emerge from genuine, “whole-hearted” curiosity and that they unfold collaboratively, through open-ended inquiry.<sup>2</sup>



*Rosetta Cohen, Interim Director*

Having lived with the “Project Method” for five years at Calhoun, it is no surprise that my experience two years ago as a fellow in a Kahn project felt a bit like coming home. I was continuously struck by the similarities of rhythm between the two experiences: the initial excitement when an idea was introduced, the periods of confusion or boredom, the gradual coming together of disparate pieces, the final sense of satisfied completion—of having created something better than the sum of its parts. And then, of course, there was what Dewey calls, “the democratic form of association”—the intimacies across age and experience that came from arguing as equals, eating and laughing together, and sharing our lives with one another. If nothing else had come out of our year-long sessions, the newfound friendships and connections would have still justified the time together. But of course, good, concrete work did come out of the group: plays and poetry, interesting research studies and books.

The world has changed a good deal since those halcyon days at Calhoun. Progressive education has been trumped by No Child Left Behind, and Calhoun, to attract 21st century families, has erected walls and a more conventional curriculum. But the ideals of Dewey and Kilpatrick are as true now as they were then, and they live on at the Kahn Institute. Kahn is an intellectual refuge from a bottom line world—and I'm so happy it exists. If you haven't participated in a Kahn project, I do hope you will consider doing so. You won't forget the experience.

<sup>1</sup> John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York: McMillan, 1916).

<sup>2</sup> William Heard Kilpatrick, “The Project Method,” *Teachers College Record*, 19 (September 1918): 319–334.