

Fall 2019

Kahn Chronicle: Fall 2019

Smith College, Kahn Liberal Arts Institute

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Faculty, Staff Invited to Apply for 2020-21 Yearlong Projects

In 2020-21, the Kahn Institute will host two yearlong projects that each address pressing global issues of today and tomorrow. The Kahn invites all faculty and staff, as well as Five College faculty, to attend upcoming Information Sessions for its 2020-21 projects *Imagining Climate Change* and *Technophilia/Technoskepticism*.

Smith faculty and staff, and Five College faculty, are invited to apply online for fellowships in the projects (see project application information below). Students will be invited to apply for the projects in January 2020. (See page 3 for complete project descriptions.)

Imagining Climate Change: From Slow Violence to Fast Hope

Imagining Climate Change: From Slow Violence to Fast Hope, organized by Lily Gurton-Wachter, English Language and Literature, and Michele Wick, Psychology, will bring together scholars in the wake of Smith's thematic year on climate change to ask how climate change forces—and inspires—us to shift our habits of thought, representation, and communication. How does climate change both come out of, and ask us to rethink, a long tradition—in science, literature, economics, philosophy, and

art—of conceptualizing and observing the relationship between humans and the natural world.

Apply for *Imagining Climate Change* by Friday, October 11, at <https://form.jotform.com/KahnLiberalArtsInstitute/ClimateChangeApp>



Technophilia/Technoskepticism Information Session, Wednesday, Sept. 18, 5-6 p.m., Kahn Institute

Technophilia/Technoskepticism, organized by Jon Caris, Environmental Science and Policy, and Dana Leibsohn, Art, examines the far- and long-reaching implications of innovation as technologies—past, present, near-future and as yet unimagined—change the world. This project will invite discussion about creativity and data, machines and knowledge production. How have people, individually and collectively, grappled with the virtues and transgressions of new technologies? How do our

positions on technology shape our senses of self and our relationships to that which is not human?



Apply for *Technophilia/Technoskepticism* by Friday, October 11, at <https://form.jotform.com/KahnLiberalArtsInstitute/TechnophiliaApp>

2019-20 Short-term Projects Reflect Climate Change Theme

In support of the college's Year on Climate Change, the Kahn Institute will host or co-host a series of short-term projects this academic year developed around climate change themes, as described below. The Kahn intends for these projects to extend and sustain the work of the annual theme, and will carry over to the yearlong project, *Imagining Climate Change*, in 2020-21 (see above). Read project descriptions at www.smith.edu/academics/kahn-institute/projects. Smith faculty and staff, and Five College faculty are invited to apply for participation in these projects throughout the year.

1. Light, Brick, Jute, Earth: Younès Rahmoun, 1996-2021* —September 19-21

A convening with Moroccan Artist Younès Rahmoun in conjunction with the Museum of Art, organized by Emma Chubb, curator of contemporary art. A public performance by Rahmoun will take place on Thursday, September 19, at 5:15 p.m. on the bank of Paradise Pond near the Japanese Garden.

*In conjunction with the annual project *Excavating the Image: Habba (Seed)* by Younès Rahmoun—December 7.

2. Climate Inherits Us All—October 17 and November 15-16 Organized by Elisa Kim, Art, and Dana Leibsohn, Art. Apply online: <https://form.jotform.com/KahnLiberalArtsInstitute/ClimateInheritsAPP>

3. Social Ecology: Rethinking the Interdependence of Individuals, Communities and the Environment

—February 21-22, 2020

Organized by Ellen Kaplan, Theater, and Michele Wick, Psychology.

4. Making an Eco-Socialist Garden at Smith College: A Faculty Workshop with Artist Zheng Bo—April 4-5, 2020

Organized by Rosetta Cohen, Lewis Global Studies Center

5. Telling Time—May 14, 2020

Organized by Bosiljka Glumac, Geosciences. A revisitation of the Kahn yearlong project *Telling Time*, 2009-10.

2019-20 Long-Term Projects

Student Fellowships Awarded

The following Smith students have been awarded fellowships in connection with the Kahn Institute's 2019-20 long-term projects

TranslationS

Fellows in the yearlong project *TranslationS*, organized by Nalini Bhushan, *Philosophy*, and Janie Vanpée, *French Studies*, examine not only the traditional practice of translation in the literary field, but also to its role in a wide range of disciplines, as well as to its capacity to animate conversation across disciplines.



Student Fellows in *TranslationS* are:

- Kendall Futrell '20, *Philosophy*
- You Jeen Ha '20, *Philosophy* and *Computer Science*
- Audrey Jiang '20, *Neuroscience*
- Kelly Lincoln '20, *Comparative Literature*
- Ilse Meiler '20, *Chemistry* and *Russian, Eastern European and Eurasian Studies*

Fear

The yearlong *Fear* project, organized by James Lowenthal, *Astronomy*, and Kevin Rozario, *American Studies*, aims to address the power of fear—to destroy and subvert, but also to create. What is fear? Who benefits from fear? Who promotes it, and why and how? What are the hidden costs? How does fear figure into current events on campus, in the U.S., and worldwide?



Student Fellows in *Fear* are:

- Nina Maxine Gunther-Segal '21J, *Sociology*
- Amanda Jiang '20, *Psychology*
- Emma Kelley '20, *Biological Sciences*
- Patience Kayira '20, *English Language and Literature*
- Mieko Kuramoto '20, *Spanish* and *American Studies*

All Faculty and Staff Invited: Autumn Party on the Porch, Sept. 26

Autumn has arrived, classes are in session and the Kahn apple tree is in full bloom—it must be time for another Kahn Party on the Porch!

The Kahn invites all Smith faculty and staff to help us celebrate fall on Thursday, September 26, 4:30-6 p.m.

Join us at 21 Henshaw Avenue (across from Henshaw Complex) on our wraparound porch for a celebration with Smith friends, great music, delicious appetizers and a variety of libations.



Kahn Party on the Porch
Thursday, September 26, 4:30-6 p.m.

For many at Smith, fall isn't quite here until that initial "Kahn-tail" has been savored. This year's liquid concoctions may be tastefully garnished with fresh apple slices thanks to the apple tree proudly bearing fruit in the Kahn Institute's side yard.

Come help us make fall official in Kahn fashion. Drop by to say hi or stay the entire time.

On the porch, rain or shine.

Scenes from 2018-19 Inside and Outside the Kahn Institute



2020-21 Yearlong Project Descriptions

Faculty and Staff Now Invited to Apply

Imagining Climate Change:

Organizers: Lily Gurton-Wachter, *English Language and Literature*; Michele Wick, *Psychology*

A recent article in *Nature Climate Change* examined the impact of marine heat waves on ocean life. The swelter, fueled by an excess of greenhouse gases, has killed coral reefs, sea grasses, and kelp forests. These foundational species feed and shelter a plethora of aquatic creatures. The impact of their loss is a far-reaching emergency; but for humanity, their demise is mostly out of sight and mind.

In his 2011 book *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, Rob Nixon compares conventional depictions of violence as explosive, immediate, and visible, to the effects of climate change, which can be distant and indistinct and thus hard to perceive and imagine. Despite these representational obstacles, Nixon insists that we view climate change's incremental calamities as violence. His plea comes with an urgent question. How, he asks, "in an age when the news media venerate the spectacular, when public policy and electoral campaigns are shaped around perceived immediate need, can we convert into image and narrative those disasters that are slow-moving and long in the making, anonymous, starring nobody, attritional and of indifferent interest to our image-driven world?"

Taking our cue from Nixon, this yearlong Kahn seminar will bring together scholars from across the disciplines to ask how climate change forces—and inspires—us to shift our habits of thought, representation, and communication. We will develop a conversa-



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tion among students and faculty from across the curriculum to rethink both the complex histories of how we have gotten here, and the urgent question of where we are going. How, we will ask, does climate change both come out of, and ask us to rethink, a long tradition—in science, literature, economics, philosophy, and art—of conceptualizing and observing the relationship between humans and the natural world? What might we all gain from moving beyond our disciplinary comfort zones and approaching the environment from an inter- or multi-disciplinary view? How is climate change inextricable from other crises—social, economic, political, or scientific? How does it draw our attention to the world's most vulnerable populations? How does it intersect with questions of race, class, or gender, and with a variety of political and social histories?

We believe that recognizing the slow violence of climate change is urgent work. However, clarity can prompt a retreat from the heartache and hopelessness inherent in socially and scientifically complex problems with uncertain futures. Our wish is that, during this yearlong interdisciplinary conversation, we will probe the magnitude of this slow violence while daring to envision and nurture the hope that turns indifference into action. For if slow violence prompts us to transform our thinking, this project is inspired by the wish that such a transformation will also allow us to imagine new futures and offer a starting-point for hope.

Technophilia/Technoskepticism

Organizers: Jon Caris, *Environmental Science and Policy*; Dana Leibsohn, *Art*

When technologies change the world, what happens? From moveable type to drones, prison architecture to bioinformatics, innovation has long tested our ethics, if not also our ways of being human. What, then, are the implications of innovation?

Thinking expansively about technology and its work in the world, this yearlong Kahn project invites discussions about creativity and data, machines and knowledge production. Among the questions we seek to address: how have people, individually and collectively, grappled with the virtues and transgressions of new technologies? How do current habits of thinking with—and depending upon—technology differ from those of the past, or those we imagine for the future? How do our positions on technology shape our senses of self and our relationships to that which is not human?

When this seminar begins in 2020, the Internet of Things (IoT) and 5G increasingly promise to shift daily lives—in conjunction with, and through resistance to—myriad older technologies. Today's pace of change may be distinctive, but innovation and inequality have sparked each other for centuries. Moreover, we know technologies can produce inequality, but what about the other way around: what are the effects of inequality on technological innovation? Alongside



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this question, we will explore and challenge underlying presumptions that fuel public discourse on technological "progress." Because social technologies lead into unexpected terrain, and, consequently, force policy reform, we expect to discuss security and surveillance, but also social media's effect on friendship and changing concepts of intellectual property. With an eye on different geographies and historical settings, we will consider analog technologies and nostalgia as well as specific technologies (e.g., CRISPR, AI, smart phones but also fax machines, eyeglasses, and cotton gins). Our inquiry will lead us to philosophy and ethics. It will also involve hands-on work and critique—perhaps with drones or video games, farm equipment and sensors that bear witness to climate change.

In taking up the contested spaces produced by innovation, this project invites people eager to think about how distinct communities consume/ produce different technologies and the issues these practices raise. We are interested in both affect and effect, especially for those anchored in higher education. The project welcomes colleagues interested in any aspect of the history of innovation, whether their primary questions are bound to algorithms, anabiosis, or the arts.

A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR

A is for Apple...

When the Kahn moved into its newly renovated space three summers ago, we were excited about many things, but most surprising among them was the apple tree in the backyard of 21 Henshaw Avenue. Our project manager had grown up in the Pioneer Valley in a family of orchardists, and, apropos of one of the yearlong projects here this year, he “translated” the tree for us, pointing out that someone (or some number of people over time) had carefully grafted several different varieties onto the single tree. We enjoyed every one of them, but we were also told that we should not expect the same bounty the following year. The tree was likely to go quiet for a year, as apple trees can, bearing fruit only biennially. Our major regret was that the *Food* project of last year didn’t have the opportunity to use the apples in their work, since they seemed to be using just about every other available ingredient, every week offering new tastes and aromas (and, no, it was not, strictly speaking, a cooking class). The apples are back, ripening day by day in our backyard. At the opening night dinner for the student fellows’ research workshop, one of the fellows offered to make an apple pie, a generous offer of sharing expertise and resources that seems very Kahn appropriate, and proves we are back online for the academic year.



the annual CHCI meeting. This year the conference theme was “Cultural Interventions,” and attendees thought about this through the complex histories that the host city, Dublin, had to offer. One thread weaving throughout the conference was a critical reevaluation of how the humanities offers itself up to and engages with the world. Wearing one of my other hats, that of a co-convenor of Humanities and Arts Strategic Planning here at the college, I was glad to be in the company of others who were also worried about the undermining of the humanities as a function of public misperceptions of liberal arts education writ large—and as energetic about addressing it as we are at Smith. There is, it seemed from the presentations and discussions in Dublin (including one very illuminating one

by James Shulman, the chief operating officer of the American Council of Learned Societies, and a former Smith trustee), a consensus that, for those of us at liberal arts colleges, the turn toward public humanities seems inextricable from the sustaining of robust humanistic practices within our curriculum, and that sustaining humanistic practices is vital to sustaining the liberal arts *in toto*. The Kahn’s projects are a model of such sustenance. No field, no division, no method has primacy over any other, and, although each fellow arrives with an individual project, the culture produced over the year enables exactly the kind of interdisciplinary blue sky research and conversation across humanities, arts, social sciences and STEM that is key to what Pomona president Gabi Starr, in her presidential colloquium last spring called “human flourishing.” Indeed, just the other day in *Inside Higher Ed*, Colby College English Professor Aaron R. Hanlon wrote about how the Kahn was instrumental in changing his mind about such centers as mere luxuries, rather than part of the solution. At a conference at Colby at which I presented last year, he saw the case study of the Kahn as a model for solving the crisis in the humanities through a liberal arts engagement in interdisciplinarity. He writes, “I’ve suggested that one of the barriers to making what the humanities do more coherent for the public is often a lack of common understanding among academics across disciplines. To the extent humanities centers, like the Kahn Liberal Arts Institute, can create a framework for people in different fields to work collaboratively while teaching one another about their disciplinary approaches, our colleagues in the natural and social sciences can learn first-hand what humanistic work entails—and what kinds of problems it’s poised to solve.” Again, I assert the Kahn is a platypus, but Hanlon’s point is well taken.

Continued next page

The Kahn is a busier place than one might think in the summer. We continue to host on-site writing groups supporting Smith and Five College faculty, providing them a space to work, as well as a community of similarly committed colleagues alongside whom to do that work. Once a week in July, at lunch time, we have “Kahn-certs” on the porch. Bad pun, maybe, but these are some very fine quickie classical concerts by young musicians (aged about 9 to 18) participating in the Lyra Music Workshop and Festival, which has a summer residence at Smith. These musicians, most too young for college, are nevertheless doing something at the Kahn that picks up the threads of the academic calendar: they are experimenting (playing outside, usually for the first time, often calling on new reservoirs of focus and concentration), and playing in ensembles with people they have only just begun to know, learning, growing, collaborating. The effects for those around them, both the intentional audiences and those who cock their ears as they walk by, wondering where the music is coming from, are restorative.

The Kahn is a member of the Consortium of Humanities Institutes and Centers—even though we are enthusiastically, voraciously interdisciplinary, and always have to declare our platypus nature at CHCI events—so I come back to the Lyra concerts fresh from

A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR

A is for Apple...(continued)

That multi-disciplinary problem posing was happening all over 21 Henshaw last week when the student fellows of *Fear* and *TranslationS* were in the house for their Labor Day weekend research workshop. Majors in Sociology, English, Computer Science, Comparative Literature, English, American Studies, Biology, Psychology and Spanish gathered to refine their projects and develop a collaborative intellectual community. Many of their undertakings will require more than scholarly focus—they will require the whole person to be committed to ideas designed to help heal the world. Work to develop better understanding of how undocumented youth develop resilience is emerging alongside of, and in conversation with, considerations of what happens when human experience is transformed into data. New ways of thinking about authenticity are conversing with emerging histories of intergenerational trauma understood epigenetically and socio-culturally. In their final presentations of the workshop, I saw scholars manifesting in their feedback the kind of curiosity, rigor and compassion for new and still vulnerable sets of ideas that the academy sometimes forgets is the best way to get to the most powerful version of our work. And considering the seriousness of so much of what was at stake, there was a lot of laughter in our hallways over our four days together.

This year, the entire Smith campus will be turning its collective attention to the single most important issue the world faces. Failing to address the multiple challenges of climate change leaves nowhere and no one to address any of the other seemingly intractable problems we face. And as we know, these other problems

are often inextricably interwoven with climate change. Almost all of the short-term projects we are running this year will be focused in one way or another on this theme. *Climate Inherits Us All* runs this fall, and *Social Ecology* runs this spring. Our usual collaboration with the Smith College Museum of Art, *Excavating the Image*, will also turn in this direction as we look at work by the Moroccan artist, Younès Rahmoun, and an April collaboration with the Lewis Global Studies Center will center on a visit from Hong Kong-based artist Zheng Bo. The upside of campus-wide themes is an intense focus by many people on a very large idea. The downside is the sense that after a year there's nowhere else to put that energy. So, next year, along with *Technophilia/Technoskepticism*, the Kahn will be supporting *Imagining Climate Change: from Slow Violence to Fast Hope*, as a way of extending the conversations.

Where there are challenging conversations, there should also be space for its opposite, so I hope you will come to the Kahn to celebrate a new year, new projects, and a new crop of apples with which to garnish our Kahn-tails, on Thursday, September 26.



Alexandra Keller, Professor of Film and Media Studies

Kahn People

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