

NEW THEMES AT THE JACKMAN HUMANITIES INSTITUTE

Each year the Jackman Humanities Institute (JHI) organizes many of its activities around a theme. Fellowships (12-month Faculty Research, Mellon Postdoctoral, Graduate Dissertation, Undergraduate) and the Programs for the Arts are selected with the themes in mind. For the first three years the themes were

- Telling Stories (2008-2009)
- Pressures on the Human (2009-2010)
- Image and Spectacle (2010-2011)

The Advisory Board of the JHI will now be picking annual themes for the three subsequent years, and we are eager to hear your suggestions. Each theme should reach across multiple disciplines and offer focus to leading research in the Humanities. Please e-mail your suggestions to the JHI (humanities@utoronto.ca) by 12 February 2010.

Appendix of Previous Themes

2008-09: Telling Stories

Making sense of our world depends on the practice of narrating events. In both oral and written traditions, and ranging from the historian's monograph to the epic poem, a film or a single painting—the activity of telling stories serves as a topic for diverse kinds of scholarly inquiry. Humanities research explores various modes of telling and the social, political, epistemological and ethical implications of how and why stories are told.

2009-10: Pressures on the Human

Today humanists must contend with a fundamental question: Is the object of our scholarship – Humanity – still a valid category? This question arises from pressures that challenge the distinctions that make us human beings. Some of these pressures arise from science, medicine, and technology: how are we to understand the distinction of being human when our physical activities can be recognized as part of animal biology, when our physical make-up is governed by the biochemistry of DNA, when our mental capacities are interwoven with those of computers and artificial intelligence? Can progress in medicine and technology replace the various functions that have historically and theoretically made the human distinct? Using various approaches to study the artistic and scholarly records of the past and present, humanities scholars explore these pressures.

2010-11: Image and Spectacle

Human beings make worlds appear by imagining and “imaging” it; they display worlds to others in performances. This cross-cultural theme embraces the study not only of how images relate to the reality of the world, but also of how both as individuals and as societies we generate images. The spectacle of performance, which was the origin of theory in the Ancient Greek world, leads to many kinds of reflection--from performativity to epistemology, from theories of history to literary and aesthetic theory, from cultural criticism to paleography. It extends ultimately to examining the role of reflection (speculation) and criticism of images and their worlds.