

Congress 2014 - Reflections

This year I attended the Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences at Brock University. I did so, in part and as usual, as a member of the Canadian Historical Association, but also in another role as Scholar-in-Residence with the University of Alberta Press, which was a new and exceptional experience.

At the heart of the annual congress of scholars is the introduction and exchange of new ideas, discoveries, and knowledge, with critical scrutiny and debate in return. As a photography historian, I was interested to hear a scope of papers from both emerging and established historians engaged with questions of First Nations, immigrant, and western Canadian histories; learn more about the potential for truly trans-disciplinary research contemplated by means of the philosophies and tools of Digital Humanities; and hear about the Conference Board of Canada's project on re-conceptualizing the Canadian post-secondary sector in national terms. The speakers in the Big Thinking Series were stimulating, especially Lise Doucet on the significance of stories in a globalized world, Lise Bissionnette on the nature of the university, David Plotz on journalism in the internet age, and Lawrence Hill on social ideas of blood.

As Scholar-in-Residence, I am tasked to explore and consider the issues and imaginative solutions being debated by scholars, editors, academic press directors, and the Federation in relation to research publication. At Congress 2014, these included open access, copyright, technology, and the economics of research dissemination in the humanities and social sciences. I discovered that the book fair is not just about giving scholar's easy access to new and back titles published in Canada by their colleagues, both Canadian and international; it is also about editors attending sessions to remain abreast of new and maturing scholarship, advising scholars on publishing, and for those publishing professionals to meet, debate, discuss, and help shape the directions of that sector that supports and disseminates academic research, a sector which both technology and new ways of thinking and working in the humanities and social sciences are causing and enabling new ways of working to emerge.

Meeting new, established, and senior "retired" yet active scholars from every field represented at Congress, as they visited the UAP booth and talked about their research, books they discovered on the shelves, and future directions of scholarship and dissemination, made for a truly trans-disciplinary intellectual congress that reaffirmed the passion, quality, scope, and radical thinking of humanities and social science scholars in Canada that is reshaping our culture, public policy, and society.

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