

Winter School 2025 Travel Grants Call for Proposals

The Institute of the Humanities and Global Cultures (IHGC) is pleased to participate in the [Winter School](#), a collaborative endeavor spearheaded by the [Centre for Humanities Research](#) (CHR). CHR describes Winter School as creating a space for discussion, presentation and response to questions around the humanities, the philosophy of history, and the challenges of critical theory. It is also committed to a sustained critical engagement with texts, theory and concepts; to exploring genealogies of thinking and critique; and to the consideration of how individual work relates to these concepts and arguments. Although sensitive to the present conjuncture of the post-Apartheid situation, Winter School remains committed to thinking beyond the geographical and historical frameworks of the South African particular.

With generous support from UVA Global in the Office of the Provost, IHGC will continue its participation in Winter School 2025, scheduled for **July 7th – July 11th** in **Cape Town, South Africa**. The theme will be **Freedom, Techne/Technics, Postcoloniality**. IHGC welcomes applications from graduate students and faculty in the College of Arts & Sciences. Up to eight students will be chosen as Graduate Student Fellows, and up to three faculty members will be chosen as Faculty Fellows. Fellows will be chosen by an IHGC selection committee on the basis of the quality of their scholarly work and how their current research speaks to the Winter School 2025 theme and guiding questions. Graduate Student Fellows will participate in a shared set of readings prior to Winter School and discuss their research during the Winter School session. Faculty Fellows will be asked to give talks at Winter School that address some aspect of the Winter School theme. Participants are expected to be active and present for all Winter School events and sessions. The IHGC will arrange for travel to/from Cape Town and for the official accommodation during the session, as well as a per-diem for any meals not already provided by CHR.

Application Process:

- Eligibility: As Winter School is focused on graduate students training, eligibility is limited to doctoral candidates who have completed their qualifying exams and tenured/tenure-track faculty members within the College of Arts & Sciences.
- Selection: A committee of past Winter School participants and representatives from the IHGC and Office of the Provost will select Fellows based on quality of work and relevance of research to the current theme.
- Application Process:
 - Please complete the [Graduate Student Application](#) or [Faculty Application](#) by **Friday, March 28**.
 - Application consists of brief statements on research interests and alignment with the theme (see below), an abbreviated CV, and other demographic information. See the appropriate application for complete details.
 - To assist in preparing for the application process, an information session will be held on **Friday, March 7th at 1pm**. [Register here](#).

Winter School 2025 Theme: Freedom, Techne/Technics, Postcoloniality

The current conjuncture problematizes the role and function of freedom in the world. In 2025 in South Africa, we remember the 200th anniversary of the Galant Rebellion, a slave revolt that explored the meanings, powers, and actions of freedom in the face of a global discourse on abolition—a failed rebellion that haunts the possibilities of the concept of freedom. Globally today, the wager on identity as the ground for the political is increasingly shifting towards an exclusionary politics of exceptionalism, built on a mythic figuring of ethno-national identity. This is an old script, familiar in its repetition, and perhaps unique in its speed and intensity. Its familiarity can be sensed in the urgent words of Frantz Fanon when he laments the repetition of the Wretched of the Earth, the rooting of identity to place that forecloses on the inventiveness of the postcolonial, even while its uniqueness is perceivable in the refiguring of the human through rapidly enfolding digital ecologies. This moment does not pit the human against technology or situate us in a zone of aesthetic education where the latter is thought of as an antidote to the more techno-empiricist renderings of the world. Rather, we would suggest that the improvisation of the human has always tended in multiple directions, and that our task at hand might be to attend to the quality of freedom that makes a certain kind of improvisation possible. Freedom as a technology, freedom as a practice, freedom as an emancipatory concept. Perhaps.

For our 2025 Winter School, we propose to abide by this question of freedom, lodged as it is at the heart of postcoloniality, at the motile edge between techne and technics.

In framing this question, we suggest that the question of freedom is at the heart of what constitutes the human insofar as human beings are said to possess free will and have the capacity to act in ways that contravene our animal natures. Freedom, in this understanding, is about capacity. In particular, the capacity to possess a power of decision that works in distinction to urges/instinct/nature that are framed as definitively biological. In this way, freedom is the defining condition of what makes the human, and the stakes of freedom resonate through the domains of aesthetic, political, philosophical, and religious inquiry and practice. The human, perhaps, becomes a name for this extra-biological capacity. As Hannah Arendt argues, in her short essay “What is Freedom?” (*Between Past and Future* 2006: 143–171), while a residue of freedom exists in every present, its full political capacity is activated only in the moment of action, an “infinite improbability,” that invents a swerve in the tendency of destruction (2006: 169–171). Yet, freedom has too often been narrowly defined against tyrannical sovereign power, following the classical republican tradition, which is premised on a reductive opposition to imposed (external) law. Freedom, we suggest, might have a materiality and a potentiality that exceeds its common conceptualization, what Adorno might call an emphatic quality, and the political exists in creating conditions for an act that might realize that excess. Freedom, here, might be figured as quality rather than as capacity.

In fact, understood as moral autonomy, freedom is what determines both individual agency and individual responsibility; therefore, any ethical theory of the individual has to assume that she is free to act and therefore is answerable for her actions. As Kant would argue, freedom is the acceptance of one’s autonomy—self-legislated rule—the free acceptance of law that the subject gives to herself.

This dialectic between freedom and law is the paradox of freedom itself, and it exists at the foundation of democratic cultures for which the free acceptance of law is what protects the minority from the will of the majority, just as it exists within the improvisational possibilities of free jazz, which are realized in conversation with conventional phrasings and musical architectonics, just as it exists in the open possibilities of free verse, which only are obtained in the sublation of meter and rhyme. With such a framing Winter School 2025 takes the concept of freedom as its organizing theme and invites contributions from faculty and advanced graduate students in the humanities and interpretive social sciences.

We would welcome students whose work considers questions along the lines outlined above, and specifically:

- What are the stakes of a concept of freedom for the humanities today?
- How do technological constraints limit the possibility of such concepts?
- What is left of postcolonial concepts of freedom?
- Is a possibility of “freedom without handrails” possible?