

Technologies of the Human: Assembling the Subject of Rights
Special issue of *Literature*

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Rights discourses have become a primary “technology” of the human, across the globe. That is to say, we recognize others, as human beings, through an international language of rights and the institutions and infrastructures that disseminate it, even as the actual legal and juridical protection of human rights remain profoundly uneven and limited - in the scope of their protections and of their political imaginaries. Since at least the eighteenth century, literature and other expressive cultural forms have served as resources for, at turns, imagining the human subject of rights, fortifying a universalizing discourse of the human person, or challenging, particularizing, and pluralizing the forms that the human subject takes.

For this special issue of *Literature*, we invite submissions that investigate relationships between international human rights, on the one hand, and literary and cultural production on the other, with a particular focus on the myriad modern technologies that articulate them with one another. We understand “technology” in three different ways. By “technology,” we mean firstly to call attention, in the conventional sense of the term, to the application of scientific knowledge in manufacturing, information and communications, biomedicine, transportation, and other forms of material infrastructure. Hence, by examining technologies of the human through rights and literary discourses together, we seek to examine how technological advances generate new forms of surveillance, discipline, and suffering but also new possibilities of human subjectivity, agency, and sociality. Secondly, we want to explore the role of different symbolic, discursive and, specifically, literary technologies in sedimenting, disturbing or expanding the imagination of what it means to be and become human, particularly in relation to technology in the first sense. And thirdly, we wish to emphasize the notion of a human *techne*, wherewith we understand practices that constitute a “making” or a “doing” that creates new possibilities for the human and human rights. Emerging from the lived experiences and struggles of specific subjects, social and cultural discourses – for example, transnational feminist or disability studies – render legible otherwise marginalized or occluded subjects and genealogies of human rights. Further, the claims that these subjects make can give rise to new *kinds of rights*. To this end, we encourage contributors to approach social discourse and movements as themselves technologies of the human that can transform legal norms and political communities.

“Technologies of the Human” thus probes the myriad ways in which artists and writers re-assemble the human, and contribute to the future forms that human rights will take. In this respect, we especially welcome submissions that consider literary and cultural

traditions from the Global South as well as non-English literatures that prompt us to consider the subject of human rights in robust and heterogeneous terms.

Humanitarianism has certainly proven an especially powerful discursive technology for interpellating Indigenous peoples and postcolonial societies as modern subjects since the nineteenth century. A critique of the "empire of humanity" (Barnett) has accordingly served as a central tenet in scholarship on human rights, humanitarianism and the humanities, a field that has flourished in the past two decades. But beyond this important intervention, we seek contributions that help us imagine the subject of rights beyond the "nothing but human" (Arendt) or "bare life" (Agamben) character ascribed to her. Finally, we invite studies that prioritize genealogies and epistemologies of human rights and human sociality that go beyond the traditional containers of sovereign personhood, sheer political rights, and the "united nations world" (Parikh).

In this Special Issue, original research articles and reviews are welcome. Research areas may include (but are not limited to) the following:

- Visions of what it means to be, or become, human in relation to both human and non-human environments, the role of material and symbolic technologies in mediating these encounters, and different assemblages of the human and technology emerging through these processes
- Humanization of technologies
- The role of material and symbolic technologies in re-working bodies and imaginaries of human beings and their rights and communities
- Representations of social difference (e.g., gender, race, ethnicity, religion, class) and human rights, and the production of these through technological interventions or violence
- Cultures of security and the surveillance state
- Artificial intelligence and machine learning
- Mobile and mobility technologies and histories of forced (im)mobilization
- Ethics of technology
- Genres, poetics, and methods of human rights: poetry, (science) fiction, life-writing, etc. as well as different discourses of humanitarianism and human rights
- Human rights "metrics": how do literature and culture "measure" the good life, understood both in ethical and economic terms
- Literary texts, practices and technologies that pre-figure emergent subjects of rights
- Human *techne* or practices that expand the experiential and ontological sphere of the human

- Poetics and politics of human rights movements and discourses, and the technologization of resistance
- Non-hegemonic notions and genealogies of the human and human rights

Deadline for manuscript submissions: 1 November 2022

Manuscript Submission Information

Manuscripts should be submitted online at www.mdpi.com by [registering](#) and [logging in to this website](#). Once you are registered, [click here to go to the submission form](#). Manuscripts can be submitted until the deadline. All submissions that pass pre-check are peer-reviewed. Accepted papers will be published continuously in the journal (as soon as accepted) and will be listed together on the special issue website. Research articles, review articles as well as short communications are invited. For planned papers, a title and short abstract (about 100 words) can be sent to the Editorial Office for announcement on this website.

Submitted manuscripts should not have been published previously, nor be under consideration for publication elsewhere (except conference proceedings papers). All manuscripts are thoroughly refereed through a double-blind peer-review process. A guide for authors and other relevant information for submission of manuscripts is available on the [Instructions for Authors](#) page. *Literature* is an international peer-reviewed open access quarterly journal published by MDPI.

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