



Call for Papers • International Conference

The Aesthetics of Rights and Wrongs

University of South-Eastern Norway, Drammen • 19-21 June 2023

§

Keynote Speakers

[Jakob Lothe](#)

Professor Emeritus of English Literature, University of Oslo

[James Dawes](#)

DeWitt Wallace Professor of English, Macalester College

[Brenda Werth](#)

Associate Professor and Director of Latin American and Spanish Studies, American University

§

Aesthetic representation is a vital resource in efforts to publicise and redress human rights abuses: violations of the human person which transgress the limits of what is considered legally, morally, and ethically permissible. In their own specific ways, literature, cinema, painting, sculpture, photography, theatre, music, dance, and architecture are all venues for engaging with these violations—but, too often, such engagements are conceived as mere vehicles, or vessels, for communicating the simple *fact* of atrocity, rather than as complex, multivalent negotiations with its various motivations, manifestations, and ramifications. As Nick Mansfield argues, ‘Four main impulses motivate creative works that deal with human rights issues’—to *remember*, to *reveal*, to *remind*, and to *resolve*—all of which bespeak what Mansfield calls the logic of the *secret*, which ‘relies on the idea that the revelation of truth is sufficient ... to trigger action and make clear what that action should be’ (203; 205). By ‘[demoting] the analysis that ... would allow us to lay out the complexity’ of human rights issues today, this approach privileges particular hermeneutic avenues and subject positions and risks rendering aesthetics instrumental and education doctrinal (205).* This event aims



to explore other openings, focusing overdue critical attention on relations between human rights and the specificities of aesthetic engagements with human rights issues.

What purposes are aesthetic engagements with human rights meant to serve? What forms of intellectual and affective response do such engagements inspire? What might be learned from the feelings experienced—from sympathy, via complicity, to revulsion—when we are confronted with human rights issues on page, stage, and screen? How can an appreciation of aesthetics catalyze innovative, purposeful responses to human rights issues prompted by contemporary social, political, and environmental crises? How might such an appreciation contribute to the project of human rights education—both in the classroom and in broader senses of the term? Where and when do aesthetic experiences *themselves* either acknowledge or impinge upon human rights—and to what ends? Can we imagine alternatives to a critical practice founded on the logic of exposure, revelation, and retribution? These are just a few of the questions we look forward to exploring together in June 2023.

We are interested in contributions that address a broad range of topics from a variety of disciplinary perspectives. Potential topics include (but are not limited to):

Authorship, Reception, and Interpretation

- Can the subject(ed) speak? Testifying on behalf of oneself, others, and the ‘othered’
- Affective responses to the representation of human rights violations: sympathy and empathy, revulsion and alienation, voyeurism and complicity
- Implicated subjects: Attributions of responsibility and the aesthetics of guilt
- Beyond the ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’: alternatives to the logic of revelation in critical engagements with representations of human rights violations

Limits, Thresholds, and Horizons

- Beyond the limits of signification: Aesthetic engagements with the ineffable
- Beyond human rights: Posthuman approaches to human rights and wrongs



- The rights and wrongs to come: Current developments and future directions
- Human rights education: Aesthetics, HRE, and the value of critical thinking

The Aesthetics of Human Rights in Practice

- The form of the law: Human rights legislation and literature as aesthetic objects
- Publicity and propaganda: Representing human rights in the name of philanthropy
- Situated bodies: Differential embodiment and the aesthetics of (universal) design
- Performing human rights: Aesthetic practice and the question of enfranchisement

Please submit individual abstracts (300-350 words) and/or panel proposals (450-500 words) through our submission portal by **10 January, 2023**. The portal can be accessed via the following link: <https://nettskjema.no/a/arw23>. Additionally, you will be asked to provide a biographical note (max. 100 words for individual presentations; max. 500 words for panel proposals) detailing your current position(s), research interests, and relevant publications.

The conference will be held at the University of South-Eastern Norway's Drammen campus, roughly 40 minutes from central Oslo, on 19-21 June, 2023. Participation is contingent on payment of a standard attendance fee. For more details, please visit the conference website: www.usn.no/activities/the-aesthetics-of-rights-and-wrongs.

If you have any questions regarding the conference, please feel free to contact the organisers at aestheticsofrightsandwrongs@gmail.com.

The conference will result in the composition and publication of an edited collection. Any participants who are interested in publishing with us should feel free to let us know.

We look forward to welcoming you to Drammen next year. *Tusen takk, og vi sees!*

§

* Mansfield, N. (2011) Human Rights as Violence and Enigma: Can Literature Really Be of Any Help with the Politics of Human Rights? In E. S. Goldberg and A. S. Moore (Eds.) *Theoretical Perspectives on Human Rights and Literature* (217-230). Routledge.