

International Conference

**In the Thick of Images:
Law, History, and the Visual**

Monday 10 & Tuesday 11 June 2024
University of Lucerne

CALL FOR PAPERS

“Suppose that whatever we’ve done, felt, and thought
has always happened in the thick of images.”
(Anand Pandian, *Reel Word: An Anthropology of Creation*)

The ‘visual turn’ has long been turning in critical and cultural studies of law (see Douzinas & Nead 1999). In the past twenty-five years, a growing body of scholarship has evolved that emphasises law’s “constitutive imbrication” (Crawley 2020) with an array of visual forms, and elaborates on the ways in which images “shape and transform legal life” (Sarat et al. 2005). Weaving together an eclectic set of theories, concepts, methods and materials, such studies refuse thin readings of images as merely illustrative of law, and invite us to think more deeply about their ideological and visual operations – about the meanings they carry and make available, about their material presence and affective effects, and about the cultural-political and cultural-legal work they perform across their multiple contexts of production, circulation and reception.

Much of this scholarship focuses on the contemporary conjuncture of law and visibility. Yet law’s imbrication with the visual is not exclusive to the present; law has always lived, happened and mattered “in the thick of images”. This is the starting point for our two-day conference, which seeks to explicitly foreground historical and historicist work on law and the visual. Situated at the disciplinary crossroads of law, history, visual cultural studies, art history, film and photography studies, *In the Thick of Images* invites multiple viewpoints and approaches to converge on ways of negotiating the entanglements of law, history and the visual – in various contexts, scales and timeframes.

From this broad perspective, we would like to set out three main lines of discussion. First, we welcome proposals that delve into ‘thick’ descriptions of visual images in their historical and discursive context(s). With W.J.T. Mitchell, we encourage contributors to think not only about what these images show and mean, but also what they ask of – or ‘want’ from – the viewer (Mitchell 2005). What prompts do they give? What emotions do they evoke? What acts of encounter and spectatorship do they enable? What “experience” (Manderson 2012) of law and justice do they provide? In short, we aim to gather a cross-section of situated case studies in order to develop a richer sense of the historical stakes of legal images, and of the nuanced vocabularies needed to appraise the cultural-legal work they do – both in the initial context of their production and reception, and across subsequent contexts of circulation, appropriation and display.

Second, we invite contributions that consider the traffic of legal images at specific sites and moments, and which locate these flows within the history of the visual. In particular, we ask for inquiries that connect the study of legal images with historical shifts in visual cultures. How do new visual technologies and practices transform conditions for the circulation of legal images, ideas and ideologies? What new spaces of representation and expression do they create? Which new publics do they bring into being? What are the perceptual changes wrought by new visual media and how do these alter how the law is seen? How do new visual practices and materials reinforce or disrupt the conventional limits of the visible and invisible?

Third, we want to open a space for reflecting on what it means to do scholarship on and in law using visual objects from the past. How might the study of images cultivate new routes into legal history? What stakes are involved when we think law with images, and to what extent does this require a “constant recalibration of the dialogue between law and society, history, visual studies, and theory” (Manderson 2018). Given the inescapability of our own historicity, and given that we too are always “in the thick of images”, we also challenge contributors to think critically about the images we use in our work, their mediums and materialities, and the effects and affects of bringing certain images into circulation in the present.

Across these main lines of inquiry, we hope to gather a diverse group of scholars for lively discussion and exchange. We welcome fully-developed contributions but also works-in-progress, as well as more speculative soundings, interventions and provocations. The overarching aim is to prod convention and to suggest some new routes worth navigating as we continue to think and re-think the connections of law and the visual through history.

Keynote Speakers and Format

The conference will feature a number of keynote lectures (speakers to be confirmed shortly via the [conference webpage](#)) and a series of parallel sessions.

Submission Guidelines

We invite proposals for 20-minute papers on any aspect of the conference theme(s) and warmly encourage scholars of all backgrounds and career stages to apply.

We also welcome proposals for fully-formed panels of 3 x 20-minute papers, roundtable sessions, workshops or other innovative formats. These will be allocated a 90-minute slot within the conference programme. Double sessions (e.g. a panel with six speakers over three hours) may be possible, but only at the discretion of the conference organisers. We encourage those interested in coordinating a session to get in touch as early as possible with any questions or queries.

For fully-formed panels, roundtables or workshops, please submit an abstract of the proposed theme (250 words), titles of the papers, plus biographies of the speakers and chair.

For individual papers, please send an abstract of 250 words and a short biography.

All submissions should be sent to laura.petersen@unilu.ch by Friday 19 January 2024.

Registration

We are pleased to be able to offer free registration to all presenters. Limited spaces may also be made available to other attendees.

Location

The conference will be held at the main campus of the University of Lucerne, Switzerland, which is on the shore of Lake Lucerne and has views across to Mount Pilatus and Mount Rigi in the Swiss Alps. The campus is next to the main train station and across the bridge from the renowned Old Town.

Organisers

Steven Howe (steven.howe@unilu.ch)

Laura Petersen (laura.petersen@unilu.ch)

Nicole Schraner (nicole.schraner@unilu.ch)

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