

Seminar 5

Visualizing Legality: How to Unpack Multimodal Legal Texts

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Representations, visual or verbal, do things with those who create, disseminate, and interact with them, even if they are without intentionality themselves. Images invoke cognitive and affective processes, arguably first on an unconscious level, to perform cultural-political work. When people look at static images, depending on their complexity, they have a sense of immediately 'knowing' what they are about, even when they are mistaken, as has been shown to have grave effects in legal contexts. The immediacy with which visuals are taken in, their polysemy, and their mutability in terms of framing and impact make these cultural artefacts central to the arousal of what I call 'legal feelings'. The formal, material, and generic qualities of images contribute to their creation and interpretation. And the reception of the image depends on whether the viewer agrees with the intended messages, negotiates, or resist them.

This seminar looks at methods for unpacking multimodal legal texts. It introduces a three-part model for the analysis of visual-legal texts that includes 1) contextual analysis and attention to political economy, 2) textual analysis (form-function interpretation) and 3) reception. Given a history of viewing practices that encourage White, colonialist, able-ist, and cis heteronormative gazing, we need to learn to see and appreciate intersectionally.

Readings

- *Beyond the Gaze: Media Awareness for Media Inclusivity* (2023). Script: Greta Olson, Additional script: Lisa Charlotte Friederich, Director: Charlotte Bösling, Graphics: Henrike Terheyden, Camera: Lizzy Geble, Sound: Steph Krah, Production: Melanie Kreitler, Speakers: Donna Liggins, Greta Olson, Hatice Korkmaz, Mohammed Bsaithi, Charlotte Bösling, Felix van Groningen, Jesse Jamal Garip. YouTube. Video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ImJouflk2QA> (8 April 2024)
- bell hooks, 'The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators', in Amelia Jones (ed.), *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader* (Routledge, 2010 [1992]), pp. 107-117
- Greta Olson, 'The Pluralization of Law and Literature', in *From Law and Literature to Legality and Affect* (Oxford University Press, 2022), pp. 25-63