

**Law and the Image, international conference at the Swedish National Library,  
Stockholm, September 24-25, 2010**

The international conference "Law and the Image" at the Swedish National Library in Stockholm, September 24-25, 2010, brought together scholars from Europe, America and Asia to discuss the complex relations between law, media and visual phenomena. The participants in the conference belonged to disciplines such as Art history, Cultural studies, Literary and Media studies, and Law.

The conference opened with a paper by Costas Douzinas (Birckbeck College, University of London) that examined the scopic field and regimes of visibility in phenomenological terms, making the argument that law historical constituted a cognitive and aesthetic field of normative world making. Rather than merely inverting Shelley's dictum that the "poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world", Douzinas argued for the necessity to develop a legal aesthetics. The majority of the papers that followed, tried in various ways to answer this call for a phenomenology of law.

The most immediate way in pursuing such a legal aesthetics was in examining law itself as an aesthetic object. Martin Kayman, Cardiff University, and Gary Watt, University of Warwick, discussed the power of law to produce icons, in the sense of unreadable texts or textiles. Kayman explored how American law circumnavigates the prohibition against public display of religion by (performatively) declaring certain religious texts as "iconic" and thereby transforming a text into an illegible image. Watt analysed legal argumentation as a form of dress-making in which the primary purpose is to hide rather than uncover naked reality.

Several speakers at the conference focused on the way that visual art can be used to present political power, but also to question it and to put it into question. Sidia Fiorato, Università di Verona, analyzed the choreography of modern classical ballet, in *Romeo and Juliet*, as a way of reading individual resistance to patriarchal political power. Paul Raffield, University of Warwick, studied the semiotics of Medieval and Early Modern

English portraiture and its capacity both to constitute and to subvert traditional perceptions of law, legality and kingship. Even more problematic are perhaps the legal structures inherent in the artwork (and the artworld) itself. In four different papers – by Ari Hirvonen, University of Helsinki; Max Liljefors, Lunds universitet; Christine Poggi, University of Pennsylvania; and Karen-Margrethe Simonsen, Aarhus Universitet – contemporary artists and artworks were discussed in terms of disclosure and deconstruction of law. Hirvonen discussed the Italian artist Vanessa Beecroft's provocative use of female bodies to uncover the relation between corporality and individuality, which ties the human to both the moral and the legal norm. Similarly, Poggi discussed Santiago Sierra's use of underprivileged people in his artwork, both as ways of disclosing social inequalities and as problematizing the aesthetics of the white gallery space (the white box). Liljefors analyzed how contemporary artists directly or indirectly violate laws not only in order to create art, but also to break into – and become recognized by – the artworld. In several of these artworks, the artist's intention appears to be to criticize the socio-legal order, as for instance in Hasan Elahi's *Tracking Transience* as analyzed by Simonsen. Several of these papers also situated the artworks in the legal phenomenology set up by Douzinas in his opening speech.

The relationship between law and images also has a regulative aspect, as formalized in modern copyright legislation. Several papers focused on the relation between law and the image, either to suggest a widening of its reach (Katarina Renman Claesson, Stockholms universitet) or on the contrary to increase public access to artistic and intellectual works (Merima Bruncevic, Göteborgs universitet, and Pelle Snickars, Kungliga biblioteket, Stockholm). In connection to these papers, there was a very constructive discussion of different kinds of rights, distinguishing individual property rights (usually held by artists and authors) and so-called "related rights" (typically held by media companies).

The last group of papers focused on the use of images and imagery in the legal process, again explicitly returning to the opening call for a legal aesthetics. Daniela Carpi, Università di Verona, analyzed the use of photography in criminal trials and the problematics of contextual fragmentation. Richard Sherwin, New York Law School,

extended this discussion into the domain of moving images from CCTV and video surveillance cameras. In both cases, the presumed naïvete of the legal eye should not remain unchallenged, but instead be exposed as the scopic dress of a legal aesthetics. Examining law on the screen demands a deeper media literacy.

As hopefully may be gleaned from this brief conference report, the papers were interconnected with each other in both fruitful and critical ways. In the eyes of this reviewer, this was a most stimulating and productive conference.

*Leif Dahlberg*