"Law in the Flesh: A Genealogy of the Political Unconscious with Specific Reference to Joshua Oppenheimer’s 'The Act of Killing’”

Humanities Research Centre Seminar

Monday 14 July, 2014, 4.00 – 5.30pm
Conference Room. AD Hope #14 Australian National University

Professor Richard Sherwin, New York Law School

A proper respect for civil order does not mandate the elision of political violence; indeed, it requires that we look for it, at the beginning of state sovereignty. Forgetfulness, or repression, of originary violence invites its return. That is why, in the end, with its insistence upon rational calculation and the neutralization of desire, the vast cleanup operation of liberal theory is bound to fail. Eros is the name we give to the creative force out of which political worlds are made, from bare life, out of the political unconscious known as the flesh of the law. Political states begin in an excess of desire, an explosion of violence and death. If contemporary neo-baroque cultural conditions implicate post-secular possibilities, we will need new interpretive and critical methods and new interdisciplinary alliances to explore their meaning and their scope in regard to contemporary politics and law. Phenomenology, psycho-theology, political theology, visual jurisprudence—these are just some of the emerging categories (or perhaps re-emergent fields) that present themselves to us for further exploration.

Richard K. Sherwin is Professor of Law and Director of the Visual Persuasion Project at New York Law School. He is the author of Visualizing Law in the Age of the Digital Baroque: Arabesques & Entanglements (Routledge: 2011) and When Law Goes Pop: The Vanishing Line between Law and Popular Culture (University of Chicago Press: 2000 [2002]). He edited and contributed to Popular Culture and Law (Ashgate:2006) and co-edited (with Anne Wagner) Law, Culture, and Visual Studies (Springer: 2013), for which he also wrote the introduction. He has written numerous chapters and articles on topics ranging from the interrelationship between law and culture, law and rhetoric, discourse theory, semiotics, political legitimacy, and the emerging field of visual legal studies.

In 2001, Professor Sherwin debuted “Visual Persuasion in the Law,” the first course of its kind to teach law students about the role and efficacy (as well as the pitfalls) of using visual evidence and visual advocacy in contemporary legal practice. In 2005, Professor Sherwin launched the Visual Persuasion Project website, which seeks to promote a better understanding of the practice, theory, and teaching of law through the cultivation of critical visual intelligence.

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This lecture is free, students are encouraged and all are welcome.

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