

The collection's first chapter, authored by the editors Jessica Milner Davis and Sharyn Roach Anleu, expertly introduces all of these themes and methodological questions. As the editors indicate, the emerging field of law and humour offers rich potential for law and society scholars, with its inherent interdisciplinary methodologies drawing upon the humanities, social sciences, and law, and engaging empirical, doctrinal, textual, and narrative and interpretative methods. In its canvassing of the relevant literature and methodological complexities attending this important topic, this chapter alone is worth the price of the book, and should be the starting point for any law and society scholars (re)engaging with the multi-faceted connections between law and humour studies.

Reference

Gleeson, A. M. "Performing the Role of the Judge," 10 *Judicial Officers Bulletin* 57–60.

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Of Comics and Legal Aesthetics: Multimodality and the Haunted Mask of Knowing. By Thomas Giddens. London & New York: Routledge, 2018

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Comics have traditionally been considered to be a children's medium. Up until the late 20th century they were typically short-form, quirky and mischievous; deploying the witty interplay of words and images to tell stories, with speech and thought expressed in word balloon format. The escapades of characters such as Dennis the Menace and Gnasher, Minnie the Minx, Billy Whizz and Johnny Fartpants from *The Beano* (1938) and *Viz* (1979) are not only familiar to older generations but are still entertaining children, and adults, today. Along with the no less playful but more serious superhero genre, exemplified by the UK's *Eagle* (1950–1969) featuring Dan Dare and the earlier creations of American *DC Comics*, Superman (1938) and Batman (1939), they present a complex world in which there is right and wrong, good and evil, crime and punishment. Such visual aesthetic forms increase awareness of 'a multiplicity of dissident perspectives' which stimulate 'free play of the imagination and assist in our understanding of the world through our senses';

with the corollary that 'the communicative power of this sensory information allows for richer intellectual and emotional engagement with objects and concepts as they really are' (Shaw 2019: 28).

Like law, comics use a hierarchical vocabulary of signs, symbols and icons which is synonymous with the symbolic order of inter-subjective relations, and 'produced in the dialogue and discourse all about us: in all the things that we read and say, in the music we listen to, and in the art we grow up with' (Manderson 2003: 93). Accordingly, comic books and the increasingly popular graphic novel format routinely engage with topical issues relating to legality, order, morality and justice, yet have been largely neglected within legal scholarship. In order to rectify this oversight, and as part of the literary, cultural and visual aesthetic turn in law, Thomas Giddens applies a novel means of 'framing' this emerging intertextual or more accurately multimodal field of legal inquiry, by removing the frame. *Of Comics and Legal Aesthetics: Multimodality and the Haunted Mask of Knowing* enlarges the scope of what may constitute a legitimate source for legal research by exploring the multitude of meanings and critical value that the comic medium can bring to law. Rather than focusing on the political and legal content – including their potential as a site for social critique and protest – law and the comic medium are juxtaposed as two examples of the same thing, namely, 'orders of knowing'; being, for example, not only textual and visual but also rational and aesthetic. By traversing, even removing, the interactive boundaries between different orders of knowing, meaning-making and communicating with the world, Giddens claims it may be possible to 'open a space... for an unbounded encounter with law... where we may be free to engage, imagine and create law in a different form' (5, 24).

The visual narratives of comics comprise complex multimodal interactions between written language and the visual language of images, where either one may direct the meaning and/or narrative structure. Just as the 'textual expression of law is visual' (199) yet 'visible descriptions are not reducible to their verbal explanations' (Goodrich 2015: 20), the adoption of 'multiframe' thinking, as opposed to narrow instrumentality, can assist in the interpretation of legal texts and challenge legal doctrine. This is possible because the interplay of forms and modes of presentation mirror the multimodal nature of modern life in which the world is comprised of fragments and division, and multiple modes of being and appearing. Comics mediate between the disorder of the unstructured universe and the multiple structures of knowing in the same way law mediates tensions between competing interests, only without questioning its own premises (xx). This phenomenon is likened to the fragmentation of urban space produced by regulation; described as 'a network of conceptual images to be read by owners,

pedestrians, property developers, politicians and corporations alike' (22, 65). The complex layering of multiple frames comprising 'categories and regulations, nested clauses and conceptual objects', which is responsible for producing statutes and doctrines, provides the context for constituting the legal subject within a conceptual order of 'endless complexities and modalities of knowledge' (23).

Legal scholars are urged to look beyond the rational, inanimate and unresponsive hegemonic forms of 'conscious law', in the knowledge that they 'cannot bring forth objectivity, truth, certainty or moral solution in any meaningful way' (136). Legal texts, for instance, despite their 'bounded creativity' and 'formulaic elegance', 'contain an unknowability that is in constant tension with our presumed ability to decipher them in their entirety' (9, 207). Their 'spectral' character comprises for Giddens a 'haunting by the presence of unknowability', because all forms of knowing are shaped by an ineffable unstructured unconscious (174). However, the comic medium – with its uniquely hybrid nature comprising a multimodal, multiframe and multisensory complexity, navigating and transcending its own limits – exemplifies how law may be reimagined to exceed the boundaries of its own forms and textual confinements. This instinctual entwining of legality, culture and aesthetics enables the disclosure of a new way of knowing, of perceiving the broader outside 'unconscious of law' which, for Giddens, has the capability to 'augur the reformation of law' (xvi),

Comics and graphic fiction represent a new development in the emerging field of law and the visual. *Of Comics and Legal Aesthetics: Multimodality and the Haunted Mask of Knowing* is an intriguing and important addition to the critical, cultural and legal corpus. While drawing on an eclectic collection of readings, influences and images, from Agamben, Foucault, Freud, Goodrich and Legendre to HP Lovecraft, Batman and Judge Dredd, it is not about comics *per se* or law and aesthetics in general. Rather, Giddens is concerned with the episteme of law, and how the constraints and limitations which are imposed on legal discourse can be overcome by embracing an alternative way of conceiving legal categories and constructs. Simply, by acquiring the ability to 'read' comics we are given the tools with which to interrogate the very 'form' of law (196). To summarise, this impressive and original work comprises the persuasive articulation of a set of laudable and ambitious propositions for reimagining law; which, in this era of disenchantment, has significant appeal to both the legal mind and imagination.

References

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Plausible Crime Stories: The Legal History of Sexual Offences in Mandate Palestine. By Orna Alyagon Darr. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019

Reviewed by Ishita Pande, History, Queen's University

This thought-provoking account of sexual assault cases in Mandate Palestine begins with a case heard in 1944 in Haifa District involving a woman assaulted by a stranger at night as she slept on the roof of her home with her infant daughter. The court disbelieved the woman's account. Why was she sleeping "alone"? Why would a stranger assault her in her sleep? Was it not more plausible that the two were already acquainted, and the alleged assault was simply a consensual act gone wrong? The opening anecdote amply clarifies the book's relevance to our times. It also sets up the notion of plausibility as an analytical tool for comprehending "law in action." What made the woman's account implausible to the colonial judge? Did the evidence conflict with the woman's testimony? Or did his incredulity have to do with his view of Arab Muslim villagers, as well as his own understanding of what constituted "normal" sexual behavior?

Whereas a scrutiny of probability or "the correspondence of the evidence with empirical reality" would bring a top down approach to the study of law, and the notion of credibility would entail a focus on the competence and character of witnesses, the pursuit of plausibility (or on which story makes sense in any particular time and place context) is a lens rich in social context. "The plausible story," as Darr puts it, "is an outcome of the interplay between law and culture, and it is predicated on communal perceptions of the legal system and legal proceedings as well as on acceptable standards of normality and deviance, gender, morality, nationality, ethnicity, age, religion and other cultural institutions." (18). Plausibility, with its basis in shared societal knowledge and affect, brings to life the histories of these myriad institutions. The emphasis on plausibility moves away from the scrutiny of