

Introduction: Pictorial Law in a World of Images

We are living in the age of the image. Images are present everywhere in today's world. You don't even need to watch TV, read a newspaper or surf the Internet. Hardly any area of society remains untouched by visualification and visual communications. Images are on the way to taking over from writing as the principal medium of cultural exchange. What side-effects does this have?

This flood of images changes everything – perception, thinking and communication. Because even at the neuro-biological level we perceive and process images in a quite different way to words and text. Images – to mention just a few characteristics – have a much faster impact than words, they are much more emotional and direct. Anyone who is used to communicating with text and words has to re-learn how to think. Because visual communication follows different rules to communication using – spoken or written – words. Like all cultural shifts this flood of images triggers emotional reactions. Visual communication is greeted euphorically as progress – and it is demonised and feared as slipping back into an era of primitive and emotional thinking. So who is right – the optimists or the pessimists? That – of course – is hard to say. What is sure, however, is that the visualification of society – like all things in life – offers opportunities but also embodies risks.

Anyone who wants to read a text-book which guarantees *no* images, graphics or visual overviews, has to pick up a legal text-book or commentary. So far the law is the one area of society which is fundamentally and very deeply sceptical about images and which is vehemently opposed to visualification. No need to be an oracle: the law will find it difficult to hold this hard line in future. The law and lawyers cannot detach themselves fundamentally and long-term from developments in society. They are far too tightly woven into the mesh of society for that. The first signs of *visualification of modern law* can already be discerned.

What does it mean if the law, with its fixation on text, has to accept dealing with images – and actually does so? That is not just an academic question, for discussion in ivory towers. Because whatever happens in the law has very practical and very wide-ranging impacts on all areas of society and on people's everyday lives. So: how does the invasion of images change the law and what does that mean for society?

Pictorial Law

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