



**24<sup>th</sup> International Roundtables for the Semiotics of Law – IRSL  
2024**

**16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> July, 2024 – Keele University UK**

**Organizer: Mark Featherstone**

**IRSL President: Anne Wagner**

***Call for Papers***

**Law in the Age of Permacrisis**

**International Journal for the Semiotics of Law**

**Annual Roundtable**

**16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> July, 2024**

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**Law in the Age of Permacrisis**

In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century Marx and Engels described capitalism's ability to melt and liquify everything solid, thus demonstrating the intimate relationship between modern society and crisis. Later, in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, Schumpeter further addressed the power of economy to ruin all social values, political orthodoxies, cultural traditions, and established legal norms by regarding them as barriers to progress, innovation, and profitability. Hence, crisis becomes about the passage to change despite the protests of those who feel betrayed or left behind by innovation. In this context the tendency towards transformation is inexorable as well as central to the progress of a hyper-

active economic system where the key message is '*change or die*'. However, it is *now* becoming apparent that we are moving beyond this idea towards a different situation marked by whole-system crisis, captured by the idea of *poly-crisis* or *perma-crisis*, where revolutionary change is no longer simply a sign of economic *progress*.

We might say that the age of *perma-*, *poly-*, *perpetual*, or *endless* crisis has been coming for some time in the form of several inter-related crises. Consider recent history: 9 / 11, the war on terror, and the demonstration of the impotence of American power; the 2008 global financial crisis, the consequent period of austerity, and the later cost of living crisis, all contributing to the deepening of social inequalities; Covid-19 and the idea that globalisation is as much about dangerous contagion as free communication; the increasing concern with cyberspace as an environment of uncontrolled algorithmic power, corporate interest, hate speech and social division; the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the return of cold war memories along with the Chinese challenge to American power; and, finally, hovering over everything, perhaps the point of crisis *par excellence* for the late capitalist system, the seeming inevitability of radical climate change. Recalling Derrida recalling Shakespeare, our world seems truly '*out of joint*'.

In this age of disjointedness and disruption we must ask questions about the dominance of the value systems informing law and policy. In the wake of the early-1990s collapse of the communist states, Fukuyama's idea of the '*end of history*' claimed the *finality* of western democracy and free-market capitalism as the *established order* immune to the revolutionary effects of crises. But it appears that this is now over. We are living through the end of the end of history. Far from declaring the '*end of the history*', in the context of the perpetual, endless crisis, alternative value systems antagonistic to this *established order* are everywhere. Thus, we witness the emergence of political parties and leaders resembling Putin's authoritarian master who completely reject the American vision of democracy and freedom and tell people that they will solve the problems of the world through the exercise of their own personal power, charisma, and authority. But there is no consensus in this model and conflict becomes normal. Indeed, this war over visions of the future seems to reflect a deep sense of political uncertainty and unease in the contemporary climate of endless crisis and deepening socio-economic inequalities.

This context sets an enormous challenge to the social and moral legitimacy of the legal order by pulling legal norms into the state of endless crisis. Indeed, the intense demand for 'honesty' in public life *against* the double standards in the application of law seems to embody a social reaction characterised by the questioning of the legitimacy of politico-economic elites in a context of fragmented value systems around social, political, and economic governance. Overall, the critical question is whether there is a danger that the endless crisis will engulf the law creating a generalised state of *anomie* or lawlessness. But then, one might argue, the answer lies in the law. After all, law remains essential, simply because it both reflects and supports the existence of a workable social contract capable of shaping the future. The very legitimacy of law remains essential to avoiding the nightmare scenario where individual freedoms are sacrificed to some conception of public good that appears necessary in a context marked by a sense of emergency. This is, of course, precisely what was set out by Carl Schmitt through his concept of the *sovereign exception*, which became a defence for Nazi dictatorship, and the situation the Italian writer Giorgio Agamben has warned about in various works. In this regard, understanding the relationship between crisis and law is deeply important for thinking about a future free of authoritarian domination.

Given this situation, we invite contributions of panels and papers concerned with the relationship between law and crisis and ways in which this is impacted by and impacts upon society, politics, economy, and culture.

Contributions may address, for example:

- The history of the connection between law and crisis, where law is understood in its broadest sense.
- The ways in which this interaction expresses itself in diverse forms in the present.
- What the future of law might look like in a time of endless crisis.
- The relationship between law and power in the age of permacrisis.
- The social impacts of changing conceptions of norms and values in a period marked by radical, unpredictable change.

- The various theoretical models drawn from Law, Politics, Sociology, and Psychoanalysis that we might think about in order to understand our critical moment.
- The changing nature of the relationship between law, transgression, and criminality in a time characterised by permanent crisis.
- The possibility that crisis is now a new normal and how this might impact upon understandings of the law.
- The future of the law in a time of anomie or lawlessness.

To this end, we invite submission of abstracts of up to 250 words for stand-alone papers. Those wishing to submit proposals for panels should submit a short overview of the theme of the proposed panel and abstracts for the three or four papers making up the panel.

### **Submission of Abstracts**

Abstracts should be submitted to the Keele University conference organising committee led by Professor Mark Featherstone at [IJSLRoundtable2024@Keele.ac.uk](mailto:IJSLRoundtable2024@Keele.ac.uk) for consideration for inclusion in the conference programme.

Selected papers will be invited for publication in a Special issue of the *International Journal for the Semiotics of Law* (Springer) and/or for inclusion in an edited volume of the Law Book Series (*Law and Visual Jurisprudence* - Springer).

The deadline for submission of abstracts and panel proposals is 26<sup>th</sup> January, 2024. Participants will be informed of decisions related to submission by 23<sup>rd</sup> February, 2024.

### **Early Bird tickets for the conference, please see link below:**

<https://estore.keele.ac.uk/conferences-and-events/faculty-of-humanities-and-social-science/school-of-law/law-in-an-age-of-permacrisis-24th-international-roundtable-for-the-semiotics-of-law>