

Rhythms of Law

Saturday 13 March 2021, 9am – 5pm GMT

Online

‘The Beat is Everywhere, But Every Life Has to Find its Own Flow.’ – Jay-Z

The Kent Critical Law Society is happy to announce that the annual Kent Student Critical Law Conference will take place on Saturday 13 March 2021. This year, we have chosen the theme ‘Rhythms of Law’, which we hope will invite interest from students and scholars from different disciplines. KCLS is a student-led society, placing emphasis on upholding the values of critical legal thought. Our annual conference aims to bring together academics, practitioners, and students from across the UK and abroad to explore and unpack the Conference theme.

The rhythms of the law can be felt throughout our lives, from the courtroom, to the law school, to the streets. Like the beat of a drum, the beat of the law can be felt but not seen: we regulate our own conduct even when the apparatus of the law seems distant or invisible: laws are coupled with surveillance and social norms to ensure orderly conduct and self-regulating behaviour even in the private sphere. The rhythms of law are varied and changing: sometimes at a consistent pace, with predictable pauses and silences; at other times erratic, syncopated or out of time. The law can have a consistent rhythm, at every stage of our lives, from when we are issued a birth certificate, to when we write our last will and testament. At other times, however, the law may be unpredictable and out of time, particularly when reacting to times of crisis, such as the Covid-19 pandemic. Rhythms are patterns of sounds and silences: in some areas of the law, we can hear a great deal of sound, evoking a sense of conflict and change, whilst we hear silence in others, evoking either a sense of neglect or space for reform. The rhythms of the law exude unique patterns in different circumstances to different groups of people - we may experience the rhythm of laws differently based on our individual characteristics, like race, religion or gender.

This year, we have encapsulated the Conference’s theme in a series of streams provided below. Each stream reflects an element of law and rhythm and invites insights from a range of legal disciplines. We would invite participants to think broadly about these themes in their own work, and we welcome papers from a diverse range of subject areas and levels of study. Contributions are not limited to the themes and disciplines given below - we warmly welcome any interdisciplinary commentary on the conference theme.

The Conference welcomes individuals to submit their proposals for papers in (but not exclusive to) the following topics:

'Timbre of Law'

When instruments play the same note, at the same volume, we can still hear the unique sound produced from each instrument. Timbre is this uniqueness, individuality and distinctiveness; the way one instrument produces a different tone to another whilst playing the same note.

The characteristic of Timbre may reflect the uniqueness and individualism of law, for instance how one person sees a particular piece of law may be different from how another person may see the piece of law. This invokes, for example, conversations about legal pluralism and intersectionality.

'Structure and the Law'

A composition consists of different parts i.e. verse, chorus, bridge, which are deliberately placed in a specific order to achieve a certain aim.

The law can serve as a structure for society to be governed in. The law can also provide structure in different areas of our lives. Are these structures too rigid or can they be circumvented?

'Dynamics of Law'

Dynamics indicate the volume at which a specific piece of music or instrument is played. The dynamics of a composition can change throughout, from forceful to gentle volumes, often to have an effect on the emotions and interpretation of the piece by the listener.

Much as in music, a change in the law can have similarly variable force on those it is intended to affect. This stream may include topics where the law has sudden 'loud' change for those concerned or where those changes were quiet and failed to make much of an impact.

'Adagio! Vivace! The tempo of the Law'

The pace of a musical work can be anything from adagio (slow) to vivace (fast). In many ways the tempo reflects the mood of a piece and the frequency and degree of tempo changes vary. They can be unexpected and quick or the change can be anticipated; as the musicians build up to a crescendo.

The tempo of the law, much like the tempo of music, can change suddenly, for example in response to a crisis; or it can be *lento* (slow) in its long-awaited need for societal progress to which the law has failed to respond. For example, there is often some discrepancy between progress in technology and the law's attempt to keep in step with this: it may respond too quickly or too slowly. In this way, much like with music, the tempo of law can express the context in which it exists.

'Harmonies of the Law: Consonance vs. Dissonance'

Harmonies arise when two or more notes are played or sung together. Where the various instruments play notes that 'fit' together in a chord, this is known as consonance. Conversely, where instruments play notes that do not 'fit' into a chord, this is known as dissonance. Dissonant chords often create the feeling of irritation or tension for the listener. Alternatively, consonant chords can often

'The Textures of Law'

Texture refers to the way in which different qualities from different instruments come together in a musical work. The thickness of texture is dependent upon the layers of instruments and the concentration of the instruments in the composition. Within a composition, texture can change as the qualities of the instruments being played change.

create the feeling of peace or calm for the listener.

This stream may apply to conflicts inherent in the law or where there is synthesis between laws or between law and other social or political objectives.

Just as the layers of instruments contribute to a composition, the law is similarly layered. In some areas, many voices speak their own narrative simultaneously. In others, only a single narrative exists, creating a much thinner texture. However, often no matter the number of narratives the law considers, the poor or high quality of any single legal instrument, as with a musical one, can cause the texture of law to change.

‘Variations in Law’

Musical variation occurs when a composition is changed from its original form. We can notice differences in melody, harmony, rhythm etc. when comparing the new piece to the original one.

This stream encourages a discussion surrounding areas of law that have had slight developments, but the overarching body has largely remained static or where the law has entirely varied from its original form.

‘Tonality of the Law’

As a musical composition is played we notice the keys, notes and chords change. Tonality refers to the system in which these are arranged as well the overall character of the piece.

As musical compositions centre around a single note, so does society progress around central ideas. Justice, equality, and civil liberties are all key themes that encourage the progression of law.

‘Chords in Law’

Built around a root note, chords consist of a union of three or more notes that are played concurrently. A series of chords develop into a progression which can express movement and structure in music.

This stream can include topics where areas of law may resemble chords, which can be seen by exploring how components, areas, or factors of the law may be combined to form the shape of the law, similar to how notes are combined to form a chord. For instance, sociology, politics, business, technology, etc, may be interlinked in a given context to form the shape of the relevant law.

‘Moving with the Rhythms of the Law’

Rhythm is a sequence found in a musical composition consisting of beats varying in regularity and strength.

The law flows in different rhythms much like music, sometimes it can have great regularity, continuity, and strength whilst at other times it may be disjointed, ever-changing or weak. This stream may look more broadly at the concept of ‘rhythms of law’, and how we adapt to move with the law or how we work actively against it to provoke change and reform.

We welcome as many students as possible to ensure a wide range of engaging discussions. As with every year we will be welcoming keynote speakers (to be announced at a later date).

Submitting an Abstract

Please submit an abstract of your work (between 250-500 words) with a short biography of yourself (maximum 60 words) to: conferencekclsoc@kent.ac.uk by **5pm on Thursday 18 February**.

Accessing the Conference

The event will be held virtually via Zoom this year. The Kent Critical Law Society will be in touch with attendees nearer the time to provide further information on how to access the Conference. To attend the conference, please register by emailing conferencekclsoc@kent.ac.uk stating your name and student id (for example: az123) and using the subject heading 'Registration'.

Enquiries: conferencekclsoc@kent.ac.uk

Kind Regards,

Kent Student Critical Law Society