

Remembering Operation Spanner (London, 10–11 Sep 15)

University of Essex / Royal Holloway, University of London, Sep 10–11, 2015

Deadline: Jul 17, 2015

Matt Lodder

Remembering Operation Spanner: Culture, Law, History and Crime

10th & 11th September 2015

Two interdisciplinary workshops at the University of Essex & Royal Holloway, University of London

Keynote Speakers:

Professor Ken Plummer (University of Essex)

Professor Carl Stychin (City University)

February 2017 will mark the 20th anniversary of the 1997 European Court of Human Rights' judgment in the case of Colin Laskey, Roland Jaggard and Tony Brown v United Kingdom, ending the legal appeals for the defendants in *R v Brown* [1994]. A group of men were convicted of assault occasioning actual bodily harm for engaging in 'extreme' sadomasochistic sex acts. None of the 'victims' of the 'assaults' were themselves the complainants, and in fact gave evidence of their consent to the acts. Moreover, the activities were undertaken in private without causing any lasting injury. An undercover Manchester Metropolitan police investigation of 1987 called Operation Spanner uncovered video evidence of the incident and the CPS made the decision to prosecute the assailants.

While legal scholars have interrogated the judgment by focussing on the deployment of consent, recklessness and the legality of sexual pleasure, a major interdisciplinary project that examines the wider and longstanding impacts of Spanner and the judgments has not yet been undertaken. The ruling was affected by and had wide-ranging impacts on culture more broadly, and its shockwaves continue to be felt today.

Two single-day seminars at Essex and Royal Holloway will be held on the 10th and 11th September 2015 respectively. The convenors intend that these intensive one-day workshops will facilitate discussion to determine the direction of a series of fundable research projects and outputs, and bring together an interdisciplinary cohort working on these topics in order to lead to published and other material outcomes.

We solicit papers and proposals for 20 minute papers which examine Spanner and its legacies from the time of the arrests to the present day in broader social, cultural and historical contexts, including but not limited to:

- criminological and criminal justice contexts

- performance art
- body modification, both professional and private
- Socio-legal and cultural regulation of bodies
- the "Video Nasties" panic of the mid-80s, cultural rhetoric of danger and contagion
- sexual subcultures, sexual rights and activism in the late 1980s and early 1990s
- pornography, particularly that classed "extreme" by recent laws
- political discourses on homosexuality, and sexual behaviour more generally
- Biomedical issues including HIV transmission, public health

We welcome proposals from the humanities and social sciences, including but not limited to sociology, law, history, criminology, art history, cultural studies, media studies, film studies, anthropology and geography.

Please send abstracts of 300 words (max) to mlodder@essex.ac.uk and alex.dymock@rhul.ac.uk by Friday 17th July 2015. Funding for travel and speaker accommodation is available. Speakers are very welcome to attend both workshops.

The organisers are also hosting a specifically art-historical panel on these issues, "Art after Operation Spanner: Visual cultures, sex and sadomasochism since 1987" at the Association of Art Historians Annual Conference 2016: <http://www.aah.org.uk/annual-conference/sessions2016/session2>.

For that session, we invite papers which consider the impacts of Spanner, its legal legacies and its socio-cultural contexts on art and visual culture in Britain and beyond, including in Europe and the United States. (Deadline November 9th)

Reference:

CFP: Remembering Operation Spanner (London, 10-11 Sep 15). In: Arthist.net, Jun 9, 2015 (accessed Sep 6, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/10519>>.