The University for the Creative Arts, the Centre for Critical Thought at the Kent Law School (University of Kent) and the Whitstable Biennale warmly invite you to the symposium

**Ethics, Art and Moving Images**

The University for the Creative Arts, New Dover Road, Canterbury, Kent, CT1 3AN  
Cragg Lecture Theatre  
Friday 3 June 2016  
9.30am - 7.30pm

*Shape Shifting* (Elke Marhöfer and Mikhail Lylov, 2014)

This transdisciplinary symposium explores how ethics can figure eminently in the generation of art and images after modernism and postmodernism, starting from the premise that in the Anthropocene, the work cannot rest upon its separation from the world. The symposium asks what ethics are at play in the relations between the human artist, the art, and the human and non-human models or participants. Art theorists and practitioners as well as legal studies scholars will probe the role of art and moving images in the creation of ethical relations which have historically been considered as the preserve of law and juridical discourse, or moral philosophy. Through new materialist, eco-political and posthuman thought and practice, the symposium will bypass the division between the active practice of ethics and the contemplative theory of aesthetics that Hannah Arendt challenges in Kant’s philosophy, to further an ethics of immanence beyond the fault line between the ethics of the individual and impersonal singularities. Using Spinoza, Deleuze, Guattari, Levinas, Nietzsche, Agamben, Grosz, Massumi, Haraway, Plumwood, Blanchot, and Nancy, the different papers move from human to human/non-human relations in the course of the day to advance an ecological and posthuman ethics with respect to art.

9.00 Registration, Tea and Coffee

9.30 Introduction (**Silke Panse** and **Connal Parsley**)

9.40 – 10.10 **Jon Kear** (Independent Scholar, I)  
**A Game that Must be Lost: Intersubjectivity, Otherness and Ethics in Cezanne’s Cardplayers**

Levinas founds his philosophy on the encounter with the Other, defined as the first principle of ethics. Facing the Other poses questions about power, language and representation with implications for epistemology and ontology. The face of the other, for Levinas, is the emblem of an inviolable and infinite relation, uncontrollable by categorization. Drawing on Levinas’ ethics, this paper explores a series of portraits Cézanne painted of peasants in the 1890s, culminating in five pictures known
collectively as The Cardplayers. These paintings of Provençal peasantry became integral to his later understanding of his art and his ideal of an unalienated and intelligible relationship to nature. These qualities associated with the life of the peasant, were ones the painter believed had an ethical meaning. As Cézanne deepened his relationship to his native Provence, the representation of the peasant took on a unique place within his painting, one that assumed an intersubjective character. His identification with the peasantry occluded the social, cultural and economic differences that separated painter and his subjects, who were mainly in his employment as workers on the land owned by the Cézanne estate. This process of identification was complicated by the painter’s commitment to pure empirical objectivity and sensate knowledge, to what the surface of things revealed to the eye of the observer, that is to say, to precisely the kind of resistance of pre-given assumptions, ideas and categorization that Levinas’ encounter with the Other presumes. Consequently, a complex and often problematical dialectic emerges in Cézanne’s painting between object and subject relations, knowledge and the suspension of the already known. These complex features of his are pronounced in the series of works he produced of the peasantry, where the stakes of identification were at play and where the problem that posed itself was one of the desire to communicate a deep relationship of identification while remaining true to an art of optical sensation. The paper argues that it is out of the tension arising between these aims, rather than the artist’s intentions, that the ethical emerges in Cézanne’s painting.

**10.10 – 10.30 Connal Parsley (Lecturer, Centre for Critical Thought at Kent Law School, University of Kent, UK)**

*For a New Ethics of Spectatorship: The Artist Films of Renzo Martens*

Do questions of representation and spectatorship have any role in ethical discourses of virtue and value? Should they be regarded as extraneous, or at best secondary, to moral philosophical questions or questions of justice? The documentary films of Dutch artist Renzo Martens strongly suggest the opposite possibility—particularly *Episode III: Enjoy Poverty* (2009), which sharply reveals how certain unexamined conditions of viewing and representation are intrinsic to the reproduction of colonial hierarchies and their stratifications of wealth in the Congo. Taking its cue from Martens’ complicit yet self-aware problematisation of the means of visibility and representation, this paper will examine the role of appearances and spectatorship in ethical discourse. Through the diffuse examples of Cicero, Adam Smith, and Giorgio Agamben, I will suggest that these practices are not only crucial to the nature of ethical discourse, but have always been intimately involved in the production of the human as a juridical being, accompanied by a juridical paradigm of ethics. Does Renzo Martens’ art practice offer us the basis for a new view on the human, and a new view of ethics to go along with it?

**10.45 Tea and Coffee**

**11.00 – 11.20 Mike Marshall (Artist, London, and Senior Lecturer, University for the Creative Arts, UK)**

*The Perils of Aesthetic Freedom / Being Bad Can Feel so Good*

Within the history of a philosophy of immanence from Spinoza, Nietzsche to Deleuze and Guattari, ethics has been distinguished from morality. At the basis for this distinction are concepts of freedom and indeterminacy characterised by the potential for self-transformation and the production of an expanded capacity to critique existing norms and create something new. In this scenario, morality becomes a separate framework with differing aims, consisting of relatively static, pre-established values operative in ways that are more evaluative than creative. With morality positioned as a constraint in relation to the freedom of self-transformation, ethics, on the other hand, becomes aligned to a fundamentally creative ‘ethos’ as the production of new ways of living. Following on from notions of ‘a life’ (Deleuze) and ‘life as art’ (Foucault), this paper will examine the perils of aesthetic freedom in the light of an apparent lawlessness of ‘affect’ as a transformational force in the philosophy of Deleuze and Spinoza. A perceived danger of aesthetic freedom can be that of romantic alienation or, taken further, of a subjectivity descending into an endless chaos of amorality, unhindered by social responsibility and effectively useless in any fight against injustice. Yet counter to this is the potential for an expanding capacity of sensing, thinking and acting that processes at the level of the individual, links to the social and operates with a deliberately less determined openness that is more adequate to the problematic complexity of the world.
Silke Panse (Reader in Film, Art and Philosophy, University for the Creative Arts, UK)
For Innocence, Against Purity
Innocence is usually opposed to experience. In Songs of Innocence and of Experience (1789-1794) William Blake pits innocence against experience, making this explicit in the continuation of the book’s title which claims the Showing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul. One is born innocent and then loses it, which is why innocence is usually aligned with childhood. Innocence is the original state before the fall which can only be lost. Innocence is cast as non-productive, passive and unoriginal, paradoxically because it is posited as an original state. Creativity, by contrast, is often portrayed as the reverse of innocence and necessarily destructive, for instance when Picasso claims that it is the urge to destroy which is creative. Innocence is habitually ascribed to the subject as a whole. This wholeness is in contrast to the notion of innocence in front of the law where one is always innocent with respect to a specific deed. This paper suggest to look at innocence as neither an original state of the subject as a whole nor as merely the absence of not having done a negative deed. Instead, it considers innocence as a generative relational force and as a productive quality in its own right. It suggests that innocence differs from naivety - which is based on not knowing and therefore cannot be chosen - in that innocence is a renewable affective quality, but that it also involves the decision of offering trust. Rather than finding that innocence is superseded by experience, this paper argues that experience is only possible through innocence. It also suggests that innocence differs from purity, a term frequently invoked with respect to material aesthetics, where it is decoupled from ethical qualities. By contrast, this paper proposes that innocence is impure. Innocence is a currency that is not of value to the person possessing it. Instead, who or what is innocent often has to pay for being so. This talk acknowledges agency for what is typically regarded as passive, and considers the immaterial quality of innocence as a productive force that materializes relations.

Mikhail Lylov (Artist, Berlin, D)
Passive Strategy: Two Moments of a Fold
An understanding of activity as a positive pivot of ethics has become a rather self-evident figure of thought. In this view ethics can be fashioned in a variety of ways: as a form of a active judgment, or as a foundation for differentiating between various qualitative modes of existence. Attention paid recently to such notions as 'material autopoiesis', 'embodied mind', 'living system' and 'bodily affects' have allowed for the activity of matter to become an ethical principle used to collapse matter/life and matter/spirit binaries. These vitalist critiques problematize the human/nonhuman distinction and explicitly question intellectual procedures that avert us from practically understanding life as it is meant by a particular organism, understood as a set of capacities to live in its milieu. While incredibly important, this line of thinking tends to assume that the meaning given to the world by the organism is rendered through world-making activity, suggesting an anthropomorphic kernel of these perspectives. In Difference and Repetition Gilles Deleuze proposes an interesting example of self-affection, performed by wheat and lily. Both organisms create themselves through absorption and contemplation of what they are not. They create themselves, as temporal images, from the elements that they contemplate. In contrast to views of life as essentially active, this example defines bodily self-creation as passive, much like a moment of hesitation. The contribution will make use of Deleuze's concepts of 'fold' and 'passive creation' to imagine how a passive force, inactivity, "a force that is but does not act", can lead to a passive production and what kind of subjectification follow from bending and folding of passive forces.

Nicolas Bourriaud (Art Writer and Curator, F)
Origin, Place, Light: On the Limit of Practical Wisdom
The talk meditates on the origin and authority of art (techne) and on the kind of refusal, differend, that intimately belongs to the unique truthfulness of the affective presencing of such origin. How is the beginning of that ‘there’ and being-there, which matters as art – how is the originary belongingness of art to which the work of art points too? How is the place of art? In responding to these quandaries the paper reflects on how, and indeed whether, the horizon visibility and the metaphor of ‘light’ can near
this place of origin. The paper argues for a placial point of departure from the current discussions of ethics and justice in temporal, spatial and material terms. In reasserting the priority of the placial the paper outlines a unique contribution to the way placiality itself is to be grasped drawing the implications to our understanding of the limit of ‘the political’ and furthermore, to the limits of the potentiality that belongs to the practical. It shows placiality to be anything but conservative, reactionary, oppressive and derivative.

15.00 Tea and coffee

15.20 – 15.45 Elke Marhöfer (Artist, Berlin, D)
Zones of Indiscernibility
This paper will view art as belonging to the expressive continuum of animals, plants, matter and their symbiotic and affective becomings, rather than being an exceptionally human practice. In her recent publication becoming undone, Elizabeth Grosz argues that art is an overall and mutually shared creative capacity of life. To strengthen this idea, she offers a fresh reading of Darwin’s theory of evolution and pays particular attention to ‘sexual selection.’ In her conception, sexual selection becomes the force of life that enables the emergence of difference and creativity. For Grosz, sexual selection is the foundation for art’s materialization. Similarly, Brian Massumi in his small book What Animals Teach us About Politics focuses on mutual inclusion, placing the human on the ‘animal continuum.’ Subtly different from Grosz, he considers Gregory Bateson’s engagement with the field of animal play as the actual capacity to foster perception and inventiveness, language and metacommunication. Animal play and creativity is for Massumi a precondition for a politics not bound to humans, and the practice of ‘becoming-animal’ its vital prerequisite. In the ‘becoming-animal’ chapter of A Thousand Plateaus, Deleuze and Guattari take up evolutionary biology’s conception of symbiosis and link it to Spinoza’s Ethics and his notion of affects. Symbiotic and affective ‘blocks of becoming’ are equally open to humans and nonhumans. They foster creative transformations and traverse conventional species oppositions. Tying together animals, plants, machines, microorganisms, bacteria and particles, but also humans with humans, in a ‘zone of indiscernibility,’ Deleuze and Guattari introduce a (machinic) ecology where difference is neither genetical, nor structural, but rather immanent, providing the necessary precondition for an ethics not centered on humans. The paper lingers on these propositions, takes examples from current ethology and my own film practice, where I explore facets of symbiotic and affective relations, and seek to understand how things, but also images come together, only in order to become different again.

15.45 – 16.00 Fiona MacDonald (Artist, UK)
Ant-ic Actions – An Experiential Exploration of the Ethics of Co-production
The paper will detail the intertwined agential and ethical questions raised by my creative interactions with wood ants (Formica rufa) and meadow ants (Lazius niger). My practice aims to be sensitive to the places, species and ecologies with which I work, but not to leave - either me or them - as I found them. In seeking out and orchestrating methods and structures to elicit co-productions with other species I am ‘interfering’ with the natural processes and activities of my subjects, but as an artist intra-acting with, rather than a scientist studying the natural world, this is intentional, indeed pivotal. During Ant-ic Actions, however, I directly, though inadvertently, caused the death of some of my ‘co-workers’. My paper draws on Donna Haraway, Lucy Kimbell, Patrick Curry and Val Plumwood to interrogate my assumptions around cold-bloodedness, size and numerosity in the making of, and the implications of, these artworks. I will question whether one’s level of moral responsibility increases when making art (as opposed to, say, making dinner). My paper offers no clear moral boundaries, but aims to ‘take responsibility’ as artist Mark Dion’s manifesto put it.

16.00 – 16.20 Phillip Warnell (Filmmaker and Associate Professor, Filmmaking and Experimental Film, Kingston University, UK)
Being Held to Account: Writing in the Place of the Animal
If the animal takes us to the limits of our humanity, it provides an unanswerable question. The question is therefore no longer a thought, but a condition of the Sphinx (Maurice Blanchot). In forming the question, our co-existence is revealed as ambiguous and intersubjective, a singular-plural prompted by a world of strangeness, unprecedented by any familiarity (Jean-Luc Nancy). Drawing on my writings
with Jean-Luc Nancy and my work as an artist-filmmaker, this paper will weave a poetic pathway of portmanteau thought-form, method and cinematic intent. The character of things is inextricably bound to territorial and spatial configurations, those of being-with. Borne of an exigency emanating from and flowing between all things - the cliff as a suspended strata of former creatures coiled in world secret – the properties of animality permeate everything: from the lithic, slow energy of the bodily stone as outside - through a palimpsest of predators, sovereign by their allure alone - to the celluloid electric screening and ghostly skin of film. In our institutional universe-city of violence and apology towards other species, we are accordingly held to account, writing in the place of the animal. Charged with inhabiting an unabated world of forced pioneering and ever-scarcer lucidity of bodily form, an inky, tautological domain prevails where first contact is entangled with an endgame of specimens, locked and recycled in proximity. Inevitably producing sacrifice and criminal coersion alike, other species perpetually force human boundaries by proxy. This liminal testing ground is bound in turn with an ongoing authorial reconsideration of the relationship between the cradle of human consciousness and the simultaneity of its representation, one in the other.

16.20 – 16.40 Anat Pick (Senior Lecturer, Film Studies, Queen Mary, University of London, UK) [via Skype]

**Electricity and the Spectacle of Animality**

Thomas Edison's *Electrocuting an Elephant* can be considered the "ground zero" of animal cinema. The film combines the prowess of the cinematic apparatus, the ambivalence of electricity as an animating and lethal agent, and the spectacle of the vulnerable animal body. This paper reflects on the place of animality in the rise of electrical power, drawing on the overlapping histories and iterations of electricity used to kill (electrical execution), torture (as an "invisible" torture method), or treat (ECT). Beyond its status as a snuff film, *Electrocuting an Elephant* and Topsy, the animal at its centre, have enjoyed a varied afterlife in the form of internet videos, short stories, and most recently, a biography. The persistence of Edison’s film can be attributed to the paradigmatic formal and ethical questions it raises about cinema's violent capturing of its living subjects.

17.00 All Speakers Round Table

Chair: Dominic Rahtz (Reader in History and Theory of Contemporary Art, University for the Creative Arts, UK)

17.30 – 19.30 Reception

The symposium is organized by Silke Panse (University for the Creative Arts) and Connal Parsley (Centre for Critical Thought at Kent Law School, University of Kent).

The symposium is free, but please register at: