**(New) Visuality: Ethics and Aesthetics**

University of Queensland, Forgan-Smith Tower (Building #1), Room 402

March 27

Program

9:15 – Welcome

9:30 – Prof. Kris Fallon:

“(In)visible Adversaries: Paranoia and the End of Mass Media”

10:30 – Prof. Tom O’Regan: “Re-drawing the line between Journalism and the Interpersonal: Facebook and the Future of the Platform Press”

11:30 – 1:00 Lunch

1:00 – Dr. Amy Hubbell:

“Circulating Bodies: Retelling the Trauma of the Algerian War through Photography and Art”

2:00 – A/Prof. Damian Cox:

“Looking for minds (and not really finding any): *Mindhunter* and the quest for understanding”

3-3:30 – Afternoon tea

3:30 – A/Prof. Robert Sinnerbrink:

“‘A Documentary of the Imagination’: Cinematic Ethics in *The Act of Killing* and *The Look of Silence*”

4:30 – Prof. Mette Hjort:

“Creating Cinematic Art in Occupied Territory: Why is Artistic Value Enhanced by Solidarity?”

**Abstracts and Bios**

**“(In)visible Adversaries: Paranoia and the End of Mass Media”**

**Kris Fallon, University of California-Davis**

For much of the 20th century, visual media were mass media.  From film and television broadcasts to magazines and newspapers, such mechanically reproducible media were reproduced at scale, drawing together widespread populations into vast audiences and publics.  Critics and champions of these forms celebrated their ability to knit together ‘imagined communities’ of spectators and questioned their ability shape public opinion or manufacture consent among the electorate of open democracies.  With the rise of digital media and its steady subsumption of these other forms, mass media are slowly giving way to the algorithmic precision of individualized content.  If the 20th century gave birth to mass visual media, the 21st may have already witnessed its death.

This talk will explore the ethical and political implications of this shift from mass media to digital media by considering the perceived influence of outside forces in recent elections in Europe and the United States on social media platforms. Indeed, Facebook’s recent move away from delivering ‘public content’ produced by news organizations toward delivering more ‘meaningful’ content produced by a user’s friends and family reveals the stakes involved in the broader shift.  While prior moments produced a concern over mass propaganda and the undue influence of ever expanding media conglomerates, the open plasticity of the feed and the anonymity of the network engender fears around ‘fake news’ spread by bots and trolls. Where the mass ornament and the media spectacle have come to define prior political configurations, the networked model produces no shared visual emblem, offering instead the fractal suspicion and insular tribalism of content shared by ‘friends’.

**Kris Fallon** is an Assistant professor in the department of Cinema & Digital Media at UC Davis.  His research focuses on non-fiction visual culture across a range of platforms, from still photography and documentary film to data visualization and social media.  His essays on digital technology and documentary have appeared in journals such as Film Quarterly, Screen, and several edited anthologies including *Contemporary Documentary* and *Documentary Across Disciplines.* He is currently completing a book entitled *Where Truth Lies: Digital Culture and Documentary Media After 9/11.*

**“Re-drawing the line between Journalism and the Interpersonal: Facebook and the Future of the Platform Press”**

**Tom O’Regan, University of Queensland**

It is too soon to call with any certainty the consequences of Facebook’s recasting of its relation to news which now clearly separates user news (which it supports) and public news (which it does not). What can be considered, however, are the political and ethical implications of this recasting as Facebook seeks to reinstitute and redraw the familiar distinctions between “The News” and “news”, between “*Public* News” and the more *private* “community of user news”, between *Public* Communication and *interpersonal* communication that it and other social media outlets had purposefully muddied. This play on Facebook’s part does not involve our going back to where we were before social media; rather Facebook is seeking to normatively reconstitute these public and private boundary distinctions in the light of social media and on its own terms at a time when its operations have come under increasing public scrutiny. What also can be considered are the ways this reframing repositions the longer term process of media platformisation. “The Platform Press” preceded and will succeed Facebook’s recasting of its News involvements but the trajectory of news platformisation may be changing in direction and emphasis. Both these considerations will be teased out in relation to *media development trajectories* anchored in the political, ethical and economic possibilities of the constitutive trifecta of media provision, market and user information and media user/audiences, to our available ways of paying for News media, and to the longer term trends in journalist employment over the past 30 years.

**Tom O'Regan** took up the position of Professor of Media and Cultural Studies at The University of Queensland in 2004. He has been a key figure in the development of cultural and media studies in Australia and has an international reputation for his screen policy studies related work. In 2002 Tom was elected a Fellow of Australian Academy of the Humanities. He was Associate Dean Research, Faculty of Arts (2010-2011); Head of the School of English, Media Studies and Art History (2005-2008), Director of the Australian Key Centre for Cultural and Media Policy (1999-2002, Griffith University) and the Centre for Research in Culture and Communication (1996-1998, Murdoch University). Tom co-founded the media and cultural studies journal Continuum (1987-1995) and was Australia's UNESCO Professor of Communication from 2001-2003.

**“Circulating Bodies: Retelling the Trauma of the Algerian War through Photography and Art”**

**Dr Amy L. Hubbell, University of Queensland**

The diaspora of former French citizens of Algeria, known collectively as the Pieds-Noirs, have increasingly turned to the internet to reattach themselves to each other and to their lost homeland by circulating images and texts from home. While the postcard-perfect images of Algeria that initially dominated community remembrance still circulate freely, over the past decade, traumatic images from the Algerian War for Independence have multiplied on Pied-Noir websites and listservs. The shocking images of mutilated corpses are at first confronting, but as they pile up, the viewer becomes more and more immune to their power. When the viewer engages with the images, she eventually recognises that the same select bodies are continuously circulating but alongside a variety of political messages.

Though no new images are likely to join these collections, the often repeated photos are now appearing in different formats such as paintings and installation art. One artist who routinely incorporates the traumatic images of the war in her work is Nicole Guiraud who survived the famous Milk Bar bombing in the Battle of Algiers in 1956 when she was ten years old. Guiraud has a personal stake in this representation: she is an amputee and champion for victims of terrorism in Europe. Her art addresses personal psychological wounds as well as the historic trauma from the Algerian War (1954-1962). Depicting both living and dead victims and including her own body, Guiraud does not solely repeat the well-known images that recount her community’s trauma and exile; she reworks and interprets them while inscribing herself among the dead. This article seeks to understand what is at stake when traumatic images are proliferated and whether the dulling effect produced through the repetition of the initial photos functions in a similar way to mitigate trauma when the images are interpreted in art.

**Amy Hubbell** is lecturer in French at the University or Queensland where she researches Francophone autobiographies of exile and trauma. She is author of *Remembering French Algeria: Pieds-Noirs, Identity and Exile*(U of Nebraska P, 2015), and *A la recherche d'un emploi: Business French in a Communicative Context* (Hackett, 2017) and co-editor of several journal volumes as well as *The Unspeakable: Representations of Trauma in Francophone Literature and Art*(2013), and *Textual and Visual Selves: Photography, Film and Comic Art in French Autobiography* (2011). She is currently working on her new project, "Hoarding Memory: Covering the Wounds of the Algerian War."

**“Looking for minds (and not really finding any): Mindhunter and the quest for understanding”**

**Damian Cox, Bond University**

The 2017 Netflix series Mindhunter, directed by David Fincher (episodes 1, 2, 9 &10), confronts the aesthetic problem of making the minds of serial killers both accessible to audiences and tolerable to them. It tries to solve the problem by displacing the burden of recognition onto its protagonist, Holden Ford (Jonathan Groff). Ford takes on the burden of internalising the serial killers’ perspectives – saving an audience from the need to do so. Long form storytelling (as long as it is not binge watched) facilitates a kind of distanciation. Because of its long form (10 episodes), Mindhunter is able to show the slippery slope of Ford’s trajectory – from wide-eyed enthusiasm to panic-stricken breakdown – incrementally. Audiences get to view the trajectory over time, with breaks between episodes. Ford’s character also becomes less appealing as the series progresses, as his insight into the serial killer mind deepens.

The series explores contrasting forms of understanding: causal explanation, as represented by the psychologist Wendy Carr (Anna Torv) versus Ford’s search for verstehen. Carr is looking for identifying and explanatory factors. Ford is too; but his technique is to establish as much cognitive empathy with the serial killers he interviews as he can bear (and it is considerable). I argue that the finale of the series demonstrates an epistemic impossibility: the task of understanding evades both Carr and Ford, for different reasons. They hunt for the minds of serial killers, but never really find them.

**Damian Cox** is Associate Professor of philosophy at Bond University. He teaches philosophy and film, ethics, political philosophy. He has co-authored three books: *Integrity and the Fragile Self* ; *A Politics Most Unusual: violence, sovereignty and democracy in the war on terror* and *Thinking Through Film.* Current projects include work on “affect mirrors” in the cinema.

**“‘A Documentary of the Imagination’: Cinematic Ethics in *The Act of Killing* and *The Look of Silence”***

**Robert Sinnerbrink, Macquarie University**

Joshua Oppenheimer described his remarkable documentary re-enactment film, *The Act of Killing* (2012), as a ‘documentary of the imagination’. This was followed by an equally remarkable but quite different ‘sequel’, *The Look of Silence* (2014), which addressed many of the issues raised by, and criticisms made of, its controversial counterpart. Indeed, the two films compose a documentary diptych, *The Look of Silence* providing the absent victim perspective and reckoning with historical responsibility that was lacking in *The Act of Killing*’s focus on the perpetrators of the 1965-66 state-sponsored massacres in Indonesia after General Suharto’s military coup. In this paper, I explore this documentary dialogue, guided by the question, ‘what is a documentary of the imagination’? To do so I approach these films as contrasting cases of ‘cinematic ethics’—films that show how cinema can be a medium of ethical experience enacted through emotional engagement and cognitive reflection (see Sinnerbrink 2016)—focusing in particular on the mediating role of imaginative engagement with cinematic works. Both films invite the viewer to imaginable the unthinkable, and to explore the role of the cinematic and ideological imagination in the complex dialectic between perpetrator and victim of political violence. I also challenge recent critiques of Oppenheimer’s films, notably by documentary theorist Brian Winston, who claims that they fail to abide by the ethical rules of engagement for both filmmaker and spectator, sensationalising violence, ignoring historical context, and privileging aesthetics over ethics. Such criticisms misconstrue both the aesthetic and ethical-political import of these films, the manner in which they expose the ideological imagination of the perpetrators and articulate the ethical imagination of the survivors in ways that exercise complex and confronting forms of cinematic and moral imagination. These two remarkable works thus offer ample scope to explore contrasting approaches to cinematic ethics: reflexive performative re-enactment in *The Act of Killing* versus contemplative ethical witnessing in *The Look of Silence*. Despite their stylistic and ethical differences, both films taken together comprise a ‘minor politics’ by enabling marginalised, suppressed, or ‘impossible’ ethico-political experiences to be narrated and enacted via cinematic means.

**Robert Sinnerbrink** is Australian Research Council Future Fellow and Associate Professor in Philosophy at Macquarie University, Sydney. He is the author of *Cinematic Ethics: Exploring Ethical Experience through Film* (Routledge, 2016), *New Philosophies of Film: Thinking Images* (Continuum, 2011), *Understanding Hegelianism* (Acumen, 2007/Routledge 2014), and is a member of the editorial board of the journal *Film-Philosophy*. He has published numerous articles on the relationship between film and philosophy in journals such as the *Australasian Philosophical Review*, *Angelaki*, *Film-Philosophy*, *Necsus: European Journal of Media Studies*, *Projections: The Journal of Movies and Mind*, *Screen*, *Screening the Past*, and *SubStance*. He is currently writing a new book, *Terrence Malick: Filmmaker and Philosopher* (Bloomsbury, 2019).

**“Creating Cinematic Art in Occupied Territory: Why is Artistic Value Enhanced by Solidarity?**

**Mette Hjort, University of Copenhagen / Norwegian University of Science and Technology**

In 2014, the Danish Film Institute, in partnership with the Danish House in Ramallah, established FilmLab:Palestine in the West Bank. Based in Ramallah and with Palestinian filmmaker Hanna Atallah as its creative director, FilmLab:Palestine finds its origins in Atallah’s “personal experience” of “empowering Palestinian youths in refugee camps in Jordan.” Atallah identifies the revitalization of the “culture of film in Palestine” as the Lab’s “sole purpose.” The aspiration is for a cinema that fosters authentic and genuinely creative expression, in part by escaping “the grasp of conventional European filmmaking industries and Hollywood” (FilmLab:Palestine 2017). Focusing on children and young people, FilmLab:Palestine pursues a variety of strategies, each of them designed to enable the next generation of Palestinians—whether in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, or Gaza—to tell their *own* stories. FilmLab:Palestine has initiated a number of outreach and talent development programmes, each of them working in synergy with the Lab’s annual film festival, ‘Days of Cinema.’ In my talk I focus on the “twinning” of young filmmakers from Denmark (the Aarhus Film Workshop) and Palestine (FilmLab:Palestine) and on the Danish Film Institute’s contribution to talent development in Palestine, through the involvement of the Head of the DFI’s ‘New Danish Screen’ initiative. My aim is to shed light on the ethics of facilitating partnerships of equals on a North/South basis, for the purposes of developing artistic talent and producing cinematic art. A key question is this: Do the ethical and political commitments facilitating sustained collaboration under difficult circumstances have positive implications for the artistic value of the “twinned” filmmakers’ films? If so, how might such implications be captured in conceptual terms? My paper draws on my own involvement with FilmLab:Palestine from 2017 onwards, on participant and non-participant observation in Ramallah, and on practitioner interviews with talent developers and “twinned” filmmakers.

**Mette Hjort** is Professor of Film Studies at the University of Copenhagen, Professor II of Art and Media Studies at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Affiliate Professor of Scandinavian Studies at the University of Washington, Seattle, and Honorary Professor of Visual Studies at Lingnan University, where she previously served as Associate Vice President (Internationalization & Academic Quality Assurance). Appointed by the Ministry of Culture, Mette serves on the Board of the Danish Film Institute, a body responsible for creating policies for the film sector and for disbursing public funds for filmmaking. Selected publications include the influential monograph, *Small Nation, Global Cinema* (U of Minnesota P, 2005), and, most recently, the edited volume *African Cinema and Human Rights* (with Eva Jørholt, forthcoming with Indiana UP).