

Eyes of the Face, Eyes of the Law
Contingencies, Interdependencies and Challenges/Provocations

“The epiphany of the face, as it bears witness to the presence of the third party, of humanity as a whole, in the eyes that look at me“
(Levinas, Totalité et Infini)

The *Eyes* draws our attention to a dualism: not only the primacy of the look (and perhaps not the primacy of the spoken or written word), but also the attendant borders and exclusions implicit in this primacy. The look focusses its own interest. Thus is the view more strongly orientated towards its subjective interest, but also towards that which it excludes. In the act of “looking“, however, a distance between observer and observed is contended. More than the thinking subject, the looking subject contends its act of looking as a singular, non-generalizable act. Conversely, the *look* contend more strongly than the spoken word the singularity of this event – an event Levinas considered to attain the significance of an accusation.

Here we must ask what the particularity of the look mean for political and ethical challenges. And this bears double ramifications: how is the *look* (e.g. *the first view*) used for decisions, perceptions and (e)valuations, in what way is a look marginalized and blocked towards creating new truths — but also what possibilities and ethical resources arise specifically from the consideration of the *look*. The conference explores the different ways in which the look shapes our understanding of daily life, and also of culture, politics, religion and the arts. Here one might ask if the look better enables us to understand fundamental human relations.

One of the conference’s goals is to read philosophical thinking, literary, everyday, political and art texts/images/film through the perspective of the *look* — in

some cases, not only reading but indeed challenging/reconsidering these texts through that perspective. Another goal of the conference is to discuss the look as a pre-condition for the establishment of political and juridical decisions. Here we can reference Judith Butler's point that we have to reconsider the relationship between vulnerability, alliances and politics. Vulnerability can be seen as the result of a constructed process, but also as a manifestation of resistance. Consistent with the conference's theme, the look can be considered a crucial means for understanding vulnerability (in its double sense as described above).

At the conference, therefore, we shall investigate the question of what the look means for the formation of an ethical consciousness attempting to assert itself in the tension between religious, philosophical, cultural and political discourse. Ultimately, the thesis of the primacy of the look bears ramifications not only for understanding the relationships between the aesthetic, the religious, the cultural and the political. It touches not only on questions of human and *real* life, but also on understandings of the narrow link between — on the one hand — the desire affecting us when we open ourselves to the *eyes of others*, and — on the other hand — defense mechanisms and attendant fantasies expediting violent *and* ethical speech.

In order to investigate this complex relationship, philosophical and transdisciplinary overlaps are necessary and desirable. Frames of reference include (among others) Th. W. Adorno/M. Horkheimer, Walter Benjamin, Judith Butler, Jacques Derrida, Frantz Fanon, Michel Foucault, Sigmund Freud, G.W.F. Hegel, Franz Kafka, Immanuel Kant, Melanie Klein, Emmanuel Levinas, Friedrich Nietzsche, Plato, and Franz Rosenzweig.