



‘What If Anything Do Faces Reveal?’

A public lecture by Professor Ruth Leys

With a response by Professor Joanna Bourke

17 May 2010. 6pm. Arts Lecture Theatre

Abstract:

Among the many consequences of the terrorist attacks on the United States on 9/11 has been the flow of federal funds to scientists committed to finding ways to identify terrorists before they can act. One of those scientists is Paul Ekman, who has devoted his career to studying facial expressions and is working on methods of surveillance designed to read the telltale involuntary facial signs that betray the potential terrorist's deadly intentions. Ekman's goal is to reassure us that we don't have to be frightened by the tendency of human beings to dissimulate, because science can be counted on to reliably distinguish authentic facial expressions from false ones, the genuine from feigned.

In my talk I will examine the theoretical assumptions and experimental methods informing Ekman's approach to the emotions. Crucial to Ekman's procedures has been the use of a set of pictures of people intentionally presenting, that is, posing facial expressions in order to evaluate the ability of individuals across the world to recognize and identify particular emotions. One of my aims will be to make Ekman's pictures of posed expressions historically intelligible while also bringing out their sheer strangeness as scientific documents.

Ruth Leys is Professor of Humanities at Johns Hopkins University. Her publications include *Trauma: A Genealogy* (2000) and *From Guilt to Shame: Auschwitz and After* (2007). She is currently working on the post-war history of experimental and theoretical approaches to the study of the emotions, with a special emphasis on the philosophical issues at stake in the competing cognitivist and neo-Darwinian paradigms of the emotions.



Joanna Bourke is Professor of History in the School of History, Classics and Archaeology at Birkbeck College. Her publications include *Fear: A Cultural History* (2005) and *Rape: A History from 1860s to the Present* (2007).

To reserve a place for this lecture and the champagne reception afterwards please email Thomas Dixon: t.m.dixon@qmul.ac.uk