

ACCIDENTS & CONTINGENCIES

13th ANNUAL YALE FILM AND MEDIA STUDIES GRADUATE CONFERENCE

FEBRUARY 29-MARCH 1, 2020

WHITNEY HUMANITIES CENTER — 53 WALL STREET, NEW HAVEN, CT 06511

KEYNOTE SPEAKER: Dr. JAMES LEO CAHILL, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF CINEMA STUDIES AND FRENCH, UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

Contingency is also a necessary quality of film.

– André Bazin

Ever since kinoscope shorts and the Lumière Brothers' first films, cinema displayed a wide variety of contingencies that were not intentionally designed to be put there: stray dogs, passers-by, flickering images, scratch marks, insect shadows, blurs and glitches, and even the glare of burning celluloid. Cinema is not only interested in showing accidents; rather, what we perceive as a final product is the sum of casual events, ranging from the process of crafting to the circumstances of reception. Or, we may even claim that what is known as the cinematic media today was itself a product of accidents, one of the innumerable technological possibilities. As Mary Ann Doane has argued, cinema in its classical period became a giant machine of symbols that persistently swallows the contingent, "tam[es] chance[s]," and incorporates them into the significative order (*The Emergence of Cinematic Time*). But what has it brought us and what will it continue to bring to us in the digital era? In an age when cinema is no longer celluloid, but takes the expanded shape of media complexes and creates for us a media ecology that is all-encompassing, what does it mean for the contingencies? Have they disappeared from the mediascape, totally harnessed by the techniques of control or, alternatively, gained a new life and become ever more flourished? What do "accident" and "contingency" even mean to us today?

What can cinema as a medium of accidents offer us and will it still contribute to our experiences in a hypermediated society?

Accidents, unexpected circumstances, and contingencies all point to a rupture, to a discontinuity in what is considered a "natural" flow of events. However, the fortuitous is also a beginning for it is the combination of heterogeneous events into a relational act of transformation that blurs the borders of a previously established order of things. The rupture produced by contingency provokes movement, a process of re-configuration into a new order that is, in turn, also subjected to casual randomness. As Jacques Rancière asserts, chance shapes the boundaries of the possible and of the thinkable by disrupting "the specific configuration that allows us to stay in 'our' assigned places in a given state of things. These sorts of ruptures can happen anywhere and at any time, but they can never be calculated" (*The Paradoxes of Political Art*). The non-calculated rupture drifts towards a beyond—potential, unpredictable, and fertile. Can cinema and related media, with their inherent contingencies, suggest a way out of political dead-ends and towards ever renewing, vibrant futures?

Paper proposals AND artworks in all areas of film and media are welcome. Possible topics for a 20-minute presentation include (but are by no means limited to):

- contingency of cinema (e.g., media/film ontology, technical accidents, early cinema/digital image-making practices, and media's potentiality)
- cinema and accidents (e.g., disasters, minor or even happy accidents)
- spectatorial reception (e.g., Schadenfreude)
- unexpected appropriations, disruptions, or half-lives of media objects
- pro-filmic contingencies such as performances (e.g., performance arts, media performances, nonhuman performances) and appearances (e.g., of objects and landscape) in relation to issues of documentary and mediation
- cinema and exploration, cinema and science, cinema and ethnography/ethology
- exposed accidents in the media ecology of the digital era (e.g., surveillance)
- automaticity in the age of technological reproducibility and digital repetition; non/inhuman aspects of media

Applications (including artworks) should include a presentation title, a brief abstract (<300 words), and a short biography (<100 words). Please email as a single attachment (.docx or .pdf) to 2020yalefmsconference@gmail.com **before 5 PM EST on Friday, December 20th, 2019.**