Call for Papers: The Aggressive Image

Leonard and Cushing duking it out in 1894, a locomotive lunging toward its audience in 1896, the kabuki-esque brawl captured by Shibata Tsunekichi in 1899, and a bandit confronting his spectators with his pistol point-blank in 1903 all confirm that the aggressive image has been hallmark of the cinema since its inception. In recent years, aggression in film and media has reached a fever pitch, from Europe’s “new punk cinema” and the plethora of coded jabs embedded in high-concept music videos, to the increasingly lucrative spectacle of contact sports and the rapid spread of the Internet as a democratic platform for aggressive mass communication. Developing coterminously with the increasing political polarization they help foster, such platforms provide a battleground for enduring culture wars, and emerging forms of rhetoric afforded by new media technologies have produced novel imbrications of affect and communication. But far from simply functioning as a depository for aggression’s affective surplus or a means for its expression, media in turn generate, regulate, and perpetuate new modes of aggressive experience, new circuits for aggressive energy. The impulse is everywhere, from the micro-aggressions that pervade our social media interactions to the macro-aggressions that saturate our media diet of summer blockbusters, hyper-violent RPGs, and a 24-hour news cycle that gyrates to the tantrums of a tweeter-in-chief. No longer repressed in the collective unconscious, aggression explodes incessantly across the surfaces of our contemporary screens.

The field of film and media has itself been rife with actual and perceived aggressions. The teaching of canonical films and established methods has been construed as a reactionary practice working to suppress emerging critical tendencies, which have in turn been dismissed as cynical vehicles for advancing progressive social agendas. Indeed, the signaling of an aggressive political position in one’s scholarship and pedagogy has become an imperative in certain academic circles. Are such developments in the dynamics of the field—and of academia more generally—a consequence of now ubiquitous media battles? The goal of this conference is to develop a greater understanding of how aggression operates in film, media, and the discourses surrounding them.

Paper proposals in all areas of film and media are welcome, and we encourage applicants interested in aggressive imagery at work in animation, comics, electronic games, or virtual reality engines.

Possible topics for a 20-minute presentation include, but are not limited to:
—the aesthetics of aggression
—aggression in acting
—aggressive auteurs
—psychoanalytic discussions of aggression and its relation to film production and consumption
—cognitive consequences of screen immersion
—film’s aggression toward the “rival arts,” and vice versa
—the effects of surveillance technologies on the performance of aggression
—the ethics of comparing media violence to real-world violence
—aggressive dimensions of new film and media technologies
—aggressive industrial practices in distribution, promotion, and exhibition
—reactions to the aggressive image, particularly media phobias, moral panic, and paranoia
—aggressive media users
—parallels between aggressive nationalist (or anti-nationalist) stances in film and media studies and aggressive nationalism (or anti-nationalism)
—the aggression of film theory, history, and criticism toward their media objects

Applications should include a presentation title, a brief abstract (<300 words), and an academic biography (<100 words). Please email as a single attachment (.docx or .pages) to 2018yalefmsconference@gmail.com before 5PM EST on Monday, November 27, 2017.