



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

This is a repository copy of *Everywhere and all the time: accident, radical contingency, and Crash*.

White Rose Research Online URL for this paper:  
<http://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/156223/>

Version: Accepted Version

---

**Article:**

Wylot, D (2020) Everywhere and all the time: accident, radical contingency, and Crash. *Textual Practice*, 34 (8). pp. 1345-1364. ISSN 0950-236X

<https://doi.org/10.1080/0950236X.2019.1580213>

---

© 2019 Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group. This is an author produced version of an article published in *Textual Practice*. Uploaded in accordance with the publisher's self-archiving policy.

**Reuse**

Items deposited in White Rose Research Online are protected by copyright, with all rights reserved unless indicated otherwise. They may be downloaded and/or printed for private study, or other acts as permitted by national copyright laws. The publisher or other rights holders may allow further reproduction and re-use of the full text version. This is indicated by the licence information on the White Rose Research Online record for the item.

**Takedown**

If you consider content in White Rose Research Online to be in breach of UK law, please notify us by emailing [eprints@whiterose.ac.uk](mailto:eprints@whiterose.ac.uk) including the URL of the record and the reason for the withdrawal request.



[eprints@whiterose.ac.uk](mailto:eprints@whiterose.ac.uk)  
<https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/>

## **Everywhere and all the time: accident, radical contingency, and *Crash***

What are the politics of the accident? This essay interrogates the accident trope's dual meaning in critical theory and popular narrative as both historically endemic and conditional for a political theory of radical resistance and ethical relation. I explore this in Paul Haggis' 2004 film *Crash*, a popular narrative that plots the accident to provide an opening for a politics of possibility and ethical engagement. However, this essay critiques efforts to situate accidents, and therefore contingency, as both historically endemic and politically resistant, arguing for the difficulty of reading a specific theory of political and ethical decision into something ontologically given. *Crash* stretches contingency to incorporate temporality itself, and in doing so nullifies consideration of institutional histories of race and class, which aesthetically foregrounds and troubles related assumptions made by a critical mode that too quickly reads a specific politics and ethics into contingency's deviation from necessary law. The essay re-evaluates the accident's political and ethical coordinates through reference to Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's theorisation of contingency as conditional for political meaning more generally. Accidents, it concludes, are politically and ethically mobile, if they, as *Crash* and theories of radical contingency contend, happen everywhere and all the time.

Keywords: accident, radical contingency, popular aesthetics, *Crash*, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe

### **Introduction**

What are the politics of the accident? To approach this question, we need to consider the role contingency plays in a theory of political and ethical decision. Perhaps surprisingly, the 2004 Hollywood film *Crash* asks this question in as direct a way as any recent plotting of the accident, exploring in popular form issues of the accident's political productivity that have also occupied recent debates in critical theory. *Crash* represents the accident to be at once historically endemic, a product of unequal stratifications of risk, and an event primed to reflect contingency's constitutive relation to time and the open future. *Crash*'s version of the car crash narrative, which builds on a rich literary and

cinematic history, draws on these different contexts in order to subsequently represent the accident as a politically productive event, invoking contingency to be a resistant and ethically demanding force.

The film questions the accident's politics and ethics in its first scene, in which two police detectives, who have just been in a car accident, discuss their crash:

GRAHAM: It's the sense of touch.

RIA: ... what?

GRAHAM: In any real city, you walk, you know? You brush past people, people bump into you. In L.A., nobody touches you. We're always behind this metal and glass. I think we miss that touch so much, that we crash into each other, just so we can feel something.

[...]

RIA: Graham, I think we got rear-ended, I think we spun around twice, and somewhere in there, one of us lost our frame of reference.<sup>1</sup>

Both Graham (Don Cheadle) and Ria (Jennifer Esposito) judge the significance of the accident differently. For Ria, accidents are simply things that happen, meaningless chance events that are epiphenomenal to contemporary life. In a statement that has partly defined the film's reception, however, Graham suggests that accidents are instead productive events, and catalysts for affective encounters in a socially alienated Los Angeles that engineer unexpected ethical relations between oneself and another. Missing a sense of 'touch', accident victims strangely desire accidental contact in order to feel something. Graham's interpretation of this motive comes belatedly, after the accident, and the film considers a possible unconscious will toward accident less through a representation of deliberately willed vehicular crashes than through a narrative in which accidental encounters create often positive and redeeming outcomes for its plethora of characters. People, according to Graham, will an exposure to the chance of this connection, which, paradoxically, comes about through the agency of unwillable and unexpected events.

‘Touch’ therefore depends on the contingency of an accident to circumvent the city’s anticipatory shielding of connection. To question the politics of the accident, Ria’s and Graham’s conversation suggests, one must consider contingency’s historical, political, and modal contexts.

This essay argues that through the film’s combination of these different contexts, *Crash* represents the trope of the accident to provide an opening for ethical interaction and political possibility for characters and viewer alike. In doing so, the film presents an ethical and political stance toward the accident that follows a pattern of politicising contingency, albeit in an aesthetic and representational sense, that is also discernible in theoretical discourses concerned with the idea of a radical contingency. But more importantly, this essay argues that in doing so *Crash* makes legible in narrative form the limitations of this kind of account of politicised and ethicised contingency that, I suggest, afflict its various manifestations, from recent valuations of the contingent event in critical theory to *Crash*’s representational politics. *Crash*’s much-maligned Hollywood liberalism, its reduction of race and class to a series of personal grievances, and its over-reliance on acts of personal heroism are not all the direct result of the film’s attempt to politicise and ethicise the accident.<sup>2</sup> But the narrative’s centrifugal employment of the accident within this milieu presents a limit case of what discourses of radical contingency can be made to do in popular aesthetic form. By reducing political decision and ethical demand to a vague embrace of accidental encounters, which repeatedly nullifies structural critique, *Crash*’s narrative emptily concludes by evacuating the accident of any criteria for judging ethical interaction or political decision, instead making the trope synonymous with time. In doing so, the film’s representation of the accident points towards limitations in the account of contingency it appears to share with theoretical discourses that seek a politically and ethically radical contingency.

Contingency as I describe it in this essay is a modal category of possibility, which is constitutive of the future's natural opacity, history's contingent rather than necessary ground, and events' inevitable deviations from natural law. In other words, contingency suggests that when an event happens, it could have happened differently, or not at all. Because of this, contingency is often associated with models of causality that are random, complex, and ambiguous, and for this reason accidents offer a privileged representation of this modality.<sup>3</sup> The notion of 'radical' contingency therefore takes a number of related forms in this account. In its first meaning, radical contingency describes contingency to be an existential structure or unsurpassable horizon for objectivity and meaning. In its second meaning, radical contingency theorises contingency to be a politically radical form that, when embraced, prescribes specific political and ethical outcomes. My critique concerns the translation from this first meaning into the second, the latter of which I argue flattens social and historical context in its effort to make contingency guarantee a radical politics and ethics.

*Crash* offers an aesthetic vantage point through which to consider how these two forms of 'radical' contingency entwine, and provides an opportunity to analyse a theoretical discourse that conceptualises the accident, and therefore contingency, as a site of political and ethical possibility. Through analysis of the film's exploration of urban alienation, its view of racism in contemporary Los Angeles through the lens of individualised prejudice, and its trivialisation of contingency's social distribution in favour of a focus on vivid accidental encounters, I argue that accidents can be neither resistant nor good in themselves. When *Crash* and theoretical discourses employ a similar conceptualisation of contingency, treating it as a modality that is broadly constitutive of time, for the purposes of opening up or transforming subject positions, they reduce social and historical relations to a meaningless void that nullifies structural critique. To analyse

this shared ambivalence in film and theory, I turn to Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's work on contingency's constitutive relation to politics. Laclau and Mouffe's poststructuralist political philosophy instead positions contingency to be a ground for any and every political and ethical decision. Contingency does not, in and of itself, prescribe a specific ethics or politics. Through analysis of *Crash*, then, this essay seeks to gain purchase on a criticism surrounding contingency that too readily reads political resistance and ethical demand into an existential structure that is as ubiquitous as time.

### **Plotting the accident**

Accidents are unforeseeable events that are often conceived of as escaping direct responsibility and clear causality.<sup>4</sup> They fit into the broader subset of chance events. Chance, in turn, resides in the category of contingency, a term designating the existential possibility of things happening that do not necessarily have to happen. Contingency therefore contrasts with the principle of necessity, the latter of which refigures the semblance of chance into the impression that it was always going to happen. Contingency's predominant expression in the philosophy of modality affirms the future's natural opacity and insists on the possibility for an event's unexpected divergence from illusory law.

The accident's complex causality and unexpected occurrence offers a tangible instance of contingency's often-inexpressible conceptualisation of time. But nevertheless, because accidental events refer to a specific event or occurrence, their demarcation is always subject to interpretation. What I see as an accident, another may not. An accident's denomination, in other words, reveals a time's and place's causal epistemology.<sup>5</sup>

This leads philosopher of speed Paul Virilio to argue that the accident provides a key hermeneutic tool for describing late capitalist modernity's systematic production of risk. In doing so, Virilio formulates an historical account of the accident that describes life in technological capitalism to be perpetually subjected to contingent events that are, from a broader perspective, the necessary 'blowback' of that same system. Describing this contradictory modality through the logic of inevitable accidents, Virilio argues that modernity invents its own catastrophes:

To invent the sailing ship or steamer is *to invent the shipwreck*. To invent the train is *to invent the rail accident* of derailment. To invent the family automobile is to produce the *pile-up* on the highway.<sup>6</sup>

While still ostensibly contingent on the surface of their appearance, accidents are also the necessary outcome of late capitalist production. They are 'an *invention* in the sense of uncovering what was hidden, just waiting to happen'.<sup>7</sup> Virilio historicises the accident to depict modernity as increasingly uncertain and subject to accident. His eschatological sociology underwrites the event's contingency with a systemic view of their statistical regularity and technological necessity.<sup>8</sup> This interrelated production of uncertainty, risk, and accident is, as critics of race and poverty point out, often unevenly distributed.<sup>9</sup> No longer the spanner in the works of a conveyer-smooth Fordism, the accident is rather an inevitable, socially distributed outcome of late capitalist modernity.

Virilio's story of the rise of telecommunications and transport infrastructures presents a familiar representation of modernity as a spatially compressed, temporally accelerated era of collisions between the self and technology. The rich narrative history of the speeding automobile and car crash, to which *Crash* adds, in part signifies this representation's associated cultural anxieties.<sup>10</sup> The history of cinema also holds a unique relation to this representation, being a medium that is often theorised as preoccupied with

the accident's representation and rationalisation. The car accident then, from early documentary film through to the Hollywood 'network' genre of the early 2000s, provides one aesthetic imaginary for the anxieties surrounding late modernity's production of risk and emphasises cinema's theorisation as a medium technologically conditioned on recording and archiving the accidental.<sup>11</sup>

Of the car accident's cinematic and literary heritage, *Crash* notably shares its title with J. G. Ballard's 1973 novel *Crash* and David Cronenberg's 1996 film adaptation. Both Ballard's novel and Cronenberg's film provide well-known evocations of technological modernity's systemic production of the car accident. Yet unlike in Haggis' *Crash*, which, as I will suggest, values the car accident for its affective interruption of social alienation, both Ballard's *Crash* and Cronenberg's *Crash* depict accidents to have been anticipated, prepared for, and mediated by consumer society. Ballard's *Crash* in particular points to the mass media's interpellation of protagonist James Ballard into sexual fantasies of vehicular crashes. His fantasies of the accident and his paranoia over their mediation by television advertising worries away at the contingency of the novel's many accidents. James' world is overwhelmed by 'road safety propaganda', from television enactments of accidents to the 'Road Research Laboratory', an institution dedicated to the simulation of the car crash.<sup>12</sup> Cronenberg's adaptation re-locates the novel's obsessions from Surrey to an unnamed North American city, but continues to follow the story of James and his cohort of car crash addicts who, to quote ringleader Vaughan in the film, desire the 'fertilising rather than [...] destructive event' of the car accident.<sup>13</sup> Like the novel, Cronenberg's adaptation is replete in deliberately willed car crashes and a shared interest in the accident's technological mediation. This shared focus frequently puts strain on both the book's and film's representations of unmediated contingency: both portray characters' desires for the vehicular crash to partially allegorise



technological modernity's production of the necessary and inevitable car accident.<sup>14</sup> Except in this case, that systemic production manifests in characters' efforts to bring about their own crashes. James Ballard's anxiety in the novel in particular figures the accident's inevitable production through a paranoia over its pre-meditation; it is as if society's mass mediation of the car accident rehearses his life's gruesome climax 'years in advance, and would take place on some highway or road junction known only to the makers of these [road safety] films'.<sup>15</sup> Although continuing these narratives' reflections on the abundance of accidents in urban space, Haggis' *Crash* treats the accident's contingency very differently. This latter *Crash* historicises the accident but simultaneously transposes the trope onto a narrative of social alienation, with specific focus on racial and class discord. The accident's contingency becomes essential in the film's attempt to address this story of alienation in contemporary Los Angeles.

*Crash* shows lives in a tense, racially divided Los Angeles repeatedly subject to accident. Many characters are at one point victim to either an accident or an unexpected encounter, and the film orchestrates these events with an unwavering fidelity to its genre, variously called the 'network', 'ensemble', or 'fractal' film.<sup>16</sup> This genre involves a wide assemblage of intersecting plotlines, which often come together through chance encounters. It functions through the viewer's cognisance of a character's place in the film's whole, which is often only partially glimpsed, taking the shape of what Caroline Levine would call a 'network' structure, a complex organisation of 'connectedness'.<sup>17</sup> *Crash*'s plots link up according to this diffuse structure, unfolding through a series of events, encounters, and entangled relations.

*Crash* formalises these intersecting storylines through non-linear narrative organisation. It begins with Graham and Ria's arrival at a murder investigation, before cutting to Dorri (Bahar Soomekh) and her father Farhad (Shaun Toub) the day earlier

buying a gun. After Farhad, the film cuts to Anthony (Ludacris) and Peter (Larenz Tate), the latter of whom we later discover to be the body visited by Graham and Ria. Graham and Ria, Farhad and Dorri, and Anthony and Peter thus each interconnect in both a formal and thematic sense; formal, insofar as they occupy the same world, and thematic, because of each character's similar imbrication in an environment ubiquitously subject to accident. This non-linear organisation thematically insists on *Crash*'s main rule of plotting: small decisions and minute fluctuations produce large and unexpected outcomes. If not for Dorri mistakenly choosing blanks for Farhad's gun, Farhad, later angry, would've killed, by further accident, Daniel's (Michael Peña) daughter, in an attempt to shoot Daniel himself. *Crash*'s plotting of these interrelations through chance, in which a character's small decisions can produce dramatically unexpected outcomes, suits the accident, an event structure that follows the rule of 'minor causes, great effects'.<sup>18</sup> This makes for a film that presents accidents, chance encounters, and miscommunication to model an historical present of networked complexity and inevitable accident.<sup>19</sup>

The accident functions in a number of ways in this representation: a method of showing complex connections between characters, a reflection of modernity's systemic production of risk to accident, and a narrative tool for mapping the links between individuals, institutions, and government as they cross over and through economic and racial inequalities. This does not mean that the film always maps institutional and individual interconnection through accident, however. In the case of police officer Graham's deliberate withholding of evidence under the demand of District Attorney Rick Cabot (Brendan Fraser), the film traces a direct causal link from Rick's political desire to appeal to 'the black vote' all the way to Graham's manipulation of evidence for the sake of his brother's criminal record. But directly causal relationships like this are a rare

occurrence in the film's representation of complex arrangements of race and class colliding through often unexpected and unforeseeable events.

This is none clearer than the scene in which white police officer Tom Hanson (Ryan Phillippe) kills Peter, a young African-American man. The scene demonstrates the accident's political ambiguity, here at odds with Graham's idealised contingent 'touch', by layering *Crash's* racial politics of individual prejudice over what it narrates to be a personal accident. Late in the film, Hanson offers a hitchhiking Peter a seat in his car. Coincidentally, it was Hanson who chased Peter's friend Anthony earlier in the day. While driving, Peter laughs at Hanson because he sees that Hanson also has a 'lucky' figurine of St. Christopher on his dashboard. Peter reaches into his coat pocket to show him his own figurine, but Hanson suspects Peter of reaching for a weapon and so he shoots him. Hanson's subsequent visual disbelief at his mistake sits uneasily with the clear case that he fires on Peter because of his own racial profiling. But *Crash's* narrative works to individualise Hanson's racism. Peter's murder, first of all, happens when Hanson is off-duty. That Peter is killed by Hanson, a new police officer who earlier complains about his racist partner Officer Ryan (Matt Dillon), individualises responsibility for Peter's murder, and echoes Ryan's earlier warning to Hanson that 'You think you know who you are ... you have no idea'. By also foregrounding Peter's and Hanson's shared superstitions through the St. Christopher figurine, the scene draws on what critics have noted to be the film's humanistic response to race and shared personal prejudice, rather than focussing on the racialised power and privilege differentiating them.<sup>20</sup> These details feed into an individualisation of Hanson's actions that mutes potential consideration of institutional racism as cause for this event. The camera's close-up zoom into Hanson's panicked face on seeing Peter's figurine makes an admission of personal error. It draws the viewer into a pained identification with him. His disbelief

impresses on this killing a sense that it was as much the result of an inexplicable mistake or accident on Hanson's behalf as it was the direct cause of institutionally attributable racial profiling.

The scene works to make the event appear accidental in order to partially reduce Peter's murder to Hanson's individual responsibility. I stress partially, however. After all, the film's simultaneous gesture toward Hanson's internalised prejudice means that the viewer will undoubtedly interpret his actions to be informed by structural and institutional racism even if *Crash* neglects to explore this with any real investment. This creates an interpretative difference, split between a reading of the killing as a personal accident and a reading of it as the outcome of structural racism, random and meaningless but institutionally caused and personally motivated. On the one hand, Peter's murder represents a grim example of uneven risk and the accident's social distribution, resulting in a young African-American man's death at the hands of a white police officer. On the other, *Crash*'s representation of this murder as accidental also supports the film's more systematic occlusion of the social histories of race and class and the institutional forms of racism that cause Peter's death.<sup>21</sup> By reducing the event to a personal and inexplicable mistake, *Crash* focusses blame on Hanson's individual prejudice and silences structural causality. This may initially appear at odds with *Crash*'s efforts to present the contingent event as opening up political and ethical possibility in its story of social alienation. But the film's narration of Peter's murder as accidental points toward the accident's broader role in *Crash*. Repeated plotted accidents underline the film's ubiquitous presentation of contingency; but building on Graham's normative desire for 'touch', the narrative's frequent mobilisation of that subjection for the purposes of staging painful, if ultimately positive, accidental encounters also, like in the case of Peter's murder, mutes social and historical context in favour of an individualised view of personal prejudice that the film

represents as possible to overcome. This feeds into how *Crash* structures its narrative around the plotted accident. It represents the accident making ethical demands on character and viewer alike, but this representation mutes consideration of the accident's uneven social distribution and the different kinds of vulnerability to contingency shaped by racial and class inequalities.

### **Radical contingency**

Sanjay Sharma argues that *Crash*'s incapacity to properly analyse racism invites a critical method better suited to understanding how the film's representation of race and power 'works' rather than one that uncovers its ineffective critique.<sup>22</sup> I follow a similar methodology in this account of *Crash*'s representation of the accident. Not in order to offer another critique of the film's representation of racism, but rather to understand the operations through which the accident and, by extension, contingency is made politically emancipatory and ethically demanding. In coordination with its portrayal of contemporary life's vulnerability to accident, then, *Crash* also figures the event as a concomitant response to racial and class inequality that can produce ethical social relations. This takes form in Graham's normative desire for 'touch'. Such a process, I suggest, follows, in popular aesthetic form, a pattern of politicising the accident discernible elsewhere in critical theory.

Recent critical attention to contingency, whether discussed in terms of the accident, the event, or the *clinamen*, has put conceptual importance on the constitutively contingent nature of historical processes.<sup>23</sup> Contingency in this sense is radical insofar as it provides an existential condition for time and being. It represents an unsurpassable, conceptual rule that shows necessary explanations of causality, history, and natural law to be retroactive fictions.<sup>24</sup> One prominent voice for this kind of radical contingency is

Catherine Malabou, whose theory of ‘plasticity’, a combination of neurobiological rupture and deconstruction, provides a materialist model for the capacity of unexpected occurrence in everything from the brain to the present. For Malabou, the accident represents the plastic nature of being and sketches out the beginnings of an ontological law:

recognising the ontology of the accident is a philosophically difficult task: it must be acknowledged as a law that is simultaneously logical and biological, but a law that does not allow us to anticipate its instances. Here is a law surprised by its own instances.<sup>25</sup>

The accident is a rule of unpredictable possibility. It puts primacy on the unforeseen as opposed to the predictable, the opaque future as opposed to the anticipated one, and the contradictory necessity of contingency.

Malabou’s work is often ambivalent about the accident’s political and ethical qualities, moving between the event’s productive modelling of a relation of ‘recognition, of non-domination, and of liberty’ to its destructive and violent nature.<sup>26</sup> Critical theorist Todd McGowan, however, suggests that the ‘philosophically difficult task’ of describing an accident implicates the event’s invitation of narration in the language of ethical demand, which bears upon political decision in the present. In this respect, McGowan’s work provides an illustrative shorthand for a kind of theorisation of radical contingency that stresses the concept’s politically radical nature.

For McGowan, an accident’s or contingent event’s occurrence throws the subject into a dearth of possible signification as to the cause and reason of the event. What this dearth of signification shows, however, is the falsity of necessary explanation. This is because these events indicate ‘the incompleteness of every structure [that] marks the limit of structural necessity’.<sup>27</sup> Accidents are thus epistemological fulcra that provide insight

into an ontologically conditional contingency. McGowan then proceeds to align necessity with discourses principally opposed to a radical, emancipatory politics. The latter can only precipitate, he suggests, from recognising existential incompleteness:

In the space of this absence [of the real Other], one finds a contingent moment that takes one by surprise and remains fundamentally inexplicable. Rather than reducing contingency to a deeper necessity in the way of the believer (in God, in the War on Terror, in progress, in Nature), we might avow the contingent, believe in it as our unsurpassable limit, and place it at the centre of our conceptual universe. The politicised subject exists in a universe structured around contingency.<sup>28</sup>

The subject's avowal of contingency opens them to a horizon of resistant possibility and provides them with a kind of best ethical attitude, one that 'offers the subject the opportunity to act'.<sup>29</sup> Avowal of contingency therefore furnishes the politicised subject with 'an opening through which a genuine relationship outside of clearly structured positions' is possible.<sup>30</sup> Exposure to contingency can be an anxious experience, but it also 'represents the only possibility for connection' with otherness as long as we 'avoid reducing the contingent event to an underlying necessity'.<sup>31</sup> McGowan therefore stakes two important assertions on the contingent event's – and the accident's – politics. On the one hand, quite simply, contingency is life's unsurpassable limit. On the other, contingency's proper recognition as unsurpassable limit provides an opening for a politics of resistance and a model of good ethical practice if embraced. Because of the contrast between this attitude of recognition and a clearly conservative necessity, it is as if contingency guarantees a specific politics and ethical interrelation if acknowledged properly.<sup>32</sup> Radical political decisions issue from an acknowledgement of this constitutive contingency that makes a demand on the subject, which can happen from exposure to an accidental event. McGowan's argument therefore demonstrates the subtle travelling of contingency from an abstract principle of time (radical contingency in its first sense) to

something that is in its essence emancipatory (radical contingency in its second sense). Accidents indicate the contradictory law of contingency, but contingency's proper acknowledgement in turn can provide an opening for a radical politics and ethics that are implicit in and issue from that avowal.

My gambit is that through an analysis of *Crash*, we can approach the theoretically problematic transition of contingency's ontological status into contingency's political and ethical essence. Despite McGowan's description of the contingent event's oppositional capacity, there remains the more tangled hermeneutical issue that concerns whether or not contingency's recognition is not just conditional for a specific kind of politics, but can rather also ground any and every political form. That is, if accidents both manifest in socially differentiated ways and express time's constitutive contingency, then why can't contingency also condition other political and ethical outcomes, including conservative and non-ethical relations?

*Crash's* narration of a series of ethically charged encounters arguably gives critics of politically radical contingency what they want. But the film's superimposition of the accident's political and ethical demand onto its representation of racial and class inequality produces an irresolvable tension, in which incidents that evidence the accident's historically and socially uneven distribution persist, albeit barely visibly, as a remainder of the politically productive accident. In order for radical contingency to cohere, in other words, *Crash* has to flatten the accident's historical particularity, resulting in a curiously contentless representation of the trope that becomes, by the film's end, synonymous with time. *Crash* urges character and viewer alike to be open to the hopeful capacities of contingent events, but by representing an equivalence between accidents and temporality itself, the film shows accidents to also be the opposite, a trope



that encompasses any and every political horizon and that is not essentially politically radical.

Early on, *Crash* strikes a series of equivalences between racism, anticipation, and affect in order to position the accident in a way that shifts it from an historical phenomenon to an event prized for its capacity to circumvent race and class formations. Eight minutes in, Anthony and Peter, two young African-American men, the latter of whom Hanson later kills, debate their stereotyping and treatment when in a restaurant. This early, reflexive framing of the film as predominantly occupied with race then shows white couple Jean Cabot (Sandra Bullock) and husband Rick walking past Anthony and Peter and physically recoiling from them. Anthony notices: 'She got colder as soon as she saw us.' Jean's withdrawal projects an expectation onto Anthony. Her recoil suggests that Anthony and Peter can touch her even without physical contact. After all, physical recoil from another's body can still imply contact, as Sara Ahmed suggests, even if invisible: 'to withdraw from a relation of physical proximity to bodies recognised as strange is precisely to be touched by those bodies, in such a way that the subject is moved from its place'.<sup>33</sup> Anthony and Peter touch Jean despite their lack of physical contact; in turn, she touches them by withdrawing, policing their bodies according to an anticipatory racism that acts non-physically.

Jean's recoil shows 'touch' functioning socially, differentiating as much as it ethically relates. She determines Anthony and Peter's presence in this social space through expectations she projects onto them. *Crash* uses this scene to establish a structural equivalence between racism and anticipation. However, almost as if in response to this, *Crash* proceeds to unpick the kernel of Graham's idealised 'touch' from Jean's demonstration of touch's racist operation through the help of the contingent encounter. The film's use of accidents, and especially car accidents, is central for this representation,

which it presents to be in some way circumventive of racism's anticipatory measures and an opening for ethical recognition.

The film stages four car accidents. The first happens off-screen, prior to Ria and Graham's opening discussion. The second involves Anthony and Peter in a collision with Park (Daniel Dae Kim), whom they take to hospital. The third is a serious car accident involving Christine (Thandie Newton), an African-American woman coping with the trauma of her sexual assault earlier at the hands of white police officer Ryan. The film doubles down on its insistent plotting of chance interconnection here, however, by ensuring that Ryan discovers her car. A final accident in the film involves a rear-end collision between insurance administrator Shaniqua Johnson (Loretta Devine) and an unnamed character, and most forcibly synonymises the accident with time.

Christine's accident is an iconic instance of the film's investment in contingently encountered 'touch'. *Crash* narrates her accident in the cut. After cutting away from her argument with her husband, Cameron (Terrence Howard), to a scene in which Farhad considers his revenge on Daniel, the camera cuts back to her overturned car, focalised through Ryan's perspective. Christine's accident happens in the time of this cut, forcing the viewer to reconstruct it.<sup>34</sup> Ryan rushes over to the car to find a concussed Christine. The film's discursive indifference to the actual accidental event, replaced by its attention to the accident's re-introduction of Ryan and Christine, emphasises their purposeful convergence. Because of his earlier sexual assault, Christine reacts with horror. She refuses rescue, but he urges her to let him help her. When Christine realises the significance of the accident she allows Ryan to approach her. The film pointedly focusses on his handling of her body. Ryan is at one point only inches away from Christine, but rather than the physical and racist violence of his earlier sexual assault, *Crash* stresses

Christine's invitation, and Ryan handles her in a way that reconfigures 'touch' between them.

Tarja Laine reads this scene as one that represents an ethically productive form of 'touch' in which Ryan is forced to engage with his earlier racist policing, and which initiates the possibility for an 'unmediated' and ethically reciprocal 'touch'.<sup>35</sup> Such reconfiguration is made possible through their contingent and unexpected encounter. 'The accident,' Laine suggests, 'becomes a moment of reciprocity', the condition of possibility for this idealised and reciprocal 'touch', because it circumvents both characters' anticipatory measures, and opens 'a possibility for reaching out to the other'.<sup>36</sup> When Ryan wrenches Christine out of her car, he pulls her to him. The scene's lurid cinematography, combining a centre shot of their embrace against a blue sky accompanied by the overpowering musical score, intimates a reconfigured kind of 'touch' as pined for by Graham. The film heroises Ryan, here, and emotively draws the two together. Their reckoning of one another hinges, crucially, on their accidental convergence. To recall the above theoretical contextualisation, contingency confers an ethical and political demand on those subject to it. If one doesn't reduce the contingent event to the structure of a pre-given, presumably conservative necessity, contingency can provide 'an opening through which a genuine relationship outside of clearly structured positions is possible.'<sup>37</sup> *Crash* shows what this logic can be made to do in the context of 'touch'. The film collides Ryan and Christine together through accident in order to circumvent their 'structured positions', demanding their recognition of one another.

*Crash's* plotting of the accident in this way, however, reveals some of the shortcomings of this theorisation of the contingent encounter. Ryan's and Christine's reconnection through the accident is remarkably slight on race's socially and institutionally specific formations, peddling individual heroism and flattening Christine's

warranted grievances in favour of an overly sentimental encounter.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, the film's focus on this kind of dramatic encounter is clearly at odds with other contingent events in its narrative that it does not choose to lavish with the same kind of attention, and which do not always produce such redemptive outcomes. A later scene in the film, in which middle class white housewife Jean falls down her staircase to be saved by her housekeeper, Maria (Yomi Perry), evidences this difference.

Throughout the film Jean subjects Maria to a range of aggressions, but she has a sudden change of heart due to an accidental fall. Ninety minutes in, Jean walks towards her staircase while on the phone. We see a close up of her foot, and suddenly she slips. Unlike Christine's accident, which the film situates in its cut, the camera languishes on the detail of Jean's slipping foot at half speed. The camera then cuts to Jean, at the bottom of the stairs, and pans over her twisted leg before fading out. *Crash* returns to Jean's storyline ten minutes later, with Jean sitting in a hospital bed. Maria then arrives. It turns out Maria discovered Jean after the accident and drove her to hospital. As Maria leans over Jean, Jean embraces her, and whispers 'You're the best friend I've got'. The film's visual organisation of Jean's slip lavishes attention on her accident and injury in a way that foregrounds the event as cause for her change of heart. The shot of their embrace then frames Jean's face as central, obscuring the back of Maria's head. Its meaning is simple: Jean 'touches' Maria, finally able to acknowledge her. Jean, who used to abuse Maria, is forced into a moment of ethical recognition, which makes Maria's labour visible to her. But Maria, whose face is hidden, is nothing but a prop for Jean's narrative redemption.

*Crash's* focus on Jean's slip and the absence of Maria's reaction to Jean's change of heart implicates the film in an economy of attention that privileges particular scales of contingent event above others. The film has a blind spot in particular for what Elizabeth Povinelli terms 'quasi-events'.<sup>39</sup> Such events equally characterise the world's constitutive

subjection to contingency. They are widespread, a general condition of life, but they do not garner the attention reserved for the kinds of spectacular accident seen in *Crash*. The ‘quasi-event’ is the unnoticed corollary of the catastrophic, a catalyst for endurance rather than a window into ethical encounter, occurring ‘within a socially differentiated world’ that distributes events differently according to race, class, and gender.<sup>40</sup> Maria is also subject to contingency, but in the form of Jean’s arbitrary attacks, aggressive and unexpected addresses that Maria has to endure in multiple scenes. While not accidents necessarily, Maria’s subjection to an almost invisible accumulation of quasi-events is structurally metonymic of the film’s broader fascination with the onslaught of contingency. But like Maria’s face in the shot of Jean’s embrace, *Crash* renders these contingent events invisible at the expense of spectacular accidents, the latter of which seem only able to provide *Crash* with its means of foregrounding ‘the ethical dictates of empathic identification’ most clearly articulated by Graham’s formulation of ‘touch’.<sup>41</sup> Contingency may not be as flatly generative as *Crash* proposes therefore when subjection to it can equally produce unnoticed suffering. This is not contingency embraced ‘wrongly’, as a critic of radical contingency might have it, then, but another manifestation of contingency, free of any kind of necessary interpretation, directed at someone who has no choice but to avow and endure it.

The film’s focus on the spectacular accident at the expense of these invisible manifestations of contingency is symptomatic, I argue, of its broader attempt to pose contingency as politically productive and ethically demanding. To emphasise Jean’s recognition of Maria through accident, the film has to minimise Maria’s own endurance in the face of a different kind of contingency, which presents the unbalanced contextual effects of a constitutive condition that, supposedly, is generative in and of itself. This process is indicative of the film at large. *Crash* minimises context, a sense of the

accident's historical distribution, and the vectors of race and class in those moments precisely when the accident is most valued for its politically and ethically normative qualities. In this way, *Crash* inadvertently offers an aesthetic redress to theorisations of radical contingency. It represents in plot a stance toward the accident that shares a particular way of presenting contingent events also discernible in these discourses. But *Crash* also points to and problematises, on an aesthetic level, the argumentative conditions that ground the logic of this kind of politicised and ethicised contingency in critical theory. This logic, I suggest, suffers from an under-examination of its own presumed relationship between political subjectivity and what it purports as ontological ground. *Crash's* exclusion of the different social and historical forms of contingency at the expense of a politically and ethically productive accident results, I argue, in a trope that is curiously contentless, a narrative event that, by the film's conclusion, becomes flatly synonymous with time.

### **Everywhere and all the time**

In this concluding section, I offer a theoretical alternative to the notion of politically radical and ethically demanding contingency. If contingency provides a description of the world in general, something to which everything is always already subjected, then the only way to acknowledge the different historical forms of contingency, as registered by *Crash's* telling exclusions, would be to suggest that this constitutive subjection to accident is conditional for any and every political horizon or ethical demand.

The issue over this double implication of contingency finds clearest discussion in the work of political theorists Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, writers who have not, as of yet, been put into conversation with critical theory's recent turn to contingent events. For Laclau and Mouffe, the world is also constituted by an irreducible contingency, and

they argue for ‘the ultimately contingent nature of all objectivity’.<sup>42</sup> Forms of excess always exceed imagined totalities, universalism always implies antagonism, and events always deviate from proposed laws. ‘Contingency’ in Laclau and Mouffe concerns less the unexpected future than it does the structural relations between things and meaning’s essential historicity; it describes how everything from discursive formations to political decisions are never fixed, nor fully constituted or positively given from the beginning, but are rather the result of their outside relations. Like the linguistic sign whose meaning depends on its relation to other signs, nothing has positive political meaning in itself, but rather depends on historical context, and is discursively made. They repeatedly critique theories of political meaning that view political attachments as given from the outset, accusing these approaches of a metaphysics that views ‘history and society as intelligible totalities around conceptually explicable laws’.<sup>43</sup> This critique and assertion of the absolute historicity of meaning yields their key ontological postulate: the world’s ‘radical contingency’.<sup>44</sup>

Laclau and Mouffe address the politicisation of accidents in a crucial way. Both insist that radical contingency alone only provides a conditional description of the historicity of politics in general. Contingency is the ground on which any political decisions build, but the concept does not in itself legislate for a particular norm. Laclau often makes this point with reference to the meaninglessness of contingency absent from context, where ‘the assertion of the contingent nature of all objectivity’ would merely provide ‘nothing but indeterminacy and the impossibility of any coherent discourse’.<sup>45</sup> ‘Pure’ contingency is ultimately meaningless. It cannot intrinsically precipitate a specific politicised horizon, then, nor offer ethical recognition of the other if embraced properly, because it is without content and is a general description of the world’s constitutive unfolding. Of course, a purely necessary world would forfeit freedom and the possibility

of future difference. But radical contingency in Laclau and Mouffe's terms is a description of what one is always already subject to: a ground for any and every political decision that can produce both ethical and non-ethical relations. It is, as Laclau puts it elsewhere, 'constitutive of all experience'.<sup>46</sup>

Laclau and Mouffe's work pinpoints the problem of reaching for a description of the world to offer a specific kind of political and ethical content if recognised in the right way. Contingency cannot alone prescribe a rule for how to ethically relate to another, nor does it guarantee a particular kind of political future if one was to embrace this state of affairs.<sup>47</sup> Rather, contingency's recognition provides a descriptive understanding of time's constitutive relationship to the unforeseeable future. Laclau and Mouffe's account of the relationship between contingency and specific political and ethical decisions therefore helps to explain *Crash*'s minimisation of the accident's historically uneven distribution and its exclusion of racial and class formations in the service of a simplistic account of ethically charged, politically productive encounters. These are the direct result of its effort to transform a concept that is ground for any and every decision into an implicitly political and ethical opening, which can only cohere through a focus on the accident's 'positive' manifestations at the expense of its 'negative' ones. In other words, by inuring itself to structural critique.

The film's socially reductive logic loops back into theories of the politically and ethically productive accident, to show, through popular aesthetic form, the theoretical inadequacy of staking a specific politics to contingency. This results in a curiously meaningless portrayal of accidents by the end of the film. Its final scene, following on from a lengthy montage of various characters, begins with Anthony, who releases victims of a smuggling operation from a stolen vehicle before driving off. The camera tracks his van in a panning shot to the left. Two cars then emerge in the left foreground of the frame,



interrupting the pan. The shot readjusts, following these vehicles as they move to the right. The car in front position of this right pan brakes suddenly and the second car behind crashes into it. The collision is almost centre frame in this arrested shot. The two drivers get out and argue with each other. After a short while, we cut to an aerial shot of their argument. The aerial shot rises above them and gradually expands its field of vision, incorporating the crossroad and other, interconnected roads. After some time, the camera stops, and angles 90 degrees up to the L.A. highway, offering an expansive vision of hundreds of cars on a busy spaghetti junction, before closing to the credits.

The scene's expansive cinematography re-distributes an isolated accident onto the entire city at large, re-populating this final crash across the city. The slow and steady presence of passing traffic in the bottom half of the shot smothers the abrupt shock of the earlier accident. But the pointed juxtaposition of these two images, the sudden accident and the moving traffic, also asks the audience to view the singular accident as immanent in these other vehicles. The cinematography transposes the accident onto this busy highway, and in doing so temporalises it. In other words, the closing scene transforms the final accident into a synecdoche for a more systemic contingency, with the promise of accident elsewhere in the city. The accident becomes a principle of unexpected divergence immanent in passing time. Despite the film's previous effort to politicise accidents, and to use contingency to circumvent characters' anticipations of one another, there is something remarkably empty about the film's final evocation of accident. It is as if, ultimately, *Crash* stretches the trope to include any and every contingent event and in doing so evacuates it of meaning.

The film's eventual reduction of the accident to a kind of ubiquitous meaninglessness results from its pining for a specific political and ethical meaning from a trope that is representative of the world's constitutive subjection to contingency. In this

way, the film's stance towards accidents reflects a related attitude to politicised contingency in discourses of radical contingency. In both cases, however, the travelling of contingency from ontological ground to an opening for political decision and ethical relation collapses in on itself, and looks instead like a vague embrace of empty temporality. Treating the contingent event's ontological immanence as sufficient ground for specific political and ethical decision inadvertently excises accident and contingency from their social and historical contexts. This produces a narrative manoeuvre found throughout *Crash*, in which the film treats the accident as politically and ethically productive in those moments when it also absents itself from structural critique. As a result, *Crash*'s urge for an embrace of accidents in this final scene comes to look less like something that implies a specific ethics or politics, and much more like an empty temporality to which character and viewer alike are passive subjects. Such openness to contingency may precede political and ethical decision, but the film's expansion of the accident to the point of being indissociable from time suggests that it cannot alone and in itself prescribe a particular ethics of interaction nor guarantee, when embraced, a specific political horizon.

If everything is contingent, then contingency cannot be in itself essentially emancipatory, nor a shortcut for ethical relation. Contingency does not automatically breach into and broach other, better futures. It is more appropriate to see contingency as the ground from which political decisions and ethical (and non-ethical) engagements proceed, rather than something that one seeks out, like Graham, hoping for the ultimately productive to emerge from the unforeseeable. Not, that is, when accidents happen everywhere and all the time.

- 
- 1 *Crash*, dir. Paul Haggis (Lionsgate Films, 2004) [on DVD]. All subsequent references are to this edition.
- 2 For instance, see Hsuan L. Hsu, 'Racial Privacy, the L.A. Ensemble Film, and Paul Haggis' *Crash*', *Film Criticism*, 31.1 (2006), pp. 132-56, Robert Jensen and Robert Wosnitzer, 'Crash and the Self-Indulgence of White America', *The Black Commentator*, 176 (2002). [http://www.blackcommentator.com/176/176\\_think\\_crash\\_jensen\\_wosnitzer.html](http://www.blackcommentator.com/176/176_think_crash_jensen_wosnitzer.html) [Date accessed: 17 July 2018], and Susan Searls Giroux and Henry Giroux, 'Don't Worry, We Are All Racists!', *Third Text*, 21.6 (2007), pp. 745-59.
- 3 On contingency and causality, see Valerie Rohy's study *Lost Causes: Narrative, Etiology, and Queer Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 163-84.
- 4 For a history of the accident's definition, see Ross Hamilton, *Accident: A Philosophical and Literary History* (London and Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 2007) and Gerda Reith, *The Age of Chance: Gambling in Western Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999).
- 5 See also David Rudrum, 'Shooting a Donkey: Accidents and Mistakes in Austin and McEwan', *Philosophy and Literature*, 37.2 (2013), pp. 421-34.
- 6 Paul Virilio, *The Original Accident*, trans. Julie Rose (Cambridge and Malden, MA: Polity, 2007), p. 10.
- 7 *Ibid.*, p. 9.
- 8 See also Howard Caygill's work on accident and insurance in *Kafka: In Light of the Accident* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017).
- 9 On risk's environmental production of different timescales of violence, see Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011); on uneven risk and disposability, see Neferti X. M. Tadiar, 'Life-Times of Disposability Within Global Neoliberalism', *Social Text*, 31.2 (2013), pp. 19-48; on late capitalism's production of accidents, see Janet Harbord, 'Contingency's Work: Kracauer's Theory of Film and the Trope of the Accidental', *New Formations*, 61 (2007), pp. 90-103.
- 10 For instance, see Jeffrey T. Schnapp, 'Crash (Speed as Engine of Individuation)', *Modernism/Modernity*, 6.1 (1999), pp. 1-49 and Nicholas Daly, *Literature, Technology, and Modernity, 1860 – 2000* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 110-35.
- 11 For a history of the car crash in film, see Karen Beckman, *Crash: Cinema and the Politics of Speed and Stasis* (London and Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010). On film's formal relation to contingency, see Mary Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive* (London and Cambridge, MA: Harvard University

- 
- Press, 2002) and Janet Harbord, *The Evolution of Film: Rethinking Film Studies* (Cambridge and Malden, MA: Polity, 2007), pp. 118-45.
- 12 J. G. Ballard, *Crash* (London and New York: Vintage, 1995), p. 39.
- 13 *Crash*, dir. David Cronenberg (Columbia TriStar, 1996) [on DVD].
- 14 For a survey of accounts of the novel's simulation of the accident, see Roger Luckhurst, *'The Angle between Two Walls': The Fiction of J. G. Ballard* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997).
- 15 Ballard, *Crash*, p. 39.
- 16 David Bordwell, *The Poetics of Cinema* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. 132-56 and Wendy Everett, 'Fractal Films and the Architecture of Complexity', *Studies in European Cinema*, 2.3 (2005), pp. 159-71.
- 17 Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Oxford and Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), p. 122.
- 18 Roland Barthes, 'Structure of the Fait-Divers', in *Critical Essays*, trans. Richard Howard (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1972), pp. 185-96, p. 190.
- 19 As Patrick Jagoda suggests, the network film avoids paranoid conspiracy narratives and favours representing systemically produced but still contingent accidents. *Network Aesthetics* (London and Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2016), pp. 73-102.
- 20 Giroux and Giroux phrase this as the film's simplistic belief in 'democratically shared racist disposition'. 'Don't Worry, We Are All Racists!', p. 755.
- 21 See Hsu, 'Racial Privacy, the L.A. Ensemble Film, and Paul Haggis' *Crash*', and Jensen and Wosnitzer, 'Crash and the Self-Indulgence of White America'.
- 22 Sanjay Sharma, 'Crash – Towards a Critical Pedagogy of Whiteness?', *Cultural Studies*, 24.4 (2010), pp. 533–52, p. 542.
- 23 For a recent special edition journal on contingency in philosophy, history, and literature, see *Textual Practice*, 32.3 (2018). Individual approaches on the *clinamen* include Nicholas Royle, *Veering: A Theory of Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011) and Louis Althusser, *Philosophy of the Encounter: Later Writings, 1978-87*, eds. Oliver Corpet and François Matheron, trans. G. M. Goshgarian (London: Verso, 2006), pp. 163-207; for a recent account of contingency, realist ontology, and the event, see Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, trans. Ray Brassier (London and New York: Continuum, 2009).
- 24 See Caygill, *Kafka*, pp. 151-80.
- 25 Catherine Malabou, *The Ontology of the Accident: An Essay on Destructive Plasticity*, trans. Carolyn Shread (Cambridge and Malden, MA: Polity, 2012), p. 30.

- 
- 26 Catherine Malabou, *What Should We Do With Our Brain?*, trans. Sebastian Rand (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), p. 31. See also Laura Salisbury, 'Narration and Neurology: Ian McEwan's *Mother Tongue*', *Textual Practice*, 24.5 (2010), pp. 883-912.
- 27 Todd McGowan, 'The Contingency of Connection: The Path to Politicisation in *Babel*', *Discourse*, 30.3 (2008), pp. 401-18, p. 408.
- 28 *Ibid.*, pp. 415-6.
- 29 *Ibid.*, p. 409.
- 30 *Ibid.*, p. 413.
- 31 *Ibid.*, pp. 414, p. 415.
- 32 McGowan confirms this summation in his work on 'rupture', another model for unexpected possibility. In this, he and his co-author make the striking remark that 'there is no such thing as a conservative rupture'. Todd McGowan and Paul Eisenstein, *Rupture: On the Emergence of the Political* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2012), p. 36.
- 33 Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 49.
- 34 On the filmic cut and the accident, see René Thoreau Bruckner, 'Lost Time: Blunt Head Trauma and Accident-Driven Cinema', *Discourse*, 30.3 (2008), pp. 373-400.
- 35 Tarja Laine, "'It's the Sense of Touch": Skin in the Making of Cinematic Consciousness', *Discourse*, 29.1 (2007), pp. 35-48, p. 41.
- 36 *Ibid.*, p. 41.
- 37 McGowan, 'The Contingency of Connection', p. 413.
- 38 In this respect, the film's liberal individualist story of personal prejudice echoes Lauren Berlant's account of sentimental political rhetoric, which produces narratives of universalist feeling that elevate claims of shared 'vigilant sensibility, virtue, and conscience' to obscure 'the fundamental terms that organise power'. Lauren Berlant, *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* (London and Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), p. 35.
- 39 Elizabeth Povinelli, *Economies of Abandonment: Social Belonging and Endurance in Late Liberalism* (London and Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 133.
- 40 *Ibid.*, p. 144.
- 41 *Ibid.*, p. 153.
- 42 Ernesto Laclau, *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time* (London: Verso, 1990), p. 18.
- 43 Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 2001), p. 3.
- 44 Laclau, *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time*, p. 20.
- 45 *Ibid.*, p. 26.

---

46 Ernesto Laclau, “The Time Is out of Joint”, *Diacritics*, 25.2 (1995), pp. 85-96, p. 93.

47 I stress that I am not advocating a naïve divide between ontology and politics. Any and every theory of being is itself caught up in and influenced by its historical enunciation.