

Introduction

“The Business of Looking”

The “germ” for this consideration of Henry James and cinema comes from James’s preface to *The Ambassadors*, his late novel of blindness and insight, where he describes a delightful “privilege” enjoyed by the “teller of tales” or the “handler of puppets.” James—ever cognizant of the benefits and limitations that appear to descend upon the author like fate upon the chosen one, yet ever ambivalent about the power that he accords to himself as “teller” and “handler”—describes this privilege as coterminous with “the business of looking”: “No privilege of the handler of puppets and teller of tales is more delightful, or has more of the suspense and the thrill of a game of difficulty breathlessly played, than just this business of looking for the unseen and the occult, in a scheme half-grasped, by the light or, so to speak, by the clinging scent, of the gauge already in hand.”¹ The “business of looking” is applicable to any range of artistic disciplines, but the precise language of this passage is clearly cinematic. Visualizing the “unseen and the occult” in a narrative scheme “half grasped . . . by the light” could be said of the films of Alfred Hitchcock as easily as the novels of Henry James. Indeed, the initial connection I made when reading the preface to *The Ambassadors*, in an effort to better understand the relationship between James’s narrative schemes and the visual imaginary of his late fiction, was the one that might exist between James and Hitchcock. If we regard the medium of film in Tom Gunning’s terms as a “transparent” yet phantasmatic “filter of light, a caster of shadows, a weaver of phantoms. . . . [where] the act of seeing encounters a bizarre entity whose quasi-ethereal nature marks the limit (or contradiction) of visibility,” we have a homologous

approximation of how James regards the narrative medium as carrying out the business of looking for the unseen and the obscure in a scheme half-grasped by light.² A snapshot of the narrative scheme of the novel prefaced by James's description shows a protagonist, Lambert Strether, grasping at shadows cast amidst faint glimmers of epistemological illumination across three hundred pages of meticulous detail, concluding with certainty only about the limitations of vision and ephemeral hints as to all that might have been seen but has not.

The same set of connections between narrational and cinematic sensibilities might be made between any number of modern novelists and modern and contemporary filmmakers, especially since one of the primary assumptions of theoretical modernism is that its products are intensively intermedial and dependent upon visualization as the primary mode of representation occurring "within a larger history and economy of sensory perception that Walter Benjamin saw as the decisive battleground for the meaning and fate of modernity."³ But, particularly in the late work and the prefaces to his novels that have constituted the basis for understanding his fictional strategies since their assemblage by R. P. Blackmur in 1934, James seems particularly prescient about the cinematic potential of his work inherent in his conceptualization of writing as an act of seeing. As Susan M. Griffin and Alan Nadel have surmised in an edited volume devoted to two men who "knew too much," Hitchcock and James: "James's sensibility was in many ways cinematic. He was profoundly concerned with the control of the gaze, with its powers and implications, long before there emerged a technology of animation to which the gaze would be central or a narrative medium based on that technology. He interrogated cinematic conventions for the most part before the medium of film existed . . . [James was] working, in other words, in a pure abstract laboratory of what might be called a cinematic imagination."⁴

In this book, I propose to explore how James's "cinematic imagination," as it is revealed in his late fiction and critical prefaces, is refracted in a series of modern/contemporary films that dwell on mutual concerns on how time and circumstance are to be rendered narratively and visually. James's critical prefaces were written near the end of his career for the New York Edition of his selected works, originally published in 1907–1909; coming in the wake of the late fictions that I consider here, from *What Maisie Knew* (1897) to *The Ambassadors* (1903), these prefaces serve as highly self-conscious commentaries on James's fictional architecture

and methodology. Historically, the culminating years in which James regarded his writing of five decades as both an author and a critic were also significant years in the development of the cinematic arts: in 1907, the first ninety-minute feature film, *L'Enfant Prodigue*, was released by Gaumont, and the year saw the initiation of the wildly popular Broncho Billy western film series; in 1908, D. W. Griffith directed his first film, a short entitled *The Adventures of Dollie*, and a group of film producers joined together with Thomas Edison to form the Motion Picture Patents Company in order to corner the market on filmmaking in America; in 1909, there were 9,000 movie theaters in the United States, and the *New York Times* published its first film review.⁵ In positioning the reflections of Henry James on his own novels in the late phase of his career alongside these signs of the emerging prominence of cinema in cultural life, I am not claiming that James was influenced directly by film, nor film by him. Although, as Susan M. Griffin relates, "James's fiction has provided a remarkable resource for filmmakers, inspiring over 100 film and television adaptations," and though he may have seen a handful of early, non-feature films (according to Griffin, "the seventy-minute film of the Corbett-Fitzsimmons fight word championship prizefight," "a short film about the Boer War in 1900," and perhaps a handful of others), in this book, I am not primarily focused on questions of adaptation or intermedial influence.⁶ Rather, I wish to explore how James's late fiction and the critical prefaces of the New York Edition embody a culmination of ideas about vision, event, temporality, and perspective that had been percolating in his work from the beginning. These come to the fore during a time when a new medium is beginning to establish its own methodological and theoretical foundations within the "larger history and economy of sensory perception" serving as "the decisive battleground for the meaning and fate of modernity" that Hansen mentions. My idea is to focus on and explore a second culmination of James's twinned narrative and visual concerns in contemporary films that, as Frederic Jameson declares, provide ample evidence of an "increasing, tendential, all-pervasive visuality" spread across the history of modernity.⁷ In so doing, I will pursue a set of correspondences between narrative architecture and cinematic architecture: James's late fiction reveals reflexive experiments in narrativity, perspective, the use of free indirect discourse, and the management of time roughly analogous to experiments in cinematic narration, set design, shot management, and editing in an array of modern and contemporary films that, through these experiments, manifest *their* reflexivity; both are

invested in the relation between visible and invisible, and the totality or partiality of what can be seen.

In comparing several of James's late fictions to modern and contemporary films, my goal is to extend the arc initiated in this "moment" of modernity's inception from James's fiction to its manifestations in contemporary cinema. I deliberately avoid defining this arc as one that curves from "modernism" to "postmodernism" (or "post-postmodernism") because I do not wish to rehearse old and tired debates about the dividing lines and transitions between the two, or whether the latter exists as an epoch separable from modernism, or whether we have passed either or both by. Briefly, however, the relationship between James's fiction and modern/contemporary cinema can be viewed in the terms Fredric Jameson provides assessing the all-pervasiveness of visuality cited above in *Signatures of the Visible*. There, he claims to have previously misrepresented the dialectical and historical relationship between modernism and postmodernism in epochal terms. With the formal intervention that the development of cinema offers and a reassessment of the "asymmetry" it introduces into a dialectical understanding of the materiality of both the scriptural and the visual, Jameson claims that "modernism turn[s] out to be anything but an inverted realism, and postmodernism anything but a cancellation of modernity."⁸ In other terms, film becomes the new entry into the history of forms and genres under capitalism that undermines any binary, epochal relationship between the "before" and "after" of modernism and postmodernism. Instead, the capacity of film to visualize reality in new ways transforms how we regard visuality in all mediums, particularly in the act of comparing two mediums—novel and film—which have established their preeminence as avatars of capitalized mass culture.

Of primary concern here, then, is how James's cinematic imagination and a thematics of visuality conveyed in his late fiction and prefaces offer parallels to modern/contemporary films engaging in experiments in the visualization of interiority, time, space, and event: these include Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window* (1954) and *The Birds* (1963), Michael Haneke's *Caché* (2005), Christopher Nolan's *Memento* (2000), Quentin Tarantino's *Kill Bill: Vol. 1* and *Vol. 2* (2003–2004), and Lars von Trier's *Melancholia* (2011). At first glance, such comparisons will seem odd and serendipitous, especially as I make no claims upon influence or genealogy. But in the readings to follow setting one of James's late fictions alongside one of these films, my purpose is to show how both raise comparative questions about knowing, seeing, and experiencing, and how these are

registered in the chosen medium. One hesitates to use the word “meta” too loosely, but I believe it is fair to say that in his late phase and his prefaces, and at an inception point for modernism, James is practicing an art of metafiction (fiction about the making of fiction) that has resonance in the metacinematic films of Hitchcock, Haneke, Tarantino, Nolan, and von Trier, symptomatic of an age of “all-pervasive visuality.” For James, a crucial aspect of his thinking about narration—the act of relating all of the details that go into a story including the interacting and (often) conflicting elements of plot, point of view, affect, geography, scene, dialogue, characterization, objects, “world”—is conceptualized in cinematic terms. Comparing James’s “cinematic” thinking as revealed in his late novels, stories, and prefaces to the cinematic thinking as revealed in films by the directors I have named reveals the extent to which specific aspects and themes of a visual imaginary pervade modernism across time and media.

The central, oft-cited metaphor that James develops for his understanding of his own fictional architecture occurs in the preface to *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881), a novel indicative of James’s increasing interest in the exploration of interiority and the resulting experiments of his late career in forging delicate, complex bonds between “reality” or “world” and an individual consciousness. In the preface to *Portrait*, James speaks of the “high price of the novel” as an entity so varied in its particulars that it continuously threatens to explode its own boundaries:

Here we get exactly the high price of the novel as a literary form—its power not only, while preserving that form with closeness, to range through all the differences of the individual relation to its general subject-matter, all the varieties of outlook on life, of disposition to reflect and project, created by conditions that are never the same . . . but positively to appear more true to its character in proportion as it strains, or tends to burst, with a latent extravagance, its mold.

The house of fiction has in short not one window, but a million—a number of possible windows not to be reckoned, rather; every one of which has been pierced, or is still pierceable, in its vast front, by the need of the individual vision and by the pressure of the individual will. These apertures, of dissimilar shape and size, hang so, all together, over the human scene that we might have expected of them a greater sameness of report than we find. They are but windows at the

best, mere holes in a dead wall, disconnected, perched aloft; they are not hinged doors opening straight upon life. But they have this mark of their own that at each of them stands a figure with a pair of eyes, or at least with a field-glass, which forms, again and again, for observation, a unique instrument, insuring to the person making use of it an impression distinct from every other. He and his neighbors are watching the same show, but one seeing more where the other sees less, one seeing black where the other sees white, one seeing big where the other sees small, one seeing coarse where the other sees fine. And so on, and so on; there is fortunately no saying on what, for the particular pair of eyes, the window may not open; “fortunately” by reason, precisely, of this incalculability of range. The spreading field, the human scene, is the “choice of subject”; the pierced aperture, either broad or balconied or slit-like and low-browed, is the “literary form”; but they are, singly or together, as nothing without the posted presence of the watcher—without, in other words, the consciousness of the artist. Tell me what the artist is, and I will tell you of what he has been conscious.⁹

I cite this passage at considerable length because it will serve at several points in this book as a touchstone for the complexities and nuances of the narrative act conceived in visual and cinematic terms, though the latter was almost certainly not on James’s radar as a descriptive word for his art.¹⁰ James’s aesthetic manifesto has several moving parts: the analogy of the “house of fiction”—seemingly, a kind of massive apartment house full of voyeuristic neighbors, telescopes and roaming eyes at the ready—conceptualizes fictional architecture, artistic consciousness, the singularity of observational frames, and the “human scene” as spectacle, all in one distended visual metaphor for which an exaggerated three-dimensional referent might be Gaudí’s Casa Batlló or Casa Mila in Barcelona.

At first glance, the analogy may appear to be panoptic. As Mark Seltzer suggests regarding acts of seeing in James’s mid-career novel, *The Princess Casamassima* (1886), they can be viewed as instances of a “watchfulness” indicative of “Foucault’s panoptic technology” with its “diffused, anonymous, and reciprocal—though always asymmetrical—operation.”¹¹ Indeed, as I will suggest in the consideration of the prefaces and *What Maisie Knew* alongside Michael Haneke’s *Caché* in chapter 3, James



Figure I.1. Casa Batlló, Passeig de Gràcia, Barcelona, Spain. Photograph by ChristianSchd. Wikimedia Commons.

reveals at several points in his novels and prefaces an anxiety about the impossibility of knowing and seeing “all,” even while he recognizes that singularity—the particularities revealed by carefully framed and delimited vision—is his true game. Though he might at moments reveal a counter-vailing desire for access to the totality of the “human scene” available to a very privileged watcher at his window, James has too much invested in the more or less, the coarse or fine of the individual vision, which has its own privileged access to microscopic specificities of character, consciousness, and event.¹² Rather than being a figure for a rather baroque panopticon, James’s “house of fiction” can be viewed—almost in Borgesian terms—as an infinite assemblage of singular, camera-eye perspectives. Behind each window is a discrete “watcher” whose access to “the human scene” occurs by means of the very shape and form of the aperture that, heretofore, had been a “mere [hole] in a dead wall,” shaped and enlivened by “the need of the individual vision and the pressure of the individual will.”

In the “house of fiction” analogy, James appears not especially interested in the totality of the scene, nor even whether all of these possible watchers collectively or collaboratively capture the whole of the “spreading field” before them. Neither does he seem interested in

any consensus over what is being seen—in fact, just the opposite, he celebrates the diversity and infinite multiplicity of perspectives: “there is fortunately no saying on what, for the particular pair of eyes, the window may not open.” From the perspective of his late career, twentieth-century hindsight, James is clearly rejecting the forms of literary omniscience and objectivism that pervaded the novel in the nineteenth century in favor of the “individual vision,” though he retained throughout his work a love of the kinds of minute detail that one finds in Balzac or Flaubert.¹³ The narrative techniques that he developed with subtlety and complexity as his fiction evolved included his well-known experiments with point of view, limited omniscience, free indirect discourse, and the location of a “central consciousness” or, as Sheila Teahan terms it, “reflective center” in a focal character such as Maisie in *What Maisie Knew* or Lambert Strether in *The Ambassadors*.¹⁴ As I will explore in more detail in the readings to follow, if we view these strategies for the representation of consciousness through the lens provided in James’s “house of fiction” analogy, the figures are strikingly cinematic. Each “watcher gazes” at the “scene” through an aperture that frames, shapes, and filters what is seen; each “pair of eyes” or “field glass” is instrumentally rendered as a technological formation that both witnesses and constructs what is seen; the activity in which all are engaged is both observational and voyeuristic, the latter, according to film theorists ranging from Sergei Eisenstein and André Bazin to Laura Mulvey and Slavoj Žižek, a primary component of film’s materiality as well as its subject matter. James could not possibly have foreseen the current moment in which billions of watchers on the planet seem to be viewing reality through the camera eyes of their cell phones, and the very thought probably would have horrified him deeply, but the image of the “house of fiction” seems an eerie prognosticator of the ways in which “consciousness” is viewed as consonant with watching and seeing through an aperture, the very *modus operandi* of cinema from those involved in film’s making.

Yet much as it may appear on superficial glance that James is attempting to democratize those acts of seeing and vision implicit in the role of authorship (it is all “as nothing without the posted presence of the watcher—without, in other words, the consciousness of the artist”), it is clear from the centralization of consciousness in his novels that some see “more” or have privileged perspectives, a position James would reserve for the greatest artists, including himself. Seeing more, in James, is seeing better, and, as I will discuss in the reading of *What Maisie Knew* in chapter

3, seeing “most” is the ultimate, unachievable goal since, as the “house of fiction” analogy suggests, the human scene “spreads” to infinity, and the number of apertures through which it can be viewed are “not to be reckoned.” Herein lies a central paradox, for while the analogy seems to imply a boundless array of singular perspectives (each to their own cell phone), it also implies that there is a totality behind it all, *one* “human scene,” *one* reality that is to be beheld, a “whole” that all of those holes in the wall pertain to. On the one hand, the singularity and privilege of authorial consciousness. On the other hand, a desire for an impossible total vision, a desire to somehow see everything incapsulated in those Jamesian stories that I will consider in detail here: a child who sees too much (*What Maisie Knew*); a woman who sees and knows much more than she should (the telegraph operator of “In the Cage,” 1898), a man who wants to know everything about his own future, conceived as a horror show (“The Beast in the Jungle,” 1903); and a man who knows too little in America and too much in Paris, leading him to view “life” as a process of discovering what one should have known all along (*The Ambassadors*).

As an artist, James feels an obligation to render visible everything that he sees precisely as *everything that could be seen* in his fictions, yet acknowledges at the same time that only through the singular, privileged perspective that frames and delimits what is seen and known can a “view” take shape at all. James makes clear that he recognizes the contradiction in the preface to *Roderick Hudson* (1875), where it causes him no little authorial anxiety. Writing from the perspective of an elderly, accomplished statesman of the novel in the Preface, James recalls the anxieties he felt about launching his early novel upon “the blue southern sea” (his reflections are replete with nautical metaphors) and giving shape and form to the ocean of reality that surrounded him.¹⁵ He speaks of “the ache of fear, that was to become so familiar, of becoming unduly tempted and led on by ‘developments’”; he describes the challenges inherent in giving structure to the unbounded scene before him with its myriad possibilities; and he confesses to the “proportionate anxiety” involved in discerning certain relations between certain elements of the observed scene, which is the at the heart of artistic labor in offering “the complete expression of one’s subject.”¹⁶ But where, James asks, “does a particular relation stop—giving way to some other not concerned in that expression?”¹⁷

This formalist concern is deepened a few sentences later in the Preface when James develops another metaphor for the work of the artist, that of an embroiderer or seamstress:

Really, universally, relations stop nowhere, and the exquisite problem of the artist is eternally but to draw, by a geometry of his own, the circle within which they shall happily appear to do so. He is in the perpetual predicament that the continuity of things is the whole matter, for him, of comedy and tragedy; that this continuity is never, by the space of an instant or an inch, broken, and that, to do anything at all, he has at once intensely to consult and intensely to ignore it. All of which will perhaps pass but for a supersubtle way of pointing the plain moral that a young embroiderer of the canvas of life soon began to work in terror, fairly, of the vast expanse of that surface, of the boundless number of its distinct perforations for the needle, and of the tendency inherent in his many-colored flowers and figures to cover and consume as many as possible of the little holes. The development of the flower, of the figure, involved thus an immense counting of holes and a careful selection among them. That would have been, it seemed to him, a brave enough process, were it not the very nature of the holes so to invite, to solicit, to persuade, to practice positively a thousand lures and deceits.¹⁸

Like the depiction of “the house of fiction” in the preface to *The Portrait of Lady*, I will loop back to this image of “the canvas of life” at several points in this book as it incrementally informs the consideration of conceptions of totality and singularity in James’s late fiction. In succeeding terms of “fear,” “anxiety,” and ultimately “terror,” James thus formulates the quandary that confronts the artist invested in representing the totality of “the vast expanse of that surface”—“the canvas of life”—but who knows that he must resist the “thousand lures and deceits” of endless detail if he is to focalize the embroidery of a singular flower or stitch the relations between a specific set of figures. While James attributes much of the affect attached to the question of how to deal with the totality of the whole and the particularities of “development” to youth in this portrait of the artist as a young man, he also makes it clear that the fear and anxiety involved in framing and stitching up reality into the specificities of chosen figures haunt his thinking about artistic work throughout his career. I will return to this complex analogy in chapter 1, where it sheds light on James’s and Hitchcock’s shared attraction to the lure of detail. But placed alongside the “house of fiction” analogy and as they

play out in his novels and stories, the two prefaces reveal an array of epistemological and visual anxieties: the desire to know and see as much as possible, accompanied by the fear of knowing and seeing too much or too little; and the recognition that there is a kind of totality (a vast expanse, the human scene) to be examined, along with a recognition that there must be an achieved perspective for that totality to be visible. Both analogies figure acts of seeing and knowing in terms of holes, wholes, gaps, filters, and windows; the fenestrated perspectivism of the “house of fiction” exists alongside the pointillist embroidery of “the canvas of life.” Both instantiate intensely visual metaphors, reflecting the author’s anxious recognition that the totality of “life” or “scene” can be peered at through the severe limitations of the singular frame, the directed view, the many gaps in the weave of the canvas not filled amidst the embroidered few. For the works I will discuss in this book, this central conundrum informs both the production and content of James’s fiction, as characters struggle to frame and reframe a constantly shifting “human scene,” as narrators, peering around the corner, frame and reframe these struggles, and as James, the author, reflects on his constructions of the, paradoxically, singular totalities of his novels.¹⁹

The conundrum informs the intertwined histories of the modern novel and cinema as well. Two foundational theorists of the evolution of the modern novel and the development of cinema, György Lukács and André Bazin, respectively, frame questions about totality and medium in ways strikingly similar to that of James in his prefaces. In *The Theory of the Novel*, Lukács develops the concept of “totality” as present and immanent in the age of the epic, which could represent “life” as “contain[ing] within itself both the relative independence of every separate living being from any transcendent bond and the likewise relative inevitability and indispensability of such bonds.”²⁰ From Lukács’s historical perspective, the novel “is the epic of an age [that of modernity] in which the extensive totality of life is no longer directly given, in which the immanence and meaning of life has become a problem, yet which still thinks in terms of a totality.”²¹ For Lukács, as for James, the novel serves as a form of access to this totality (the human scene, the canvas of life) only indirectly, formalistically, via a manufactured perspective: “The epic gives form to a totality of life that is rounded from within; the novel seeks, by giving form, to uncover and construct the totality of life.”²² To be sure, James is much less nostalgic than Lukács for the kind of direct, “epic” access to the immanent totality of life, for he sees the novel much more clearly

than Lukács in terms of its medium and materiality. The novel *is*, for James, a multi-windowed portal opening out onto modern life as we know it, a spreading, open-ended, even rhizomic assemblage of relations going everywhere to be culled by the discerning artist dedicated to providing singular, centralized perspectives that limn the whole as much by what they leave out as what they put in. Yet both Lukács and James identify in the history and form of the novel a problematic relationship between the genre and its modern status as a mediator of “life,” conceived as a totality to which the novel has some kind of privileged access. Especially for James, this access—this portal to the whole—is both empowered and delimited by its materiality as a shaped lens or framed window opening out upon “life” and “scene.”

In “The Myth of a Total Cinema,” a chapter in the foundational *What is Cinema?*, André Bazin articulates a strikingly similar problematic operating with the emergence of film, the exemplar of mass media in the first half of the twentieth century. Bazin writes that the “idea” of cinema precedes the technology by which it came about.²³ In the minds of those avatars and inventors of what he terms “photographic cinema” and the technology that enabled “the automatic fixing of the image,” there existed an idealization of the medium *avant la lettre*: “In their imaginations, they saw the cinema as a total and complete representation of reality; they saw in a trice the reconstruction of a perfect illusion of the outside world in sound, color and relief.”²⁴ Bazin goes on to critique this myth at the origins of a genre and discipline that, in his view, is founded upon “the primacy of the image”: “The guiding myth, then, inspiring the invention of cinema, is the accomplishment of that which dominated in a more or less vague fashion all the techniques of the mechanical reproduction of reality in the nineteenth century, from photography to the phonograph, namely an integral realism, a recreation of the world in its own image, an image unburdened by the freedom of interpretation of the artist or the irreversibility of time.”²⁵ But interpretation and technological limitation, Bazin suggests, are part and parcel of the medium itself, despite any implicit desire to capture the whole of reality for the first time via a new technology that automates imagistic primacy. James’s watchers at the window—those embodiments of “the consciousness of the artist” with their multiple angles of vision upon a scene—are necessary to a medium that only exists because of their presence. For Bazin, film cannot even begin to address its hopes for the inculcation of an “integral realism,” the total “world in its own image,” save through a cinematic apparatus

wholly reliant upon interpretation and instrument (shots, camera angles, directors, actors, scene constructions, lighting schematics) for it to come about *as* film.

Two common elements emerge in the “meta” statements of James, Lukács, and Bazin about the status of mediums they consider in light of an implicit desire that they reflect, or fail to reflect, a totality variously referred to as “world,” “scene,” or “life.” We might call these the “facts” of intermediality existing in the modern novel (for which James surely serves as source and avatar) and the modern genre of film from its inception.²⁶ The first is the “fact” of a reality composed of multiple perspectives. The novel for James, especially as it is characterized in his prefaces and exemplified in his late fiction, is focused on interlocking or conflicting perspectives and angles of vision, as well as the misunderstandings and affective imbalances that can occur as the result of characters exchanging perspectives in dialogue. A film, of course, considered in the broadest possible terms, is composed of a series of shots, angles of vision, and directed “scenes” that are edited together to produce a whole made up of parts rendered by the multiple, overlaid interpretations of the director, cinematographer, film editor, screenwriter, and others as to what should be seen and screened. The second, as this characterization of what is involved in the making of a film makes clear, is the “fact” of collaboration. On the one hand, while James—the “master” as he is often termed²⁷—is the sole writer, director, and producer of his novels (as well as serving as set decorator, costume designer, and dialogue coach), the prefaces and the narrative strategies he increasingly deploys as he moves into his late phase clearly suggest that he views the making and content of his fiction in collaborative terms, both visually and narratologically. The novels and stories I shall discuss in this book work are assemblages of multiple perspectives, some privileged, some not, charting intersubjective relationships between consciousnesses matched and mismatched in terms of intelligence, scope and range of vision, wit, and ability to adapt to unstable social environments. The environment itself, in these fictions, whether one uses the term “human scene” or “mise-en-scène,” is activated through directed angles of vision and the elaboration of perceptions arising from a series of finely detailed “consciousnesses” seeing, hearing, and absorbing through the senses the “world” around them. Like the cinematic auteurs that I will discuss here—Hitchcock, Nolan, Tarantino, Haneke, von Trier—each signing their collaborative work as masters through their recognizable directorial stamp, James clearly insists,

among all those watchers at various windows, that his view is primary, yet the view itself, in its framing offers an anxious recognition that it is but a single portal opening onto an ungraspable, manifold totality only revealed through a collaboration of minds.

I will be pursuing the specific consequences of the complex set of connections between medium, artist, and world in considering how these occur in the work of a modernist “master” who thinks about writing in visual terms, and six modern/contemporary films that trouble these connections visually and narratively in ways comparable to James. The troubling traces an arc, between a moment when the novel, as Lukács suggests, was beginning to be anxious about its capacity to encompass a reality that was now accessible through other means (photography and film) and an era of cinematic primacy where film, in the hands of several auteur directors, engages with questions about *its* capacity to engage with reality through the limitations of the medium. Subtending this arc is the fantasy of a totality that has its secular foundations in late capitalism where “the concept of the market lies in its ‘totalizing’ structure . . . that is, in its capacity to afford a model of social totality.”²⁸ How a novelist perched at the beginning of a new century thinks “narratively/visually” about his work as a form of mediation between consciousness and world, and how, comparatively, a handful of filmmakers riding the cinematic wave from mid-century on think “visually/narratively” about the same thing, yet differently, because the medium is different, comprises the connective tissue of this book.

Specifically, in chapter 1, I consider James’s novella “In the Cage” alongside Hitchcock’s *The Birds* as works invested in coming to terms with human subjectivity as an entity devoted to discerning the intentionality of a perceived totality toward the iconic singularity of the individual, and the intentionality of the individual toward the world. Both Hitchcock and James gravitate toward the “lure of detail” mentioned previously, and the protagonists of the two narratives represented in the film and the novella are confronted with a barrage of singularities comprising a whole (birds, codes, signals, messages) that they are compelled to comprehend in the form of an intention. The impossibility of doing so informs the dramatic tension of the novella and the film, and poses certain technical problems for both the novelist and the director: How, for Hitchcock, to visually represent the universality of the birds as an overwhelming catastrophe through specific events, locations, and entities that cannot possibly be made to flock together? How, for James, to represent the purchase on

social and political knowledge save through a serendipitous array of messages that can only be partially decoded? For both, how is the social order to be viewed when it is recognized that it is made up of myriad details that do not add up to discernable purpose or intention? Both face in these highly reflexive works the question of what is to be done when, in effect, the camera can only infer the reality it visualizes, and the novel can only provide an angular purchase on the world it seeks to establish.

In chapter 2, a comparison of James's *What Maisie Knew* and Tarantino's *Kill Bill: Vol. 1* and *Vol. 2* provides an occasion for considering the ways in which one of the novelist's most complex and touching portrayals of the destruction of innocence can be read in light of the director's ultra-violent *bildungspiel*, where the central dramatic concern is the nature of a parent-child relationship when its narrativization takes place within a social order wholly given over to mortality. In her voice from the dead, William Faulkner's Addie Bundren states a pedagogical principle: "I could just remember how my father used to say that the reason for living was to get ready to stay dead a long time."²⁹ The same principle, with variations, is expounded in *What Maisie Knew* and *Kill Bill*. In James, childhood living is a series of merciless plunges into an adult world of sexual conspiracy and betrayal; Maisie is "nothing" in her own right save an epistemological reservoir for "improper" desire, and her imagined parent-murder in the closing scenes of the novel is but the logical outcome (as staying dead is for Addie) of living in the world constructed about her. In Tarantino, childhood living is but the initial stage in a mortal apprenticeship for a fully achieved "adulthood" that seems to inevitably involve daily hand-to-hand combat in the desire for revenge and the struggle for survival. James's mannerism is matched by Tarantino's naturalism in their mutual regard of time passing as the "material" of knowledge and experience. Narratologically and cinematically, both James and Tarantino foreground temporality in these stories of maturation at the intersection of content and medium. For James, it becomes a question of how the centralized consciousness of Maisie can come to know the unknown, and how much of the unknown is knowable. Tarantino, via the furious, hyperkinetic citations of the *Kill Bill* films, pressures the extent to which the cinematic medium visualizes its own phantasmatic nature and, as Murray Pomerance has defined it, the primary condition of its modernity—its temporariness, nothing but time passing while passing time.³⁰ Both novel and film, in this regard, approach the limits of their capacity to render worlds of their own making.

Total vision is the subject of chapter 3. Extending the discussion of *What Maisie Knew* to *The Wings of the Dove*, the prefaces to *Roderick Hudson* and *The Golden Bowl*, and Haneke's *Caché*, this chapter considers the fantasies constitutive of what Slavoj Žižek terms the "parallax view." This is a condition of post-Einsteinian modernity where the recognition that the materiality of the object can change in relation to the position of the observer produces "a reflexive twist by means of which I am myself included in the picture constituted by me . . . [a] redoubling of myself as standing both inside and outside [the] picture."³¹ For James, this recognition is cultivated within the protagonist who at first sees too little, then, as a growing consciousness of an expanding universe comes about by the very act of seeing, constituted as a form of voyeuristic self-consciousness, begins to see too much. The dilemma for James's protagonists in *What Maisie Knew* and *The Wings of the Dove* becomes one of fitting into the self-constituted picture, given that it is never complete or finished (consciousness, for James, stops only at death, and until then continuously reflects upon the limitations of its scope and the quantity of its blind spots). This redoubling or reflexive twist is equally present in those metacritical reflections of the prefaces where James positions himself both inside and outside the "picture" of a given novel, and worries about the extent of his survey both when he is within the picture, as author, and outside the picture, as critic.

For Haneke, the hyper-visibility of contemporaneity—cameras on every street corner—operates within the limits of a kind of presentism that depends upon a repression of the past. In relation to the novel in the hands of James, with its exposure of a voyeuristic consciousness increasingly aware of both what it can and can't see, the surveillance camera in the contemporary urban environment of Paris offers Haneke the perfect metaphor for an anxious society resting upon panoptic fantasies, obsessed with its own security, and indifferent to the safety and well-being of the "other"; indeed, in its anti-bourgeois, paranoid narrative, *Caché* makes it clear that the survival of the one depends upon the exclusion and extermination of the other. In the film, James's voyeuristic consciousness is translated into the optics of the camera which, however multiplied at every possible site in the pursuit of capturing everything (eyes at a countless number of windows) inevitably fail to "see" those blind spots—on the fringes of the social order, hidden in the past—upon which a panoptic construction of reality ironically depends. For both James and Haneke, as they etch the reflexive twist in their work,

the limits of vision are engrained in the medium itself: the novel, as an inscription of consciousness observing itself seeing all that it can see and all that it cannot; film, the televisual, and the digital (all operating in *Caché* to produce visibility) as a registering of what the surveillance camera sees, all the time, proffering the panoptic fantasy of our capacity to see everything if the collectivity of cameras is sufficient (it is not) to the scale of the “all.”

In chapter 4, James’s “The Beast in the Jungle” and Christopher Nolan’s *Memento* are brought together as bearing a Janus-like relation to the concerns in *What Maisie Knew* and *Kill Bill* with childhood, mortality, and passing time discussed in chapter 2. In James’s story and Nolan’s film, the reversible relation between memory and the future takes center stage. John Marcher, the protagonist of “The Beast in the Jungle,” lives only in a future that awaits him as a memory of what will have inevitably occurred, the future perfect thus becoming a fated past.³² But constantly living in the tense of the future perfect causes him to visualize a specific event that, in effect, will never happen; the event itself exists as a mere figure of speech, the envisioned “beast” that will pounce upon him unawares that will convert anticipation into fact. This story about visualizing the future itself then exists in the form of a memory of the future reverse engineered into a past that, for James, serves as a rubric for the authorial relation to story, or more specifically, the story to come in the future of his writing. The conceptualization of futurity to medium is also explored narratively and cinematically in *Memento*. The notorious exploration of short-term memory loss and the construction of a future “backwards” as the film intersperses sequences in reverse chronological order with memories that move forward in time underscores Nolan’s reflection on film as a collation of cut and spliced time slices that enable a narrative relation to futurity. The future of the subject as well as the future of the medium (or more precisely, how the future can be represented narratively and cinematically) undergirds the “plots” of both the story and the film, to the degree that plot becomes a problem not to be solved by any narrational schemes. On the one hand, “The Beast in the Jungle” is a story about the man in time to whom nothing was ever to have happened; on the other, *Memento* is a film about a man who remembers nothing about what has happened to him in the recent past: both film and story plot this “nothing” as the content of their medium.

The nature of the reflexivity inherent in James’s fiction and the films discussed up to this point, and its bearing upon questions of time,

media, and authorial/directorial survey, lead to the central concerns of chapter 5: what is the nature of experience, and what is the comparable relation between experience and reality as mediated through the devices of a novel and the instruments of a film? A discussion of James's *The Ambassadors* and Hitchcock's *Rear Window* reveals that both author and director, engaged in narrativizing what a protagonist sees and understands when encountering an initially unfathomable event, provides complex reflections on the nature of event as such and the capacity of the medium of choice to render what happened in a time and space captured (or, more pointedly, trapped) within the confines of the mediation. Going back to claims made at the beginning of this introduction, this chapter offers a capstone assessment of how just "looking" in James and Hitchcock—an act enfolded in both the plots and materiality of their respective novels and films—signals modernity's investment in visuality as a primary form of knowledge, and knowledge as the scriptable and visual registering of consciousness in motion. We see, therefore we exist; we think, and what we think we see forms the content of what we experience. Clearly, this rubric has become intensified as we move into the digital age, but early on, Henry James had a sense of it, just as it would be adumbrated in the genre of film as it evolved. I thus conclude with a brief discussion of *Melancholia* and "The Beast in the Jungle" redivivus as imagining the limits and ends—the "felt ultimacies" as John Barth puts it in "The Literature of Exhaustion"—of the mediums they exemplify, predicated, from the beginning, on the limits of knowing, seeing, and experiencing.³³ My goal, throughout, is to assert the importance of close reading and close looking in assessing the encompassing issues of medium, genre, and thought upon which this book freely touches.