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THE HYPERSPATIAL SELF: HENRY JAMES  
AND POSTHUMAN MODALITIES

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A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of Arts and Humanities

University of Denver

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In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

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by

Christina Patsiokas

November 2012

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Title: THE HYPERSPATIAL SELF: HENRY JAMES AND POSTHUMAN  
MODALITIES  
Advisor: Eleanor J. McNees  
Degree Date: November 2012

## ABSTRACT

In the era of computing and ubiquitous media, scholars across disciplines have been developing new models for how humans operate in complex environments. This line of inquiry can be bracketed under the larger term of posthuman thought. This thesis attempts to engage the critical and fictional work of Henry James with several posthumanist texts to challenge the temporal limitations of both. Against the backdrop of posthuman discourse, James emerges not as the cherished father of modernism but rather as a pioneer of distant territories far beyond the ways in which the modernist novel conceptualized the self and its consciousness. James provides useful models for defining modalities of the posthuman *before* the advance of technology materially manifested the cyborg reality in which we presently live. Juxtaposing James's proto-modern thought with the postmodern sensibilities of the posthumanists results in significant reconfigurations of both. Jamesian narrative and theory find ways to reconcile the absorption of the self into informational pattern with long-cherished notions of individuality and autonomy; because this self exists both *in* physical space and *outside* of it, it is essentially hyperspatial—that which can move through space but also transcends the limitations imposed by space through mediation and virtuality. Ultimately, James performs the posthuman in a holistic way that more productively reveals insights about technology and identity than the attendant theory or criticism.

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## INTRODUCTION: THE POSTHUMAN, THE POSTHUMAN JAMES

### END OF THE EGO: CYBERNETIC SENSIBILITIES

In a 1997 episode of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* called “I Robot, You Jane,” the scanning of an ancient text unleashes a demon into cyberspace; the scanning interface “reads” the spell that allows the demon to manifest itself, and the space in which that manifestation takes place exists only virtually. The demon, Moloch, captivates several students in Buffy’s high school who become his minions and build him a clunky mechanical body for Moloch to inhabit and thus wreak both virtual and physical havoc. During the unfolding of these events, Buffy’s mentor, a very British former museum curator named Giles, expresses his abhorrence of technology to the computer science teacher and a student (one of Moloch’s would-be minions) and receives an eerie warning:

GILES. Miss Calendar, I'm sure your computer science class is fascinating. But I happen to believe one can survive in modern society without being enslaved to the idiot box.

MISS CALENDAR. That's TV. The idiot box is TV. This is the good box.

GILES. Well, I still prefer a good book.

FRITZ. The printed page is obsolete. Information isn't bound up anymore. It's an entity. The only reality is virtual. If you're not jacked in, you're not alive.

MISS CALENDAR. Thank you, Fritz, for making us all sound like crazy people. (“I, Robot, You Jane”)

What comes from the mouth of a throwaway character in an allegory of technological danger proves prophetic: fifteen years later, social media—interfaces such as Facebook,

Twitter, and LinkedIn—ensure our presence in a world much bigger than our proximate spatial communities. We conduct much of our daily lives over the internet, and if we weren't "jacked in," we might miss out on many of the goings-on to which we've become accustomed. *Buffy* is ultimately a serialized tele-novel in the humanist tradition about a hero who uses her physical superpowers to fight for the good and counter the powers of evil. The idea of being "jacked in" destabilizes these boundaries by expanding the battleground between good and evil into the virtual world—a world without embodiment and thus without use for Buffy's superpowers. Fritz's words, and the way the show frames them, express a pre-2K anxiety of what has come to be called the posthuman, a conceptual matrix of ideas about technology, disembodiment, otherness, and consciousness that attempts to keep an interpretive pace with the multiplicity of ways people in the 21<sup>st</sup> century exist.

What does it mean to be posthuman? The "post" in posthuman immediately misleads the casual observer into the idea that the posthuman attempts to construct a mere temporality, a historical announcement that we have entered an era in which we are not quite human anymore. While a large part of posthuman theory does actually advocate the view that our integration with machines and our ability to biologically modify ourselves have reached a point of no return—that we are at the threshold of a new version of the human race—the wider implications of such a theory compass a much larger philosophical trajectory. The liberal humanist tradition of the Enlightenment established the heliocentrism of the self, a discrete identity bounded by the body which shines forth that everlasting sunlight of being, a conscious free will. Discourse in the twentieth

century, however, specifically poststructuralism and postmodernism, has critiqued and fragmented the constellation of ideas surrounding the autonomous self. In 1963, for instance, when Derrida deconstructed the Cartesian Cogito and announced the crisis “in which reason is madder than madness” (62), he destabilized the validity of the thinking self that proves its existence *as such*. This line of thought challenges an ontology—reaching back to Plato and Aristotle—that assumes an essential connection between *being* and *thinking*. Postmodernism was the amorphous and terror-ridden (thus angry) realization that our humanist tradition begged for some sort of sequel.

Coincident with this discourse, the development of computing technologies inspired the notion that our minds, bodies, and societies operate in much more ecological and interdependent systems than those imagined by the individualizing tendencies of modern Western thought. During the period from 1940-1970, the interdisciplinary field of cybernetics, pioneered by Norbert Wiener, sought to understand “how information, messages, and signals work within systemic boundaries, and with an orientation that implies humans, animals, and machines can all be understood within such a framework” (Hayles, “Cybernetics” 148). The project of cybernetics sought both to understand the mechanisms underlying complex systems such as humans and to construct those systems as informational flows that can be modeled in a digital medium. As Katherine Hayles explains in *How We Became Posthuman* (1999), “The deconstruction of the liberal humanist subject in cybernetics...proceeded primarily along lines that sought to understand human being [*sic*] as a set of informational processes” (4). Within this context, thought and consciousness became imperiled because they came to be seen as

processes that merely mediated between input and output much like breathing<sup>1</sup> or taste. Cybernetics, then, performed a Derridaean deconstruction of the human “system” as it nullified humanist concerns in the interest of pursuing parallels between technology and biology.

At the same time cybernetics dissected human functionalities, cultural theorists began to recognize the sweeping effects of the media environment on the society as a whole. As early as 1967 Marshall McLuhan recognized that

Our electrically-configured world has forced us to move from the habit of data classification to the mode of pattern recognition. We can no longer build serially, block-by-block, step by step, because instant communication insures that all factors of the environment and of experience co-exist in a state of active interplay. (*Medium* 63)

The multiplicity of information available to an individual forced a change in thought modality; in essence, mass media reprogrammed how we interpret the world. Thus media and humanity participate in a reflexive symbiosis wherein the nature of one affects the evolution of the other and vice versa in what Hayles refers to as feedback loops: “The feedback loops that run between technologies and perceptions, artifacts and ideas, have important implications for how historical change occurs” (14). While the concept of symbiotic evolution with the objects we create reveals what’s at stake in mass media and technology studies, it also opens up discussions of collective consciousness and mythic transmission by highlighting the mechanisms of an inevitably interconnected world. These mythic dimensions of technology possess the power to effect the historical change

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<sup>1</sup> William James, elder brother of Henry, theorized that the stream of consciousness was identical to the stream of breath in his 1904 article “Does ‘Consciousness’ Exist?” (491).



referred to by Hayles and have important consequences for the ethical aims of cultural studies in general.

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, then, we discovered the electricity of machines in the very fibers of our nerve tissue; we found in our genetic material analogues to the codes of our computing systems. These uncanny resemblances sparked questions about how our reality operates and confused the boundaries between the physical and non-physical. The “post” in posthuman refers to a new and old idea that the liberal humanist tradition isn’t a very accurate explanation of our world. In order to understand our reality we must go beyond the traditional body/mind and self/other dualisms of Western metaphysics; we must go beyond the “human” into the posthuman.

Dissolution of the self in preference for the whole—tearing down the hegemony of Western egocentric identity—is nothing new. Romanticism privileged interdependence over isolation and mystery over knowledge in direct reaction to the mechanistic, Newtonian world of the Enlightenment. Underlying this reaction is a belief in complexity, a deep instinct planted in the human mind that there are aspects of reality beyond the grasp of our glorified rationality. Call it spirituality, magic, energy, the Force, or what you may; there has always been a name for things encountered by humans outside of the five senses. This instinct has found new meaning in the posthuman world, where the immersive technology that defines it continuously operates at levels beyond human sense or general comprehension. Like a magic wand, the remote control, the touchscreen phone, and the laptop all translate our desires and intentions into virtual materiality through unobservable, effectively invisible means. If “all media are

extensions of some human faculty—psychic or physical” (*The Medium* 26), then the internet, movies and television expanded the capabilities of the human eye in ways previously categorized as the stuff of wizardry, teleportation, and time travel.

These consequences of technology make the concept of an impermeable individual consciousness seem at odds with the evolutionary drift of our electric creations. At the core of posthuman discourse is a suspicion, elusive to the point of apophasis, that because technology develops according to seemingly autonomous trajectories—trajectories that are paradoxically controlled by humanity en masse via capitalism—there is an essential and infinitely complex link between the emergent functionality of our technologies and the mystery of human teleology. As capitalism allows human desires to operate in a collective fashion, the emergence of technologies that expand our capabilities for experience to further and further horizons begs the questions, “Where are we going? How do we want to get there? What are we sacrificing in the process? What for?” Technology, it seems, is our destiny; the value in posthuman discourse lies in understanding exactly what technology *is* and how we reflexively *shape and are shaped by it*.

#### JAMESIAN TECHNO-AESTHETICS FROM THE NARRATIVE TO THE ELECTRIC

Henry James seems a queer choice in addressing questions of technology; why an author? Why a novelist whose baroque, labyrinthine prose frustrates the mind’s struggle for comprehension and undermines the idea of a coherent story? James’s work is deeply psychological, dramatically slow, and not crowdpleasing. Camille Paglia puts it

accurately when she admits, “Why more people are not seen rushing shrieking from libraries, shredded James novels in their hands, I cannot say” (622). The difficulty with James is that his ambiguity harbors immensities. He uses the absence of syntactic linearity to paint reality from *inside* the mind. James saw a moment when the novel gained a consciousness of itself as an art form, when authors and critics alike attempted to define what exactly fiction was and what it should do. His copious critical writings complicate his fictions because they imbue the difficulties of his prose with a deeper purpose than the mere sadistic entrapment of the reader; for James, the narrative is a technology with which the artist attempts to capture the complexity of instantaneous experience. He treats humans microscopically; what would seem to most people the simplest, most straightforward incident unfolds for James into an intricate hundred-page novella. There is a scene in *The Matrix* when Cypher looks at a scrolling screen of green characters and explains to Neo that he can “read” the code and see in real-time what’s going on inside the virtual reality of the Matrix. To the untrained eye, the screen is gibberish, green noise. Certain individuals, however, can see a wealth of information in the noise—details, undisclosed connections, the long chain of causes and effects that brings something to a certain point. James was one of these people, and he made it a point in his critical work to explain the torments he endured in trying to capture the impression, the knowledge of a moment with prose:

Really, universally, relations stop nowhere, and the exquisite problem of the artist is eternally 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 and

instant or an inch, broken, and that, to do anything at all, he has at once intensely to ignore it. (*Art of the Novel* 5)

The narrative mediates between the reality of experience and what the human mind can grasp and communicate at any given time. “Relations stop nowhere” because at any moment the artist experiences an unbroken web of connection to his or her environs through his or her senses, emotions, social faculties, and intuitions. For a narrative to gain a cohesive form, it must “ignore” much of the reality of experience. Significantly, William James explains consciousness as participating in the same process:

But we do far more than emphasize things, and unite some, and keep others apart. We actually *ignore* most of the things before us...If the sensations we receive from a given organ have their causes thus picked out for us by the conformation of the organ’s termination, Attention, on the other hand, out of all the sensations yielded, picks out certain ones as worthy of its notice and suppresses all the rest. We notice only those sensations which are signs to us of *things* which happen practically or aesthetically to interest us, to which we therefore give substantive names, and which we exalt to this exclusive status of independence and dignity. (“Selected Texts” 111)

William explains that the structure of our senses provides us with a basic filtering mechanism for phenomenal input and that the structure of the mind provides another filter through the function of attention. The psychological process through which our minds distill experience for our own comprehension participates in the same inclusions and exclusions that a coherent narrative requires. Henry would have been well apprised of William’s psychological theory, and the connection that the above quotations illustrate between narrative and consciousness is significant for understanding Henry’s work.

Writing is a technology of the mind, a technology that forces the mind to grapple with the exigencies of subjectivity and translate them into language. Furthermore, the filtering in which narrative participates elevates the inclusion/exclusion mechanism to a higher level

of complexity because Henry's narratives explore several overlapping consciousnesses at once. Isolating these ideas about how narrative works within James's writing reveals a Jamesian poetics that constellates reality, consciousness, interpretation, and input/output processes in a trajectory parallel to that of cybernetics.

James was also writing at the time when the electric telegraph introduced the world to the "text" message, electric mail, and international news. Though access to the new technology was stratified by class, the birth of the global mass media saw the birth of the mediated masses. Tom Standage, in his history of the telegraph, aptly named *The Victorian Internet*, explains that by the 1850s, "newspapers were able for the first time to give at least the illusion of global coverage, providing a summary of all the significant events of the day, from all over the world, in a single edition" (152-153). This revolutionized the ways humans produced, exchanged, and transformed information about themselves. The birth of the mass media invented new and ubiquitous forms of narrative through the news, and this had profound effects not only on social structures but also on the narrative itself. James's expatriation and consequent treatment of differing social codes between Americans and Europeans throughout his fiction necessarily confronted him with the enormity of societal changes occurring globally. James's fiction and theory are pertinent to ideas about the posthuman because they encapsulate the Western world at the very moment when new communication technologies eliminated space and time across the continents; they grapple with the fear and excitement that attends widespread social change.

While the extensive corpus of James criticism demonstrates a preference for James's late work and its complexity of style, this thesis takes interest in two works from what Sergio Perosa calls James's "Middle Period" (402) of the 1880s and 1890s. In *The Reverberator* (1888), James comically treats the assault on privacy introduced by the mass media in a play on his "international theme."<sup>2</sup> The short work novelizes the troubled engagement of an American girl, Francie Dosson, and Gaston Probert, the French son of an American expatriate, against the backdrop of a gossip-hungry transatlantic society quelled by the reports of the rumor-mill newspaper called *The Reverberator*. James's characterizations flow upon the idea of external coding: Probert's entire perspective relies on "the Parisian education" (586) that he has received and the suffocating influence of his family while Francie Dosson, described as a "vague soft negative being" (595), is praised by Gaston's painter friend as a "flower of plasticity... that you may make of her any perfect and enchanting thing you yourself the wit to conceive" (696). Probert's Gallicized American family barely deign to accept the naïve, unconnected Francie as Gaston's fiancé, and when she grants an interview about the family to her rejected suitor George Flack to be published in *The Reverberator*, the Proberts furiously reject Francie and Gaston is forced to choose between his family or hers.

Describing the actual incident that inspired the novel in which a young woman published the personal details of the Venetian family she had been living with (*Notebooks* 40), James explains that

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<sup>2</sup> Early in his career James gained fame for juxtaposing American and European characters to expose the values and customs of both cultures; Richard Blackmur points out that as a device, the "international theme" raised "such specific questions as the opposition of manners as motive in drama, the necessity of opposing positive elements of character, and the use of naïve or innocent characters as the subjects of drama" (151).

The ingenious stranger—it was awfully coming to light—had *written* about them, about these still consciously critical retreats, many of them temples harboring the very altar of the exclusive; she had made free with them, pen in hand, with the best conscience in the world, no doubt, but to a high effect of confidence betrayed, and to the amazement and high consternation of every one involved. (*Art of the Novel* 184-5)

The tiny article in a local American paper managed electrically to cross the Atlantic and land in the incredulous laps of the very people whose life it described. The immensity of the scandal fascinated James; why did a tiny inoffensive article addressed to far-off strangers incite such fury among the natives? James revolves the drama of *The Reverberator* around two conflicting perspectives of privacy embodied in the exclusivity of the Proberts and the publicity-celebrating Dossons. Francie, when confronted with her betrayal, pleads that she thought her new family would like the experience of being in the papers. Recent scholarship on the novel has examined the ways it complicates the commonly conceived idea that James harbored an unadulterated disdain for the newspaperism that transformed the social milieu of his time. This thesis takes those arguments a step further by first examining the heretofore unobserved overlapping identities among Francie and her sister Delia, and second, speculating that James, in a McLuhanesque manner, intuited the depth of societal transformation effected by changes in mediation as he struggled to characterize the worldviews of the Dossons and Proberts. Ultimately, Flack's phantasmic imagining of *The Reverberator* as the "most universal society-paper the world has seen" (597) anticipates the posthuman fate of the mass media society as one that cannot conceive of its identity save through mediation.

Ten years after *The Reverberator*, James would again turn explicitly to the subject of new technology with "In the Cage," a novella about a telegraphist who caters to the

elite Mayfair crowd and decodes their telegrams only to learn about their vices, scandals, and affairs. Like *The Reverberator*, the novella drips with class consciousness and the yearning to participate in the lives of the aristocratic and glamorous. The telegraphist, an imaginative young woman, discerns an affair between a married woman and a man named Captain Everard. She becomes obsessed with Everard and cultivates a strange relationship with him over the sending of his telegrams; eventually, she begins stalking his address, and the consequent “chance meeting” that she orchestrates results in a bizarre conversation on a park bench, during which the unnamed girl seems to confirm that an intense, extraordinary connection exists between her and Captain Everard. Because this bond originated in the intimate, dangerous nature of the coded telegrams that Everard entrusted to her and not through any kind direct communication, the telegraphist imagines a vague telepathic linkage between the pair that, despite her attestations that the nature of their relation is “not a bit horrid or vulgar,” stands at the precipice of the erotic. For three days, Everard hovers in the telegraph office, fixing her with hungry stares and slipping extra money over the counter. When the telegraphist ignores these advances, the captain leaves town, and she prepares to move to a postal office in a less prosperous part of London. Finally, Everard arrives at the postal office frantic one day to know the contents of a telegram sent by his lover weeks ago, and the telegraphist plays with his desperation, imagining the whole exchange as role-play, before revealing that she remembers the contents—a meaningless series of numbers—and relieving him of his anxiety that he has been ruined.



The tale emanates solely from the consciousness of the unnamed girl, an exercise in imagination and desire that explores the slipperiness of interpretation and the permeability of subjectivity. For James, the young woman constructs her reality in the same way that “the musing artist’s imagination—thus not excluded and confined—supplies the link that is missing and makes the whole occasion...comprehensively and richly *one*” (*Art of the Novel* 183). The imagination of the telegraphist has necessarily incorporated the spatiotemporal instabilities associated with a telegraphic world into its fabric, and as such the drama that is “the girl’s ‘subjective’ adventure” (*Art of the Novel* 157) includes an expanded realm of the erotic. A wide body of scholarship about the societal consciousness of electric technology at the *fin-de-siècle* identifies a cultural tendency to associate electricity with unexplainable, imaginary, or magical phenomena. As Pamela Thurshwell explains in *Literature, Technology, and Magical Thinking, 1880-1920*,

Teletechnologies such as the telegraph and the telephone suggested that science could help annihilate distances that separate bodies and minds from each other. When these new technologies began suffusing the public imagination from the mid-nineteenth century on they appear to support the claims of the spiritualist mediums; talking to the dead and talking on the phone both hold out the promise of previously unimaginable contact between people. (3)

The notion of electric intimacy—the exchange of pulses, knowledge, and desire through nothing but air—displaced old tropes of physical intimacy in a shift that dethroned the body as the *de facto* focal point of eroticism. Though these electro-erotics participate in the erasure of embodiment that Katherine Hayles identifies as one of the most characteristic and problematic aspects of the posthuman view, they meanwhile recuperate an association of technology with magical thinking that reveals the straining of

consciousness to impose its desires upon externalities that simultaneously involve it with—and alienate it from—the world. “In the Cage” demonstrates not only James’s interest in the more paranormal effects of new media but also the connection he draws between the magic of electric mediation and the magic of narrative mediation.

Reading James through a posthuman lens is an attempt to involve one of the greatest connoisseurs of mediation in a conversation in dire need of refreshing perspectives. At present one cannot invoke the posthuman without taking an ethical stance on where it might/should lead. While futurists like Hans Moravec (*Mind Children*) and Ray Kurzweil (*The Age of Spiritual Machines*) contend that humans and machines are on an inevitable path towards convergence that will radically transform and evolve the human, staunch humanists such as Francis Fukuyama (*Our Posthuman Future*) argue that the development of new technologies should be policed so as to protect the sanctity of human nature (Hayles, “Computing” 131-132). Others like Joel Dinerstein view the spiritualizing of technology—calling it a vehicle for utopia—as a smokescreen for preserving white Western hegemony and an excuse to ignore social problems:

If the brain is a computer, human neurocircuitry finds a nonbiological home. If it’s not, then we get the same old greedy humans abusing power and rationalizing environmental devastation and global misery via technological progress. This synthesis of Western nationalism, Christian disdain for the animal body, and superiority over the Other comprises a faith-based narrative whereby scientists eliminate all subjective experience to focus on the dream of a mechanical brain from which they can then upgrade the human race. (588)

Futurist views argue for a kind of technological determinism in which the human brain will inevitably be able to reside in computers—a process that will free the mind to experience immortality and progress beyond instantiation in flesh. Dinerstein reveals that

anticipating this dubious utopia provides for social irresponsibility in the present. While Dinerstein argues persuasively that the idea of the posthuman has been misused, it certainly cannot be dismissed as mere hegemonic rhetoric. The generative dreams of the posthuman originate in the simple idea that mediation opens up possibilities—a notion not lost on Henry James. His preoccupation with layers of mediation and the richness that such layers add to a story points towards a grander impression that humans seek mediation—from the book all the way to virtual or augmented reality—because the complexity with which we are wired begs for more and broader modalities of experience. “We’re tired of trees,” cry Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, “We should stop believing in trees, roots, and radicles. They’ve made us suffer too much” (15). What posthumanist utopians chase after, perhaps with too much enthusiasm, is the possibility that the complexity inherent to posthuman society might allow it to break free from hierarchies that have enslaved humans for thousands of years. Perhaps, even, the democratized pleasures of new media will prove that the long history of human suffering that has accompanied the evolution of societal organization towards global democracy has been leading us somewhere better.

Though discussions of the cyborg and posthuman have mostly been confined to the era following the deconstruction of poststructuralism and the technologies and literatures therein, this thesis proposes a broadening of scope in discussing what the idea of the posthuman might add to our understanding of how society and culture have functioned since the rise of the electric telegraph. Within this broader conception of the posthuman lies a scattered history of intellectual imagining regarding the interdependence

of the individual with the environment and the idea of nature as a reflexive system in which we participate. Exploring the fiction and theory of Henry James demonstrates how his interpretation of consciousness and narrative frame both as media technologies that filter our immersion within a continuous web of experience. James, thinking about narrative technology, produced extensive commentary about how capturing reality necessitates an artificially delimited view of it long before postmodernism announced the inescapability of representation—the distancing of our reality and our perception of it—through the mediation of the weightless play of the sign.

Against the backdrop of posthuman discourse, James emerges not as the cherished father of modernism but rather as a pioneer of distant territories far beyond the ways in which the modernist novel conceptualized the self and its consciousness. James provides useful models for defining modalities of the posthuman *before* the advance of technology materially manifested the cyborg reality in which we presently live. Juxtaposing James's proto-modern thought with the postmodern sensibilities of the posthumanists results in significant reconfigurations of both. Jamesian narrative and theory find ways to reconcile the absorption of the self into informational pattern with long-cherished notions of individuality and autonomy; because this self exists both *in* physical space and *outside* of it, it is essentially hyperspatial—that which can move through space but also transcends the limitations imposed by space through mediation and virtuality. Ultimately, James performs the posthuman in a holistic way that more productively reveals insights about technology and identity than the attendant theory or criticism.

## CIRCUMSCRIBING THE POSTHUMAN: SOURCE TEXTS

“Who shall say thus?” cries James, “...where the associational nimbus of the all but lost, of the miraculously recovered, chapter of experience shall absolutely fade and stop?” (*Art of the Novel* 182); James would agree that any attempt to provide a narrative of the posthuman, that is, to *define* it, requires a reduction. Nevertheless, this thesis identifies Katherine Hayles’s 1999 *How We Became Posthuman* as the central text to understanding the interdisciplinary meaning of what *posthuman* has come to mean. Ultimately, *How We Became Posthuman* offers the most comprehensive and germane definition of the posthuman:

First, the posthuman view privileges informational pattern over material instantiation, so that the embodiment in a biological substrate is seen as an accident of history rather than an inevitability of life. Second, the posthuman view considers consciousness, regarded as the seat of human identity in the Western tradition long before Descartes thought he was a mind thinking, as an epiphenomenon, as an evolutionary upstart trying to claim that it is the whole show when actuality it is only a minor sideshow. Third, the posthuman view thinks of the body as the original prosthesis we all learn to manipulate, so that extending or replacing the body with other prostheses becomes a continuation of a process that began before we were born. Fourth, and most important, by these and other means, the posthuman view configures the human being so that it can be seamlessly articulated with intelligent machines. In the posthuman, there are no essential differences or absolute demarcations between bodily existence and computer simulation, cybernetic mechanism and biological organism, robot teleology and human goals. (2-3)

According to Hayles, the posthuman subsumes its identity in the ever-swirling maelstrom of information that travels around the world; it is but one collection of processes (senses, thought, breath) in an endless world of media entrenched in their own inherent processes. Consciousness is a degree of awareness granted by the coalescence of those processes. Finally, embodiment in flesh is an analogue of a machine’s embodiment in silicone,

plastic, and metal, and the temporal happenstance that flesh embodiment occurred before machinic embodiment sheds no light on the difference between the two.

Crucial to understanding Hayles's concept of the posthuman is Donna Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto" (1991), in which she defined the cyborg as "a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction" (149). Haraway used the concept of the cyborg to illustrate the ways in which women are partially programmed by society and suggested a methodology for embracing that hybridity in the search for liberation. Haraway locates the domination of patriarchal ideology in the origin myths of selfhood in the Western humanist tradition. This myth "begins with original innocence and privileges the return to wholeness" (177). In the merging of man with machine, the violation of boundary between technical and organic opens the possibility to a cyborg identity that has no origin, because the cyborg body, as a collection of processes and information (both biological and mechanical), never *became* a machine; it always was: "A cyborg body is not innocent; it was not born in a garden; it does not seek unitary identity and so generate antagonistic dualisms without end (or until the world ends); it takes irony for granted" (180). Her cyborg became a model for what a posthuman identity might mean; its cybernetic nature accepted interpenetrations of ideologies while at the same time declaring its right to autonomy.

The analysis of James that follows focuses on specific parts of Hayles's posthuman: first, it marks the resonance between the construction of the Jamesian narrative and the posthuman demotion of consciousness in favor of complex systems theory; second, it takes up ways in which James's critical work and fiction explore the

self/other dualism through ideas of pattern/randomness rather than absence/presence to the effect of privileging “informational pattern over material instantiation”; third, it identifies cites where James’s treatment of technology points toward the reflexive relationship with machines and media that leads towards articulation with intelligent machines.

James’s notions of consciousness, as noted above, are inextricably bound up with the work of his elder brother William James, who was pioneering the fields of psychology and American philosophy at the same time James was developing his narrative theory. It is a limitation of this thesis that the brothers’ reflexive influences on each other with regards to consciousness require too much space to be adequately teased out, especially considering the complexity of their emotional relationship. At the cost of reduction, Henry’s work takes privilege over William’s theory with regards to consciousness, because this thesis attempts to demonstrate that Henry achieved theory through a more artistic and layered method than that of psychological or philosophical discourse. However, William’s influence bridged the space between Henry’s thought and later philosophies that came to influence postmodernity; Section I explores this connection further.

It is the view of this thesis that an informed perspective of the posthuman requires a sweeping background in phenomenology, poststructuralism, and postmodernism. Though such thorough contextualization is beyond the scope of this thesis, it identifies certain key texts that provide at least a basic understanding of the evolutions in discourse that led to posthumanism. Edmund Husserl’s *Cartesian Meditations* (1931), Martin

Heidegger's "The Question Concerning Technology" (1954), Marshall McLuhan's *Undersanding Media* (1964) and Jacques Derrida's *Writing and Difference* (1967) span the years from 1930-1970 and compass a wide array of ideas about consciousness, technology, and mediation during that time. More recently, Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1980), Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981), and Donna Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto" in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women* (1991) conceive of the postmodern era in rhetoric that resonates with the issues of media saturation and technological theory associated with the Haylesian posthuman. Finally, media theorists Fredrich Kittler and Mark Poster conspire with the posthuman view to define the operations of media as inherently reflexive with the society that generates them.

For the analysis of James's non-fiction, the Prefaces to his New York Edition, written from 1906-1908, will largely comprise the body of critical work under scrutiny. Also included will be his 1888 manifesto on the novel titled "The Art of Fiction" and his 1899 "The Future of the Novel." Source texts used for *The Reverberator* and "In the Cage" are not those of the New York Edition but instead those that James originally published. It is the view of this thesis, that while the New York Edition often provides a subtly more complex and sophisticated version of James's tales, the original texts better serve the aim of capturing James's frame of mind—and thus his own reflection of culture within the text—in the historical moment during which the tale was written.

Cybernetically, an author engaged in the recursive feedback loops that generate ideas about his self and his environment represents a different entity from one year to the next



(even, perhaps, from one day to the next). Revision, for James, involved a “re-dreaming” that inevitably distorted his initial vision of the story, and thus the New York Edition, polished as it is, flattens the depth inherent to an author who develops symbiotically with his environment for over 40 years. However, the contrast between the textual variants of the original tale and the New York Edition can certainly shed light upon crucial moments in the text, and this interpretive device will be used when particularly illuminative.

#### CYBORG METHODOLOGIES

This thesis attempts to participate in a discourse possible only through cyborg construction, which makes no distinction between the thoughts of different minds and eras once they are in contact with each other. All cultural theory necessitates plagiarism, and all accusations of plagiarism attempt to authenticate the myth of the individual consciousness. Much of what the posthuman envisions involves dismantling our myths of origin and oneness with the natural world. Without an origin, we are free from the tyranny of originality—without the anxieties of autonomous agency, we are free to participate in the chaotic, hyperspatial, and invisible electromagnetic brain that lives and breathes through every media device, every cultural artifact, and every store of information we encounter. Though it will attempt to do both, this thesis sees remixing as a more productive practice than historiography. Rhetorical resonance provides a vehicle through which long dead voices can contribute to contemporary thought without the requirements of longitudinal source study. Instead of requiring authorial *intentionality*

behind a statement, this thesis prefers revivification of meaning through novel contextualization.

The first section examines James's critical work on narrative as technology and the nature of consciousness as the main vehicle of the narrative. Juxtaposing postmodern and posthuman theories with James's critical work will draw out the subtleties of James's narratological poetics and reconfigure the importance of the prose narrative within those theories. The second section reviews the minor critical history of *The Reverberator* and attempts to capture its meaningful peculiarities by examining the coding registers that wholly constitute identity for its characters. These registers are the societal codes imposed by the environment, either tradition or media, and James frames identity in *The Reverberator* through them. The third section will examine the erotic dimensions of "In the Cage" within the larger matrices of technological possibility and magical thinking that attended cultural conceptions of electricity and telegraphy at the turn of the century.

Having collaged these theories and fictions, the thesis concludes by discussing how the ethics of the posthuman might be revised in light of the more expansive implications for mediation offered by James' narratological theory. Furthermore, it will investigate how his critical work begs for a kind of scholarship much more cybernetically engaged with art and culture production than it currently does. Juxtaposing James's ideas about what criticism does with cultural theorists' ideas about their own function, the conclusion laments the absence of enthusiasm for fostering a public intellectual discourse. For a truly dynamic cultural aesthetic to flourish, dialogue needs to happen between artists, the public who consumes art, and the scholars who study it. Considering

that scholarly funding for the humanities has been dwindling in the face of more “useful” technological and scientific pursuits, what might a posthuman academic community have to offer a society tired of a reclusive academia? The question can by no means be answered satisfactorily, but any serious student of James living in a posthuman reality betrays the author’s indefatigable commitment to art by ignoring it.

## SECTION I: NARRATIVE TECHNOLOGY AND CONSCIOUSNESS IN JAMES AND THE POSTHUMAN

In the middle of the twenty first century, as the atomic bomb haunted ideas about human technology and teleology, Martin Heidegger posited “The Question Concerning Technology,” in which he recuperated an ancient connection between imaginative and mechanical creation: “Once there was a time when the bringing-forth of the true into the beautiful was called *technē*. And the *poiēsis* of the fine arts also was called *technē*” (34). The bringing forth of the true, that is, manifesting potentialities for beauty, was a shared function of technological development and art. However, he described modern technology as fundamentally different, in that it proceeded by “the rule of Enframing, which demands that nature be orderable as standing-reserve” (23). The logic of modern technology sought not the “bringing forth of the true” but instead the transformation of nature into more powerful forms through scientific processes. Devouring nature by viewing it as heterogeneous energetic resources—“standing-reserve”—defines the goals of twentieth century science. Heidegger then issues a warning about technological teleology:

It is precisely in Enframing, which threatens to sweep man away into ordering as the supposed single way of revealing, and so thrusts man into the danger of the surrender of his free essence—it is precisely in this extreme danger that the innermost indestructible belongingness of man

within granting may come to light, provided that we, for our part, begin to pay heed to the coming presence. (32)

Heidegger, then, imagines two paths that our technological society can take. One involves sacrificing human essence for the ever-turning wheels of consumption, while the other posits a potentiality for a radical emergence of humanity's "innermost indestructible belongingness" through an awareness of the reflexive bonds between humans and technology. The divergence here predicted has found new voices in posthuman theorists that anticipate technological utopia on the one hand and the conquest of *Homo sapiens* by intelligent machines on the other. What becomes clear in the debate is the contention on both sides that the *mediation* that characterizes posthuman existence will ultimately transform the essential nature of human existence. It is the aim of this section to place James's critical ideas about the mediation of narrative technology in conversation with twentieth century discussions of technology, mediation, and the human being with productive results. Not only will a less determinist view of mediation emerge, but James will also provide models of consciousness that celebrate intersubjectivity in a way that diminishes anxieties about the disappearance of the human subject in twenty-first century posthuman existence.

James demonstrated what almost amounts to a fetish for mediation in his novels, short-stories, and critical work. He took his major works, revised them, compiled them into the New York Edition, and then gave each volume a preface: a new lens through which the reader could read the work. For James, adding layers of mediation added to the interest of a story:

Again and again, on review, the shorter things in especial that I have gathered into this Series have ranged themselves not as my own

impersonal account of the affair in hand, but as my account of somebody's impression of it—the terms of this person's access to it and estimate of it contributing thus by some fine little law to intensification of interest. (*Art of the Novel* 327)

James, mediating his own text, explains that by using a mediating individual to tell his story, the reader can get more out of it. Presumably, now that the reader understands this technique through James's mediatory remarks, the reader can recognize the added layers of meaning and grasp the spark of James's inspiration. As a student of consciousness and an innovator of narrative, James discovered the power of media to expand boundaries and destabilize the nature of human identity nearly a century before cybernetic models provided literary and cultural theorists the conceptual vocabulary to name the transformation posthumanism.

#### THE BOOK, THE BODY, AND CONSCIOUSNESS: COMPLEX MEDIATION

In August of this year, a short op-ed appeared in the *New York Times* about the book and new media entitled "It's Alive!" by Gillian Silverman of the University of Colorado, Denver. Silverman begins by invoking the simultaneous anxiety and wonder of posthuman existence:

By now, we've all heard the warnings: Humanity is under siege. Ever-encroaching communications technologies are replacing intimate connections... In this cyborgian age, inanimate things take on a life of their own, endowed with properties that once upon a time distinguished people from things. They pulse with vitality, their beeps echo our touch and they feel melded to our bodies. The very nature of what it means to be human may be changing before our eyes.

By opposing the description of humanity as "under siege" with the pleasurable idea of the sensuous "vitality" behind the electronics to which we are attached, Silverman manages

to capture both the ethical concerns and the sense of magic inherent to a technologically mediated society. She continues:

And yet, long before neural implants, the iPad and the talking phone, there was the book. It, too, was described as a living, breathing entity intimately connected with our own.... When we ‘face’ the book, our own spine curved over its, our mind engrossed in a borrowed consciousness, we have the vague sense we are interacting with something that, whole not exactly human, is uncannily similar to ourselves.

Deftly eliding a hundred years of technological evolution surrounding media, Silverman exposes the book as an interface, a machine of sorts that is just as sensual and captivating as new media objects like the iPhone. The book proffers a “borrowed consciousness” that we access through the words on the page. To open a book, then, is to fuzz the boundary between one mind and another in the same manner our touchscreens and earbuds confuse our physical space with virtual space. Constellating the book with technology, new media, and posthuman embodiment, Silverman locates the transformative power of reflexivity in a technology that much of posthuman discourse excludes as a generator of the intersubjectivity that threatens the autonomous self. Though it is widely acknowledged that the book must be considered in any comprehensive understanding of technology, its queerer aspects as an interface are generally overshadowed by ideas that print culture aligns itself much more with the linearity of modernity than the fragmentation of postmodernity.

One explanation for the prejudice against the book in discussions of transformative mediation lies in embodiment. Despite the “bodiliness” of the book that Silverman highlights, the narrative is largely seen as a software that interacts with our minds to the *exclusion* of our bodies, whereas new media couple with human sensual

abilities *in addition to* mental faculties. Take, for example, Fredrich Kittler's argument that

once the technological differentiation of optics, acoustics, and writing exploded Gutenberg's writing monopoly around 1880, the fabrication of so-called Man became possible. His essence escapes into apparatuses. Machines take over functions of the central nervous system....And with this differentiation—and not with steam engines and railroads—a clear division occurs between matter and information, the real and the symbolic. (*Gramophone, Film, and Typewriter* 16)

Locating the origin of postmodern rupture in the fall of "Gutenberg's writing monopoly," Kittler argues that human experience underwent a fundamental change when we created technologies to expand the possibilities of sensual experience—an expansion previously achieved only through "reading to hallucinate meaning between lines and letters" (10); technologically producing sensory experiences stripped words of their "sensuality and memory" (10). Our minds were the original technology to transform words into sensory experiences, but Kittler contends that we have outsourced that ability to sensory media. Such an argument reinforces the mind/body separation that Kittler identifies when human "essence escapes into apparatuses."

James, on the other hand, caught as he was between "Gutenberg's writing monopoly" and the *fin-de-siècle* culture of the telegraph and mass media, presents a much more continuous view of mediation. In his 1899 essay entitled "The Future of the Novel," Henry James theorizes about the novel as a piece of media and about how it will serve future generations. He explains that the novel satisfies "man's general appetite for a picture" (244). This "picture," made with the language of thought rather than the colors of the eye, is a gateway, a portal to some new kind of knowledge, to information not



available elsewhere. The reason the novel works so well is because the medium allows for greater experience:

For [the novel's] subject, magnificently, it has the whole human consciousness. And if we are pushed a step farther backward, and asked why the representation should be required when the object represented is itself mostly so accessible, the answer to that appears to be that man combines with his eternal desire for more experience an infinite cunning as to getting his experience as cheaply as possible. (244)

The value in fiction lies in the *representation* itself, the screening of reality through another set of eyes. He repeats and distills this sentiment in his preface to “The Altar of the Dead” when he discusses narrating an experience of the occult:

We but too probably break down, I have ever reasoned, when we attempt the prodigy, the appeal to mystification, in itself; with its ‘objective’ side too emphasized the report (it is ten to one) will practically run thin. We want it clear, goodness knows, but we also want it thick, and we get the thickness in the human consciousness that entertains and records, that amplifies and interprets it. (256)

James names several processes by which representation transforms experience into narrative: entertaining, recording, amplification, and interpretation. It is significant that James is speaking of how the consciousness digests a mystical encounter, because he privileges the distillation of that experience over the question of what actually occurs—the “mystification, in itself.” Human consciousness provides the original technology through which we produce our world in narrative form. In conversation with James, then, Silverman’s invocation of the book as the original medium through which humans came to have new ideas about themselves rings refreshingly true.

James’s critical work provides, admittedly, but tangential commentary about the interactions among embodiment, consciousness, and narrative; indeed, his writings that seem to resonate most powerfully with posthuman theory perform the same erasure of

embodiment in preference to thought that Hayles cites as one of the major weaknesses of the posthuman view (*How We* 29), because the Jamesian narratological consciousness floats disembodied among characters, times, and locales. At the same time, however, the following section will demonstrate that James's ideas of consciousness reveal a striking resemblance with posthuman models of cognition; both of these ideological matrices allow for the existence of processes that our minds bracket off from awareness in order to produce a cohesive model of the world—a stance that allows for the reinscription of consciousness within the body as a mediating technology that cannot grasp the totality of the complex system.

#### DECONSTRUCTING DESCARTES: CONSCIOUSNESS, REPRESENTATION, AND

#### DUELING DUALISMS

The more one reads about dualisms and multiplicities, the more one gets the sense that a battle is raging in the rhetorical corners of the Western mind. At its core lies the choice between the individual and the collective: the self/other dualism that constitutes the self as an autonomous entity seems always about to collapse under the weight of the *whole*, that is, the infinite multiplicity of the world. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari articulate this conflict concisely when they demand, “Arrive at the magic formula we all seek—PLURALISM = MONISM—via all the dualisms that are the enemy, an entirely necessary enemy, the furniture we are forever rearranging” (21). Consciousness necessarily falls into the center of the fray, as it names the medium through which we experience the world and thus the process through which we construct ideas of the self

and the other. If one traces a rough trajectory of the self/other dualism in twentieth century discourse from phenomenology through poststructuralism/postmodernism to posthumanism, several stories present themselves. First, the self/other is intimately bound up with other dualisms such as inside/outside, conscious/unconscious, and body/ mind, and all of these binaries can be compassed by the more expansive dualism of presence/absence. Second, the concept of reflexivity problematized the stability of the self/other boundary because it revealed the interpenetrating influence of an entity with its environment. Third, cybernetics and informational discourse used the idea of reflexivity to shift the presence/absence dialectic to one of pattern/randomness. Within this shift came a fluidity not allowed for in the rhetoric of presence/absence; this fluidity lies at the core of what seems magical and erotic about technology because of the ability it engenders to experience the world as both separate from and dissolved in its multiplicity. The posthuman occupies the liminal space between pattern/randomness because in its celebration of the expanded possibilities of experience through coupling with machines, it is always about to drop off into the multiplicity, to lose its pattern to the randomness and thus altogether lose the self.

To capture the full ecology within which these concepts and theories have evolved would require a comprehensive review of phenomenology, postmodernism, poststructuralism, twentieth century technological theory, communications theory, new media studies, cognitive psychology, neurobiology, and cybernetic theory, as well as the emergence of post-, trans-, and anti-humanisms. While such a project could fill volumes perhaps as numerous as James's New York Edition, it is clearly beyond the scope of this

thesis. Invoking instead the power of rhetorical resonance (remixing), this thesis seeks to develop a concept of Jamesian poetics always in conversation with the deconstruction of Descartes that characterizes the conflict between the self/other of the presence/absence dualism and the unity/multiplicity dualism. David McWhirter, in “Henry James, (Post)Modernist?” highlights the danger of such an endeavor, in that

our postmodernizing of James *has* undoubtedly distorted its object, imposing late twentieth- and early twenty-first century social and political agendas on a late-nineteenth century writer and in the process, it may be, promoting the ‘loss of historicity’ Jameson insists is the postmodern’s most salient and disturbing feature. (169)

Indeed, that Freudian monster *projection* always threatens to invade our sense of scholarly propriety; but then again, from the cybernetic perspective, prose is a pattern of information with which we interact, and the meaning we ascribe to it is solely an output of our own perspective. In *Autopoiesis and Cognition*, a text that Hayles identifies as central to the shift in cybernetic theory that brought the observer into the system (*How We* 132-154), neurophysiologists Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela contend

We become *observers* through recursively generating representations of our interactions, and by interacting with several representations simultaneously we generate relations with the representations of which we can then interact and repeat this process recursively, thus remaining in a domain of interactions always larger than that of representation. (qtd. in Hayles, *How We* 144)

In the cybernetic view, then, we always exist in a reflexive relationship with James’s prose representations; the observer can never get outside the system, and even if it could objectively see an object in its original context, the loss of its own context would prove disastrous for assigning a relevant meaning to the object with which it attempts to interact. Thus, for James’s work to live in our own time, we must allow new and perhaps

unintended insights to emerge through interaction with a contemporaneous ideas; it is not in the interest of this thesis to keep James locked up in the box of history in which he lived—the aim of writing itself, the extension of one’s consciousness into objects that will outlive your body, begs for a fairer treatment.

In Edmund Husserl’s *Cartesian Meditations*, some of the most influential ideas about the ultimate complexity living in the space between the self and the other arose from the philosopher’s phenomenological project to debunk the assumption that the world outside of exists as a valid ground upon which to conduct science. Husserl begins his *Cartesian Meditations* with his “transcendental-phenomenological reduction” in which the self realizes the existence of the world cannot be taken as a certainty; rather,

the world is for me absolutely nothing else but the world existing for and accepted by me in such a conscious *cogito*. It gets its whole sense, universal and specific, and its acceptance as existing, exclusively from such *cogitationes*....I can enter no world other than the one that gets its sense and acceptance or status in me and from me, myself. (21)

Husserl, while careful not to deny the existence of the natural world, insists that our representation of the world cannot prove the existence of the *whatness* represented; the representation can never provide evidence for existences outside the representations of thought. Sharon Cameron in *Thinking in Henry James*, astutely points out that James wrote his prefaces in a span of years proximate to Husserl’s development of phenomenology and argues that James’s “representations, and the literary and critical problems they generate,” share “an affinity with Husserl’s roughly contemporaneous philosophy” (22). Furthermore, the spectre of Henry’s narrative theory haunts William James’s psychological theories of consciousness that influence not only Husserl but also

Bergson and by extension the postmodernism of Gilles Deleuze.<sup>3</sup> With regards to Husserl, Cameron contrasts the internality of Husserl's phenomenological reduction with the externality that Jamesian consciousnesses tend to enjoy as they move through several characters' perspectives fluidly in a single narrative. Her idea of the Jamesian consciousness views the *narratological* voice as a single consciousness which exists externally and possesses different characters at different times. Conversely, the preface to *The Wings of the Dove* reveals that James built up individual, internal consciousnesses for each of his characters and then devised a method by which these entities could interpenetrate:

The clearness is obtained in Book First—or otherwise, as I have said, in the first “piece,” each Book having its subordinate and contributive pattern—through the associated consciousness of my two prime young persons, for whom I early recognized that I should have to consent, under stress, to a practical *fusion* of consciousness. It is into the young woman's ‘ken’ that Merton Densher is represented as swimming; but her mind is not here, rigorously, the one reflector. There are occasions when it plays this part, just as there are others when his plays it, and an intelligible plan consists naturally not a little in fixing such occasions and making them, on one side and the other, sufficient to themselves. (*Art of the Novel* 299-300)

James explains that he enacted a “practical” fusion of consciousness; the entities remain separate but the intensity of the bond between Merton Densher and Kate Croy allowed for a recursive mirroring in which the line between self and other certainly exists but cannot be definitively located. The characters of James's late work comprised fully formed entities that existed in complex ecologies with each other in ways that echo

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<sup>3</sup> In his philosophy on pluralism, William echoes Henry's assertion of the continuity of experience—both ideas of which are pointed to in Bergson's ideas about multiplicity. In a 1907 letter to Bergson, William lavishes praise on his contemporary's theory of “the continuously creative nature of reality” and sends along with it his own book on Pragmatism (*Selected Letters* 236-239). Gilles Deleuze revitalized Bergson's ideas of multiplicity the second half of the twentieth century.

Husserl's determination that the other—the outside world—exists first and foremost in the thought of the self. Late Jamesian consciousness, moreover, modeled a complex version of the phenomenological reduction in which the self/other boundary resists phenomenological policing. Resisting the idea of “personal consciousness” that William espoused<sup>4</sup>, Henry destabilizes the reduction's claim that *only* the thoughts of the self constitute one's representation of the world because the thoughts of one character can invade another.

Derrida, in conversation with Husserl and Heidegger, took issue with the self/other dichotomy as an essentially illogical assumption upon which the sanctity of reason was founded. Reflecting on Foucault's history of madness, Derrida uncovers the shaky ground upon which confidence in reason resides:

This is why the act of the Cogito, at the hyperbolic moment when it pits itself against madness, must be repeated and distinguished from the language or the deductive system in which Descartes must inscribe it as soon as he proposes it for apprehension and communication, that is, as soon as he reflects the Cogito for the other, which means for oneself. It is through this relationship to the other as an other self that meaning reassures itself against madness and nonmeaning. And philosophy is perhaps the reassurance given against the anguish of being mad at the point of greatest proximity to madness. (59)

Reason can only be defined as such by relativity, by pronouncing it to the other and by having the other recognize it and agree. That is, reason founded upon empiricism relies on a community of observers who all perceive the same thing, and there is no way to prove that those observers don't share the same version of madness. The self can only

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<sup>4</sup> With the personal consciousness, William denied the possibility of a leaky consciousness: “Each of these minds keeps its own thoughts to itself. There is no giving or bartering between them. No thought even comes into direct *sight* of a thought in another personal consciousness than its own. Absolute insulation, irreducible pluralism, is the law” (*Selected Texts* 91).

conceive of the other as separate through a communication that paradoxically unites them as one. Derrida's contribution to the destabilization of the self/other dualism represents an essential stepping stone to the posthuman: reason emerges as a pattern rather than a presence—empiricism proves nothing but the dominance of a pattern.

Conspiring with the thought of phenomenology and Derridean deconstruction, cybernetics allowed for the emergence of the posthuman state of virtuality, in which the pattern/randomness dialectic came to dominate many ideas once articulated within the rhetoric of presence/absence: "living in a condition of virtuality implies we participate in the cultural perception that information and materiality are conceptually distinct and that information is in some sense more essential, more important, and more fundamental than materiality" (Hayles, *How We* 18). The more humans came to be seen as informational patterns, the more cybernetic theory devalued the boundary between the self and other as a reference point for defining complex systems; eventually, this led to a posthuman view of cognition:

contemporary models of cognition implicitly deconstruct the notion of a unified self by demonstrating that cognition can be modeled through discrete and semiautonomous agent....In this model, consciousness emerges as an epiphenomenon whose role it is to tell a coherent story about what is happening, even though this story may have little to do with what is happening processurally. (Hayles, *How We* 238)

Consciousness mainly functions as a narrative technology which creates a central narrative out of several conflicting narratives. Each sense has its own narrative, and thus the mind is a multimedia processor designed to interpret the endless inputs of the outside world. Though this seems a radical reconfiguration of what it means to be a thinking



human, Henry James portrayed the narrative artist as constructing a narrative along similar narrative lines:

It is, not surprisingly, one of the rudiments of criticism that a human, a personal ‘adventure’ is no *a priori*, no positive and absolute and inelastic thing, but just a matter of relation and appreciation—a name we conveniently give, after the fact, to any passage, to any situation, that has added the sharp taste of uncertainty to a quickened sense of life. Therefore the thing is, all beautifully, a matter of interpretation and of the particular conditions; without a view of which latter some of the most prodigious adventures, as one has often had occasion to say, may vulgarly show for nothing. (*Art of the Novel* 286)

An adventure is only an adventure when someone calls it one. The central assumption behind this passage is essentially a posthuman one: there is no reality other than our story of it. We *experience* reality in a much more expanded sense than our minds bother to tell us; the most we can say of the pure experience of something special before we interpret it and necessarily narrate it in our minds is that something has “added the sharp taste of uncertainty to a quickened sense of life.” The closest we can come to reproducing genuine experience is our best narrative of it, and our consciousness is the only route through which to interpret and create that narrative. Poiesis, then, captures in the book the representational narration going on in our heads that makes us posthuman. James’s ideas of narrative technology, moreover, recognize the ultimate artificiality of the self/other dichotomy because that *other* is an interpretation, not an experience.

#### HEIDEGGERIAN JAMES: RECONCILING *TECHNĒ* AND *POIĒSIS*

In 1995, Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingston produced *Posthuman Bodies*, a collection of essays that study science fiction and popular culture artifacts to reveal a postmodern, inclusive view of the body and its relationship to identity. Intimately tied up

with feminism and queer studies, the volume expresses the opening up of human possibilities through transgressive behavior:

Some turn-ons: women in suits looking like boys, women in suits wearing dildoes looking like and being men, men without dicks, dicks without men, virtual body parts, interactive fantasy. What is bodily about sex? What is sexual about sex? What is gendered? Are posthuman bodies postgender? Is anything post anymore, or is this the beginning? The search for origins stops here because we are the origins at which imagined reality, virtual reality, gothic reality are all up for grabs. You're not human until you're posthuman. You were never human. (8)

Manipulation of the body allows for new identities, new genders, and eventually, the obsolescence of categories like race, gender, and class. Marshall McLuhan insists that "all media are extensions of some human faculty" (*Understanding* 26). If this is true, what media aren't human? The internet thrives on user-generated content, little pieces of ourselves we put out into non-time and non-space for all the rest of humanity to see grasp, take in, transform, make its own. The essential tie between the posthuman and sexuality is that technology allows everyone to penetrate everyone else. Bodily penetration is replaced with informational penetration; our existence to some people is embodied in a Facebook news feed, a collection of pictures, links, and interactions that are all incredibly human. Hayles asserts, "In the posthuman, there are no essential differences or absolute demarcations between bodily existence and computer simulation, cybernetic mechanism and biological organism, robot teleology and human goals" (*How We*, 3). Though it sounds radical and dehumanizing on first glance, this describes exactly how we are living in a networked world: in several modalities, with several overlapping identities, in time and space and out of time and space, in our bodies, through our phones, inside web addresses. If the medium is the message, we are now the very hands giving it.

James's narratives, much like our conscious faculties, filter the immersive experience of reality into disembodied words just as the Internet allows for virtual existence in web sites and social media feeds outside the boundaries of the flesh. James's lifelong battles with constipation provide a logical explanation for his fantasies of disembodied consciousness and of the ability to slip behind another's eyes. The exigencies of embodied thought, however, lap at the shores of his character's minds, as Melba Cuddy-Keane points out in "Narration, Navigation, and Non-Conscious Thought: Neuroscientific and Literary Approaches to the Thinking Body." Citing recent studies in which spatial navigation activates the same part of the brain as abstract conceptual mapping, Cuddy-Keane explains,

Literary narrative's fascination with phenomenal experience, with the connotative dimensions of language, and with the dynamics of psychological processes make it a fertile site for tracking the fuzzy and imprecisely understood area of non-conscious thought. (688)

Outside of the laboratory, narratives provide case studies in how an individual might process knowledge through conscious and non-conscious thought. Examining the distracted, unthinking bodily actions of James's characters Maggie Verver (*The Golden Bowl*) and Lambert Strether (*The Ambassadors*) when they are processing revelations, she concludes that "Henry James – like his brother William – implies that the transformative power of visceral thinking, or embodied cognition, actually depends on a disconnection from abstract conceptual thought" (693). James's characters, at moments of deep significance, retreat from conceptual analysis of their situation into the vicissitudes of body in a non-conscious processing mode that current neurological studies are beginning to discover. Cuddy-Keane's study demonstrates that James used the

posthuman model of cognition—a circle drawn artificially in a sea of informational input—to allow for embodied thought to seep in at the edges of the circle. Though he might have consciously lamented his entrapment in an ailing body, James resists erasing the important role it plays in the framing of the self.

The theory of consciousness that James's critical writing explores through its descriptions of poesis reunites the ancient connection between *technē* and *poiēsis* with which Heidegger begins his treatment of technology. Poesis, in effect, instantiates into a medium the work that our consciousness already does; this narrative generation, embodied in fiction or experienced through body, possesses the magic of creation, the pleasure of simultaneous differentiation from and interdependence with the other. The excess of media can be seen as a logical pursuit of an experience-hungry consciousness. As a race we have come to a point where narrative is no longer merely doubling the work of our minds—the prose narrative proved to be just the first technology in an endless series of sensually narrative technologies that capture, repeat, and embody the work of the mind in ways that are both *other* (we only experience them as outside ourselves, things to be perceived) and the *same* (because we create these mediations out of the senses we already have as extensions of those senses). Thus iTunes, for instance, can make a complex visualization out of a song; the program is told to create a visual *story* out of that song by transforming patterns of auditory inputs into patterns of visual outputs. That translation, that transformation-as-creation, is similarly at the heart of intuitions about magic that gives technology its mythic power. Consciousness is the medium through which we cybernetically transform mysterious inputs into rational

outputs, and the fantasy and impossibility of that process is overcoming the gap between what consciousness knows and what it *desires*, i.e. the ability to reverse the reality → consciousness dialectic and instead create reality with our consciousness. Through media technologies we are able to increasingly project into reality (or at least virtual reality) the experiences we desire—we get closer and closer to projecting our preferred narratives of reality into a sensory existence. The coming chapters propose to explore how James uses his postmodern views of consciousness to explore the tension between the world that consciousness perceives and the versions of the narrative it most desires.

## SECTION II: MASS MEDIA AND IDENTITY IN THE REVERBERATOR

James started writing *The Reverberator* in late 1887, after spending eight months in Italy and then returning to London (Edel 3:242). He published it serially in the Cambridge, England based *Macmillan's Magazine* during a year when he enjoyed a greater domination of contemporary periodicals than he ever had before (Edel 3:242). Ten years earlier, James had achieved international literary renown with "Daisy Miller" (Edel 2:302-319), during what Leon Edel called Henry James's "descent upon and conquest of London" (2: 328). Much of what James produced in the 1880s involved social themes that treated specific historical problems of the time (Perosa 372), and *The Reverberator* was no exception. In his most overt treatment of mass media's effect on the life of the individual, James told the story of Francie Dosson, a wealthy, beautiful yet naïve American girl travelling with her good-natured, passive father and motherly, overbearing older sister Delia through Europe. While they are staying in Paris, an ambitious young journalist named George Flack, whom they met on their initial voyage to Europe, arrives and endeavors to win Francie's favor by escorting her and her sister around Paris. Unscrupulous and manipulative, Flack portrays Paris to them by "pointing out its charms to them in a way that made them feel how much they had been in the

wrong” (572)<sup>5</sup>. His plans unravel, however, when his arrangement for an up-and-coming American artist to paint Francie’s portrait brings her into contact with Gaston Probert, an American born and raised in Paris whose Gallicized family has married into French aristocracy. Against the biases that circulate through his family, Gaston pursues Francie and secures an engagement with the reluctant acceptance of his family.

When Gaston travels to America on business for both his father and Francie’s father, Flack returns and surreptitiously secures an interview from Francie about the Proberts, eliciting private details about their various relationships and lifestyles. He proceeds to write a column divulging this information in the American gossip newspaper for which he writes, *The Reverberator*, and mails it to the Probert household, provoking an explosion of indignation and disgust from all of them. They summon Francie by herself to the household and interrogate her as to the source of the information; under scrutiny and pressure Francie discovers her own sense of self-assertion and boldly admits to granting Flack the interview even as she comprehends the betrayal of confidence she has committed. Having seen the article overseas, Gaston returns from America in a state of despair and begs Francie to deny her complicity in the scandal. Though she seems to have granted the interview without intending the more personal information to be published, she refuses to place the blame on Flack and instead calls off the engagement. Forced to choose between his oppressive family and marrying Francie, Gaston in the final scene chooses to marry Francie and prepares to leave Paris with the Dossons.

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<sup>5</sup>Unless otherwise noted quotations from *The Reverberator* will refer to the Library of America text, which reproduces Macmillan’s first American edition of the novel, a slightly revised version of the novel that appeared in *Macmillan’s Magazine*.

Early reviews of the novella were generally positive but lacked enthusiasm. The June 16, 1888 issue of *Athenaeum* (London) includes a short blurb about *The Reverberator* wherein the reviewer notes repeated themes from James's earlier *The American* and grants it decent comedic value but concludes that it's "impossible to feel much interest in the rest of the tale" (759). The *London Quarterly Review* depicts the story of a clash between two types of Americans, the one being "a naïve, unsophisticated class" and the second being "that other, and by no means admirable—often absurd—class which has become completely Europeanized" (191). Admitting that "the study possesses considerable interest, though hardly of a pleasant kind," (191), the reviewer concludes that James overdoes the naiveté of the Dossons. That the interest of the novel is "hardly of a pleasant kind" might account for its lukewarm reception; James's theme pokes at an uncomfortable truth about the emergent mass media at a time when Europe was still lamenting the global newspaper's invasion of society and the consequent dissolution of private life that attended its coming.

One of the most concise and nuanced contemporary analyses of *The Reverberator* appears in August 4, 1888 issue of London-based *The Spectator*. Though the reviewer accuses James of becoming "thinner and thinner in his studies" (1066), the reviewer finds the story well drawn and praises the subtleties of character therein. Like other reviews, it takes interest in the portrayal of George Flack and questions the ignorance of the Dossons:

He has brought before us the Paris correspondent of a successful American "society" paper in the most vivid manner; he has made us see exactly what such a man aims at, and how incapable he himself is of even furnishing to his paper what he aims at, without the help of others who



know more than he knows of the sort of pangs that will be inflicted in the process of satisfying the American appetite for French gossip; and he has made us see at the same time how entirely innocent is the American class for which this kind of reading is provided, of any sort of insight into the immoral machinery by which such gossip is obtained, as well as any power of understanding what wounds it inflicts on the victims of the process. (1067)

This passage illustrates interesting veins of thought that will be continued in later treatments of the novel. First, the reviewer characterizes Flack not as an aggressive invader of privacy but instead a passive medium that needs the activity of others to achieve saliency. Thus James's contemporary audience saw in *The Reverberator* not an indictment of mass media's intrusions into the private sphere but instead an examination of a culture in which the public regularly divulged its private affairs in exchange for the social capital of newspaper mediation. Second, the review takes James to task for the extent to which he absolves the Dossons of wrongdoing by exaggerating their ignorance. The review ends with the sly remark that "we could wish there was as little of guilty responsibility in the corresponding phase of English vulgarity, as there appears to be in the society journalism of the United States" (1067). To the chagrin of his European audience, James refused to bestow upon the Dossons even the slightest awareness of social codes outside their assimilation into a mediated environment. The significance of this refusal will be developed below.

James scholarship has, to borrow the above reviewer's phrase, but "thinly" examined the stakes that James raises in *The Reverberator*. Leon Edel calls it a "light comedy" (3: 239), echoing James's own couching of the novel in his preface to *The Reverberator* as a "jeu d' esprit" (*Art of the Novel* 180). Citing James's original conception of the novel in James's notebooks and the lightheartedness of the end product,

Perosa dismisses the importance of *The Reverberator* because “the original social purpose of the novel, its documentary purport, and contemporary relevance were almost completely lost on the way: the comedy prevailed” (381). It is true that as a comedic piece, the novel succeeds flourishingly. The dialogue hardly ever fails to deliver the acerbic wit that only James could finesse into such doughy characters as he presents here. As the reviewer in *The Spectator* noted, however, James unfolded his plot in a way that reveals a kind of social comment not acknowledged by these critics.

Recent work by Richard Salmon in *Henry James and the Culture of Publicity* and by Matthew Rubery in “Wishing to Be Interviewed in Henry James’s *The Reverberator*” has recuperated the significance of the novel in terms of how it complicates James’s position in relation to the rise of mass media in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. Though situating James in his historical moment remains of great value to James studies, there is more to the meat of his work than a simple historical analysis can draw out. Reading some of the queerer, unexamined aspects of *The Reverberator* against the rhetoric of mass media studies after a century of its evolution yields productive results; blurred subjectivity and the McLuhan-esque effects of newspaperism on James’s characters place the novel squarely in precession to posthuman ideas that wouldn’t form until the coming of the Internet. While Rubery makes the case (echoing *The Spectator*) that the publicity promoted by Flack requires the active participation of the public that produces and consumes it, and Salmon persuasively argues that James’s stories demonstrate a public complicity in the supposedly “invasive” nature of the mass media, they both miss a glaring peculiarity of the text in the relationship between Francie and

Delia Dosson. The intensity of their bond amounts to a virtually telepathic connection in which Delia invades Francie and constructs the whole of that character's agency.

While James wouldn't admit to a "fusion of consciousness" (*Art of the Novel* 299) between two of his characters until the preface to *The Wings of the Dove*, he experiments with Francie and Delia to examine how such a relation might work. In the first scene of the novel, when Flack visits the Dosson family in their hotel and, much to his disappointment, encounters Delia rather than Francie, they engage in a repartee about his intentions for Francie:

'I have an idea you don't want me,' said George Flack.  
'Oh yes, I do—as a friend.'  
'Of all the mean ways of trying to get rid of a man, that's the meanest!' he exclaimed.  
'Where's the meanness, when I suppose you are not so peculiar as to wish to be anything more!'  
'More to your sister, do you mean, or to yourself?'  
My sister *is* myself—I haven't got any other,' said Delia Dosson.  
'Any other sister?'  
'Don't be idiotic. Are you still in the same business?' the girl went on.  
(560-561)

Thus begins the strange way James interpenetrates Delia with Francie. Delia is a *self* that includes Francie: she is telling Flack that to design upon Francie is to design upon herself. The way she says it, however, "I haven't got any other," besides kinkily connoting some kind of Catherine-Heathcliff attachment, resonates with Husserl's idea of how the self constitutes within itself the "other" in order to differentiate between the "I" and everything else:

the ego constitutes himself, in respect of his own proper essence, as existent in himself and for himself; then, secondly, a self-explication in the broadened sense, which goes on from there to show how, by virtue of this proper essence, the ego likewise constitutes in himself something 'other',

something 'Objective', and thus constitutes everything without exception that ever has for him, in the Ego, existential status as non-Ego. (85)

This process, wherein the self needs the other to draw a line between the ego and the object, seems to have short-circuited between Francie and Delia. 'I haven't got any other,' when seen phenomenologically,<sup>6</sup> indicates an abnormal process of self-constitution, the source of which will be hypothesized later.

Delia has higher ambitions for her sister than a match with George Flack; thus when the aristocratically associated Gaston Probert turns his attentions on Francie, Delia wages a campaign for Francie to get rid of Flack. On the "war-path" (592) one night, Delia lectures her younger sister towards this course. James subtly slips into Francie's consciousness:

His daughters sat up half an hour later, but not by the wish of the younger girl. She was always passive however... She thought Delia whipped her up too much, but there was that in her which would have prevented her from ever running away. She could smile and smile for an hour without irritation, making even pacific answers, though all the while her companion's grossness hurt something delicate that was in her. She knew that Delia loved her—not loving herself meanwhile a bit—as no one else in the world probably ever would; and there was something droll in such plans for her—plans of ambition which could only involve a loss. (593)

The advent of the marriage that Delia would like to orchestrate necessarily requires a differentiation between the two sisters; for Francie, this separation will not, as Husserl might argue, result in the constitution of self but instead in a "loss." James, by way of Francie, stabs at the significance placed by society upon marriage as Francie internally admits the impossibility of any romantic connection ever reaching the intensity of her

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<sup>6</sup> This is not to say that James engaged in an active discourse with phenomenology; Sharon Cameron notes that though James would not have read Husserl, William James did influence Husserl (21) and that the two brothers William and Henry shared a common preoccupation with the location of consciousness in relationship to the exterior world (77-81). In this case Husserl's phenomenology serves as a normative model for distinctions between self and other that James subverts.

filial connection. Despite the danger of reading past James's intention<sup>7</sup> by projecting the hypersexual (or perhaps sexually hyper-sensitive) perspective of the 21<sup>st</sup> century onto the narrative, there appears once again a strange eroticism at work, as Delia "whips" Francie only for Francie to come to the realization of something in herself "which would have ever prevented her from running away." James reinforces the physicality of Delia's assault in the New York Edition, when he replaces "though all the while her companion's grossness hurt something delicate that was in her" with "though all the while it hurt her to be heavily exhorted, much as it would have done to be violently pushed" (Scribners 55). In both editions James invokes Francie's identification of Delia's verbal aggression with a bodily one; in Francie's mind (or perhaps more accurately, within her pre-cognitive feelings), her verbal interactions with Delia are confused with physical ones.

The shared identity of the two sisters culminates in a telepathic exchange during which Delia demands that Francie reject Flack once and for all. As the Dossons, George Flack, Gaston Probert, and Charles Waterlow (Probert's painter friend and Francie's portraitist) are strolling the St. Germain one evening, Flack detaches Francie from the group and leads her a distance away so that he can propose to her. Francie looks for Delia to wave them back, but instead Delia turns and leads the others away, a separation that telegraphs a fully articulated communication to Francie:

The girl gave a sigh, looking up at her companion with troubled eyes, at the idea of being made the object of converging policies. Such a thankless, bored, evasive little object as she felt herself! What Delia had said in turning away was—"Yes, I am watching you, and I depend upon you to

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<sup>7</sup> Though this is exactly what D.H. Lawrence claimed the function of criticism *was*, that is, to navigate between "Two blankly opposing morals, the artist's and the tale's. Never trust the artist. Trust the tale. The proper function of a critic is to save the tale from the artist who created it" (8).

finish him up. Stay there with him—go off with him (I'll give you half an hour if necessary), only settle him once for all. It is very kind of me to give you this chance; and in return for it I expect you to be able to tell me this evening that he has got his answer. Shut him up!' (595)

Francie, as the “object of converging policies,” lacks all agency; she is caught in the convergence of Delia’s telepathic consciousness with Flack’s overt desire. It is significant, here, to recall Hayles’s description of distributed cognition:

Contemporary models of cognition implicitly deconstruct the notion of a unified self by demonstrating that cognition can be modeled through discrete and semiautonomous agents. Each agent runs a modular program designed to accomplish a specific activity, operating relatively independent of the others. Only when conflicts occur between agents does an adjudicating program kick in to resolve the problem. (*How We* 157)

Francie must adjudicate between Flack and Delia, and as a program she is coded to grant preference to Delia’s “policies.” James seems to reinforce the idea of Francie as a surface upon which others inscribe agency as she thinks to herself, “She was not to be counted on; she was a vague soft negative being who had never decided anything and never would, who had not even the merit of coquetry and who only asked to be let alone” (595). Taking this quotation as a genuine description of Francie’s conscious experience will later reveal the depth to which James imagined a mass media environment penetrated and transformed its subjects.

The strange, semi-erotic dominator/dominated relationship between Delia and Francie Dosson bursts into utterance soon after Francie accepts Gaston’s marriage proposal. As Delia cross-examines Francie about her conversation with Gaston, she commits a gross Freudian slip that reifies in speech the odd kink in her relationship with Francie:

Delia looked at her a moment gravely. 'Is that the way you answered him when he asked you?'  
 'I'm sure I don't know. He could tell you best.'  
 'If you were to speak to me that way I should have said, 'Oh, well, if you don't want it more than that!''  
 'Well, I wish it was you,' said Francie.  
 'That Mr. Probert was me?'  
 'No, that you were the one he liked.'  
 'Francie Dosson, are you thinking of Mr. Flack?' her sister broke out, suddenly. (616)  
 'No, not much.'  
 'Well then, what's the matter?'  
 'You have ideas and opinions; you know whose place it is and what's due and what isn't. You could meet them all.'  
 'Why, how can you say, when that's just what I'm trying to find out!' (616)

In asking Francie if she wishes Gaston were Delia, Delia reveals her ignorance of her sister's motives and desires. Their connection allows for non-verbal communication but not emotional or imaginative communion. Throughout the novel, Delia hijacks Francie's autonomy so that Francie's actions are mere puppet moves of Delia's; however, the vicarious life that Delia leads through Francie does not result in stable identity formation for either sister. Francie complains that Delia knows so much more than she does about societal codes, when in reality Delia merely uses Francie as a prosthesis to effect a trial and error approach in social situations.

The proximity within which the sisters live results not from their shared identity but from their shared *lack* of identity. This lack of identity and their collective inability to gain the awareness they need to form that identity have their origins in their lifelong indoctrination into mass media. Because the Dossons have been acculturated to receiving all information about the outside world through media, they lack the ability to understand

their relationship to it without a newspaper telling them about it. In the Dosson sisters, then, James presents the effects of how media rework people at an operational level.

James comments in his preface to *The Reverberator*,

For supreme, more and more, is the blest truth—sole safety, as it mostly seems, of our distracting age—that a given thing has but to be newspaperised *enough* (which it may, at our present rate of perfection, in a few hours) to return, as a quick consequence, to the common, the abysmal air and become without form and void. This life of scant seconds, as it were, by the sky-scraping clock, is as good for our sense and measure of the vulgar thing, for keeping apprehension down and keeping immunity up, as no life at all; since in the midst of such preposterous pretensions to recorded or reflected existence what particular vulgarity, what individual blatancy, can prevail? (190)

The saturation of information, of personalities, and of stories that the American culture of publicity produces effaces individual identity in a way that prevents the narrative of identity to form. Delia's ambitions to get Francie an advantageous marriage turn out to be an attempt to reproduce the identities of the mediated lives she has read about in the papers; thus, even when Francie's engagement is imperiled by the fury of the Proberts, Delia experiences a secret satisfaction in Francie's having been written about:

Mixed up with this high rigour on Miss Dosson's part was the oddest secret complacency of reflection that in consequence of what Mr. Flack *had* published the great American community was in a position to know with what fine folks Francie and she were associated. (676)

Francie's identity relies not on the story her consciousness tells her but instead on the external story that a mass media culture inscribes upon her; Delia's satisfaction of reading Francie's appearance in *The Reverberator* cannot necessarily be differentiated from her sense of accomplishment at orchestrating the proposal that precipitates the publicity.



This need for external mediation in order to constitute the self reflects what Baudrillard calls the hyperreal:

The real is produced from miniaturized cells, matrices, and memory banks, models of control—and it can be reproduced an indefinite number of times from these...it is no longer even the real, because no imaginary envelops it anymore. It is a hyperreal, produced from a radiating synthesis of combinatory models in a hyperspace without atmosphere. (2)

James anticipated in the Dosson sisters how saturation by mass media effects the disappearance of reference points with which an individual consciousness can write the narrative of its existence. The absolute innocence of the Dossons that the critic in *The Spectator* subtly criticizes actually pointed to James's ideas about how Americans had lost the capacity for cultural delicacy and awareness. The violence that the mass media commits upon its subjects only appears when you remove them from media saturation; James explains that "for these candid minds the newspapers and all they contained were a part of the general fatality of things, of the recurrent freshness of the universe, coming out like the sun in the morning or the stars at night" (670). Outside of the media universe, Francie and Delia can't differentiate from each other because they lack the contextual ability to do so. *The Reverberator*, then, draws less judgment on the *invasive* nature of the press than on its *pervasive* nature.

In the preface to *The Reverberator*, James notes the decentered perspective of the story: "The anecdote has always a question to answer—of whom necessarily is it told? Is it told here of the Proberts or of the Dossons?...What 'happens,' by that felicity, happens thus to everyone concerned, exactly as in much more prodigious recitals" (181-182). The action of the novella, James insists, is not about a single character but about everybody. It

is a story, then, of the collective—what happens to this heterogenous group of people? Though the Dossons lack indoctrination into the ways of French aristocratic tradition, the Proberts lack an understanding of how America writes its collective and individual social identities through newspaper mediation. Both families, however, rely on external coding registers to understand who they are. The social customs of French aristocracy inscribed onto the expatriate Proberts a new identity that valued privacy, discretion, and exclusivity. American social mores, however, lacking the centuries of development that French social codes enjoyed, allowed the ubiquity of mass media to make publicity the default measure for social status. James recognized that publicity—the exhilarating (or humiliating) feeling of being seen and talked about—had seductive and irresistible powers over the human imagination. In his original conception of *The Reverberator*, he imagined the newspaper playing a larger role in determining the outcome of the story:

The end is a little difficult to determine. I think the truest and best and most illustrative would be this: that the young interviewer who has *his* virtuous indignation too, learning the scandal he has brought about, the rupture of the marriage, etc., threatens the bloated foreigners with a new horror—that is, to publish the scandal itself, with tremendous headings—the way they have treated the girl, etc. Appalled by this possibility they ‘come round’—forgive, conciliate, swallow their grievance, etc., so that the marriage takes place. The newspaper dictates and triumphs—which is a reflection of actual fact. Such is the rough contour of my idea.  
(*Notebooks* 42)

Though the Proberts cling to their age-old coding register, their collision with the Dossons and George Flack entraps them in the media environment they so abhor. This version of the story foresees the way that American culture spreads around the world through media, hijacking long-cherished cultures and rewriting traditional modalities of

identity creation. James insists that the newspaper “dictates and triumphs”; examining how he frames *The Reverberator* reveals the ultimately prophetic nature of this statement.

George Flack, ambitious and unscrupulous, imagines the heights of power he might be able to attain through his work at the newspaper. He explains to Francie,

It’s a big thing already and I mean to make it bigger: the most universal society-paper the world has seen. That’s where the future lies, and the man who sees it first is the man who’ll make his pile.... The society-news of every quarter of the globe, furnished by the prominent members themselves—oh *they* can be fixed, you’ll see!—from day to day and from hour to hour and served up hot at every breakfast table in the United States: that’s what the American people want and that’s what the American people are going to have. (597-8)

*The Reverberator* is the original social media, and Flack serves to elucidate the natural expansion and evolution of that technology. With Facebook and Twitter, the “prominent members” of American society—the rich, famous, and powerful—indeed do “serve up” bits and pieces of news or commentary to their millions of Facebook friends and Twitter followers. James, a public figure himself, understood the power that publicity grants to its objects, and simultaneously realized that power could turn into a social market itself. Information in a networked society *reverberates* through the web of humanity, shaking up everything it touches. The Proberts demonstrate that the quest for social capital is an old, old human pursuit, but the Dossons demonstrate that new media have the potential to rewrite the market relations. James, though clearly ambivalent about the effects of mass media on society, cannot help but see the road to a posthuman future unfolding ahead of him.

### SECTION III: NARRATIVES OF EROTICISM AND INFORMATION IN “IN THE CAGE”

James wrote “In the Cage” in 1898 at a deeply transitional time in his life. At fifty-five years old, James decided to retire from living permanently in London and purchased Lamb House in Rye, Sussex—his countryside retreat from the fast pace of London life. Leon Edel postulates that

The profound change in his mode of existence, his sense at times of being confined and ‘out of things’ seems to have contributed at this moment to his imagining a young girl, handling the brief and cryptic telegrams of the outer world, counting the words and reckoning the fees. (248)

The liminality of James’s social position during the composition of “In the Cage” bleeds into the essence of the story wherein a character seems always caught between visibility and invisibility, selfhood and anonymity. The novella narrates the story of the “young girl,” a working-class telegraphist who receives and processes the telegrams of the rich and powerful in the Mayfair district of London in a “caged” off corner of Cocker’s<sup>8</sup> grocery store; through imaginative decoding and extrapolation of certain customers’ telegrams, she becomes a momentary player in the drama of an affair between married Lady Bradeen and Captain Everard. Imagining that Everard notices the special care she takes in helping him with his telegrams and exchanging with him playful banter about his handwriting, the telegraphist becomes convinced that “no form of intercourse so

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<sup>8</sup> A pun? The liminal nature of the telegraphic space of the grocery store surely “cocks” the gun that will unload the plot.

transcendent and distilled had ever been established on earth. Everything, so far as they chose to consider it so, might mean almost anything” (147). When a bad habit of stalking his address enables her to have a conversation with Everard on a park bench outside of the cage, her subjective view of their conversation confirms that he experienced this “transcendent” relationship as well—one that is “not a bit horrid or vulgar” (165).

When Everard, however, after their conversation on the bench, begins to stalk *her* at the post office, it becomes evident that what he wants from her is exactly of a vulgar nature. At this point, her identity does, in fact, become ambiguous: “To be in the cage had suddenly become her safety, and she was literally afraid of the alternate self who might be waiting outside. *He* might be waiting; it was he who was her alternate self” (183). As long as she stayed in the cage, she could wield the power as an intermediary in the upper class communications circuit that had originally “distilled” their relationship into transcendence. Outside the cage, however, she was in danger of the physical vulgarity that would fully implicate her as a “shopgirl at large that she hugged the theory that she was not” (160). James intersperses the novella with vignettes of conversation between the telegraphist and Mrs. Jordan, a woman who has made an occupation for herself arranging the flowers in aristocratic homes. Both characters, it seems, came from upper middle-class backgrounds but simultaneously experienced catastrophe that forced them into lower spheres, a circumstance over which they commiserate. Mrs. Jordan, speaking of her transit among the houses of the wealthy, wistfully admits, “One seems to live again with one’s own people” (133). Thus the Everard seeking carnal consummation of the

telegraphic relation represents for the girl her “alternate self” in that he represents a temptation to forsake the narrative of class transcendence the girl has written for herself.

Everard abandons his attempts to lure her out of the cage after three days and all but disappears. The telegraphist guesses that he effectively “cheats” on her by sending telegrams from other offices. As the girl prepares to marry her fiancé and transfer to a middle class telegraph office, Everard returns in a high state of agitation. The success or ruin of his life depends on an encoded telegram sent by his lover and evidently intercepted months ago. The telegraphist, of course, remembers the arbitrary series of numbers that the telegram contained, but she subjects Everard to a lengthy interrogation in which she experiences an intoxicating sense of power over Everard before eventually giving up the goods, as it were, and repeating the contents of the telegram for him to reveal his fate.

Though “In the Cage” has been critically treated as an example of James’s engagement with the “wired love” (Goble 397-413) trope of late nineteenth century popular literature in which romances were carried out through telegraphic means and has been interpreted as a metaphor for the position of the author in the medium of literature (Menke 975), the erotic rhetoric of the telegraphist’s encounters with Everard has not been explored to its full potential. Put into the context of cultural attitudes towards telegraphy and electricity at the time, a close reading of the telegraphist’s encounter reveals a disembodied narrative of sexual contact—that is, sex by magic rather than sex by body. The magic, for the telegraphist, lies in her access to information that even her high-class customers would never gain. Instead of experiencing an effacement of identity

by information saturation like the characters in *The Reverberator*, the unnamed girl experiences an upper class identity by placing herself in the flow of information that circulates among the wealthy. In the “cage” she is free to leave her body and instead become a fluid instantiation of data that can experience the sensual through access to knowledge.

It is significant, then, that Edel initiates a biographical identification between James and the telegraphist based on spatial alienation: her entrapment in the working-class cage, where she can only experience upper-class adventure through an “expansion of consciousness” (121) that creates narratives out of barely rendered clues, analogically performs James’s entrapment in his imaginative life occasioned by his distance from London. The spatial alienation, the bracketing off of the body into confinement from his peers, gave rise to imagining a new kind of erotic experience through the mysterious pulsings of electricity that constituted the body of telegrams. Standage, in *The Victorian Internet*, describes the replacement of geographical addresses with arbitrary “nicknames,” in telegraphy that in itself enacted a community-wide distancing from the geographic space that telegrams traveled over instantaneously:

In Europe, the telegraphs had in most countries been government controlled from the start, and Britain’s private telegraph companies were taken into public control and absorbed by the Post Office in 1869. Having a single organization controlling a whole country’s network did, admittedly, make a lot of sense; in Britain for example, it meant that a centralized “nickname” system could be introduced. Under this scheme, companies and individuals could reserve a special word as their “telegraphic address” to make life easier for anyone who wanted to send them a telegram. Telegraphic addresses were easier to remember than full postal addresses, and after 1885 the pricing scheme was changed so that it cost more to send a message to someone with a longer address. (172)

Built into the very language with which telegrams were encoded was an erasure of geographical space and thus physicality in general. This is a prime example of McLuhan's assertion that "the medium is the message" in that "effects of technology do not occur at the level of opinions or concepts, but alter sense ratios or patterns of perception steadily and without any resistance" (*Understanding* 18). Telegraphy, for James, played a central role in his social relations and communication and thus would have subliminally projected its alteration of "sense ratios" with regard to his sense of space and embodiment. In the preface to *What Maisie Knew* wherein he discusses "In the Cage," James describes the telegraph office as a dynamic space in which events of personal significance occurred regularly in a voyeuristic public atmosphere:

The postal-telegraph office in general, and above all the small local office of one's immediate neighborhood, scene of the transaction of so much of one's daily business, haunt of one's needs and one's duties, of one's labours and one's patiences, almost of one's rewards and one's disappointments, one's joys and one's sorrows, had ever had, to my sense, so much of London to give out, so much of its huge perpetual story to tell, that any momentary wait there seemed to take place in a strong social draught, the stiffest possible breeze of the human comedy. (*Art of the Novel* 154)

James's telegraphist, then, is privy daily to the spectacle of individuals' private "needs," "labours," "rewards," "disappointments," "joys," and "sorrows." In reading this passage one almost wants to complete James's list with the "pleasures" and "pains," that hover just on the linguistic periphery of his description. The telegraphist's "cage" performs the erasure of geographic space at the same time that it concentrates an overwhelming amount of human drama and emotion into its gaze. No wonder, then, that "There were times when all the wires in the country seemed to start from the little hole-and-corner where she plied for a livelihood" (129). James's unnamed girl exists in an informational



dimension that amplifies the sense of nervous connection between human beings at the same time that it nullifies the physical space of the body.

Electricity animated this transformative space; the mysterious, physics-defying pulses that travelled along the wires manifested this new dimension through a materiality that was distinctly immaterial. Sam Halliday, in *Science and Technology in the Age of Hawthorne, Melville, Twain, and James*, traces the contours of the nineteenth century cultural consciousness surrounding electricity. He explains that

In addition to the body-soul distinction, then, electricity complicated distinctions between oppositions such as life and death, matter and spirit, physical and metaphysical, abstract and concrete, natural and artificial, and functioned as a sign for paradoxical amalgams in each instance. (6)

Discourses of electricity, then, manifested an implosive desire that conflated opposites and opened up liminal space between traditional boundaries. In short, James saw a moment when electricity opened up the cultural field to magical thinking, which Thurschwell defines as “the belief that thoughts and desires can directly transfer themselves to, and transform, the material world, other people, the future” (6). Magical thinking, then, imagines the dominance of consciousness over reality; that is, the narrative that our minds produce about what is happening “outside” the self comes to dominate the outside in a reversal in which the internal narrative absorbs the outside. We<sup>9</sup> arrive again at the queering of the self/other dualism wherein the fluidity that the pattern/randomness dialectic allows for the pleasure of internal desires to dictate the

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<sup>9</sup> The shift in critical register here is intended: any attempt at an abstracted observation of the events described attempts to absolve ourselves, the readers, of the taint of erotic voyeurism. Ignoring our complicity as intruders into the telegraphist’s subjectivity (and the kinks therein) erases the pleasurable layers of mediation (or penetration, as you will) that occur as our gaze consumes the personal experiences of the telegraphist as she, in turn, consumes the salacious personal lives revealed by the telegrams of her customers. James would imagine the erotic poetry of “In the Cage” incomplete without us there to thicken the plot, so to say.

reality outside the self. With the allure of this reversal in mind, we are prepared to examine the erotic dynamics of the relation that the telegraphist of “In the Cage” creates between herself and Captain Everard.

Skipping ahead to the scene outside the cage in which the girl pretends to meet Everard outside his residence by chance, we see the telegrapher immediately consider “the question whether people of his sort still asked girls up to their rooms” (160). The entire encounter rides the edge of that question and infuses the dialogue with danger that any word might push the encounter over that edge. “She had an intense desire,” the narrator explains, “he should know the type she was without her doing anything so low as tell him, and he had surely begun to know it from the moment he didn’t seize the opportunities into which a common man would promptly have blundered” (161). Ignoring the fact that the good manners she expects of him preclude mentioning the “opportunities” that occupy her thoughts, she instead reads a telepathic relation into his propriety: “These were on the mere surface, and *their* relation was behind and below them” (161). Then, when he admits to her that he “ ‘always quite wanted the chance to thank you for the trouble you so often take for me,’ ” she replies “ ‘Yes, I know’ ” (162). Initiating him into the telepathy she imagines, the telegraphist at once disobliges herself of having politely to accept his gratitude and instead intimates that she has penetrated his mind.

Dissolving into tears at the emotion of the encounter, she confesses wildly,

‘This is what I meant when I said to you just now that I ‘knew.’ I’ve known perfectly that you knew I took trouble for you; and that knowledge has been for me, and I seemed to see it was for you, as if there were

something—I don't know what to call it!—between us, I mean something unusual and good—something not a bit horrid or vulgar.' (165)

She accomplishes two things with this statement. First, she projects for him her interpretation that because of her knowing that he knew that she “took trouble,” they’ve established an “unusual” communion. Second, by pulling back from the sexual precipice the conversation has been edging along, she frees herself to push it even closer to that edge:

‘I’d do anything for you. I’d do anything for you.’ Never in her life had she known anything so high and fine as this, just letting him have it and bravely and magnificently leaving it. Didn’t the place, the associations and the circumstances, perfectly make it sound what it was not? and wasn’t that exactly what it was not?

So she bravely and magnificently left it, and little by little she felt him take it up, take it down, as if they had been on a satin sofa in a boudoir. She had never seen a boudoir, but there had been lots of boudoirs in the telegrams. (165)

She drops her “I’d do anything for you” like a naughty telegram into his lap, and she imagines she sees him “take it up, take it down” in a movement that mimics the sex that she imagines having with him in the ethereal telegraphic boudoir. She has never seen the real version of the boudoir; it doesn’t exist for her bodily self, a circumstance by which James likely meant to emphasize the girl’s virginity. This effusion by the girl brings Everard’s hand onto hers, which she does not remove; the encounter slips just a bit off the ledge into the physical realm of touch, and the boundary that the telegraphist has been working hard to construct threatens to dissolve her abdication of the “vulgar.”

She uses the rest of the conversation to assert her knowledge of all the vices that Everard and his class communicate in their telegrams: “‘I like them as I tell you—I revel in them. But we needn’t go into that,’ she quietly went on; ‘for all I get out of it is the

harmless pleasure of knowing. I know, I know, I know!’—she breathed it ever so gently’ (169). Her exposure of her own fetish for “knowing” the dirty secrets of Everard and his peers—the display of her own masturbatory “revel” in the vice—brings the telegraphist to waves of climax: “I know, I know, I know!” Significantly, she “breathes” this climax instead of speaking it, and thus belies the seeming erasure of embodiment that her knowledge fetish entails. After this, she abruptly ends the encounter, leaving a perplexed and bothered Everard impotently pleading “ ‘See here—see here!’ ” (170) on the bench as she walks away.

Emboldened by the experience of dominating Everard on the bench, the telegraphist tells her helplessly dull fiancé of the encounter and of the promise she gave Everard to stay at the Mayfair telegraph office to help him with his “danger,” that is, the risk of potential ruin occasioned by his affair with Lady Bradeen. The witless grocer can only ask, “ ‘Then where do I come in?’ ” to which the girl haughtily replies, “ ‘You don’t come in at all—that’s just the beauty of it!’ ” (177). At this point the telegraphist has triangulated Everard into her relationship with her fiancé Mr. Mudge as well as triangulated herself into Everard’s affair with Lady Bradeen in promising to stay on at Cocker’s grocery in Mayfair to help the Captain however she might. Both triangulations necessitate “her framed and wired confinement” (117) in the cage.

During her next encounter with Everard from behind the counter at Cocker’s, “the ‘anything, anything’ she had uttered in the Park went to and fro between them and under the poked-out chins that interposed” (178). Desire circulates telegraphically, telepathically, while they engage in their mundane routine of customer and operator. In

comparison with the immediacy of the encounter on the bench, their former, mediated relation markedly pales:

It was as if they had met for all time—it exerted on their being in presence again an influence so prodigious. When she watched herself, in the memory of that night, walk away from him as if she were making an end, she found something too pitiful in the primness of such a gait. Hadn't she precisely established on the part of each a consciousness that could end only with death? (179)

The girl's narrative of her identity as an exiled member of the upper class that nonetheless maintains its standards of conduct begins to unravel as she realizes the "primness" she affected when leaving Everard failed to redeem the voluptuousness of her time spent with him on the bench. The "consciousness" she establishes for each of them by walking away is none other than consuming physical desire, and the naïve girl, in perfect Freudian terms, equates the satisfaction of such a feeling with death. The temptation to give in to the "vulgar" narrative of her identity nearly overtakes her as she imagines that "if she *were* out of the cage...she would have gone straight toward Park Chambers and hung about there till no matter when. She would have waited, stayed, rung, asked, have gone in, sat on the stairs" (179). As she prepares to tell her boss that she is too sick to stay and actually effect this plan, Everard returns to the store, "producing in her agitated spirit, by his real presence, the strangest quickest revolution. He stopped her off without knowing it, and by the time he had been a minute in the shop she felt that she was saved" (180). It is at this moment that the girl secures her former narrative of herself as above the tendencies of common shopgirls and avoids the trap of desire into which she was about to fall. It's Everard's "real presence" that saves her, because his absence actually allows her to imagine a stronger telepathic connection to him than when he is

there; before he arrives and “saves” her she had imagined “that he might just have gone to sit and wait for her. She could almost hear him, through the tick of the sounder, scatter with his stick, in his impatience, the fallen leaves of October” (179). Everard’s reappearance breaks the spell of her desire as it invalidates the girl’s imagined telegraphic telepathy (or is it telepathic telegraphy?).

In the final interview between the girl and Everard, the complete opposite of telepathy occurs, as each treats the other as a stranger, and Everard begs to pry information about an intercepted telegram out of her mind. This memory ironically constitutes the “help” that she initially offered Everard with regard to his “danger” (169), but instead of placing her on the plane of Everard and Lady Bradeen as a participant in the affair, the knowledge that she is free to dispense or withhold the information he seeks allows the girl to experience a feeling of superiority: “It came to her there, with her eyes on his face, that she held the whole thing in her hand, held it as she held her pencil, which might have broken at that instant in her tightened grip” (190). Her fetish for information ultimately conspires with her fetish for control and domination. Hurt by his impersonal manner, she asks circuitous, evasive questions: “If she kept it up long enough she would make him really angry” (191), she thinks. It’s a prospect that doesn’t displease her. When she finally ends her game and reveals the string of numbers to him, he shows visible relief and walks straight out of the shop. “No happiness she had ever known came within miles of it,” (194) remarks James. The fact that the content of the power-granting information, a string of numbers, could have had no meaning for the telegrapher, both contradicts and supports her earlier climactic exhalation, “I know, I know, I know!” She

does, in fact know the information through which she gains temporary domination over Everard, and yet she knows nothing of what it means. The dénouement heightens this sense, as the final vignette with Mrs. Jordan, who has heard her own unstable version of the Lady Bradeen/Everard affair further confuses the facts that the girl thought she understood about it. The information-as-commodity by which the girl had transcended the cage of her own working-class powerlessness ultimately revealed an “abyss” of meaning quite measureless.

How are we to reconcile the two narratives of desire/dominance that James weaves for his “framed and wired” telegraphist? The first achieves a (mostly) disembodied eroticism in which absorption into informational flows inspires masturbatory “revelry” in the fantasies of salaciousness the glimpses and hints of vice inspire; the girl gains power over the man on the bench by exposing herself to him. The second instance sees the telegraphist actually possessing the information that Everard needs; however, it contains no content from which the telegraphist can extrapolate her own narratives. Furthermore, the identity the girl constructs for herself lies in unstable narratives; first, physical infatuation threatens the overthrow of her high-class sensibilities, and second, a loss of meaning involving the very stories she believed she correctly interpreted weakens the girl’s view of her “framed and wired” position as one of exclusive privilege. Katherine Hayles, in *My Mother Was A Computer*, analyzes “In the Cage” as a “prequel to the story of information in the twentieth century” (71), in that the telegraphist’s second domination over Everard shows her escaping “the regime of scarcity” in which matter and energy enact restraints that stratify the human race and

instead achieving “the dream of information” (63), wherein its potential for replication and complexity *ad infinitum* will ultimately remove from the human world the scourge of scarcity—hierarchical organization—as the code of machines integrates with the code of humans. James may have pitted the telegraphist’s reality-based “regime of scarcity” with her fantasies of the “dream of information,” but he ultimately presents a more nuanced constellation between consciousness, desire, communication, and narrative.

In “Wired Love: Pleasure at a Distance in Henry James and Others,” Mark Goble argues that the sex notoriously lacking in James’s fiction appears at the juncture of telegraphy and communication:

because there is no direct link between communication and any concrete expression of sexuality but rather this supremely circuitous sense that communication and a whole series of mediated pleasures refer back to each other without priority or hierarchy, the languages of mediated experience I have been charting in James are inevitably resistant to being translated or rationalized into familiar categories of overt message and latent meaning. (419)

“In the Cage” enacts this kind of rhizomatic system of vague pleasure, in that the girl’s exposure on the bench demonstrates a narrative of telepathy made potent through projecting that narrative onto another, resulting in a mirror effect that simulates the kind of telepathy (and its erotic potentialities) that telegraphy seemed to prove possible. The girl, like the author, mediates her own narrative by imposing it on the other. Her “framed and wired position” places her in the fluidity of the pattern/randomness dialectic in which she extrapolates patterns from the never-ending noise of the telegraph office, an imaginative, interpretive pursuit that grants her temporary escape from the working-class exigencies of her life.



In the story of the telegrapher, James explored the disembodied pleasures of narrative, particularly of a narrative mediated through the gaze of others. The possibilities for narrative technology in this novella point in two different directions. The first points to a process rooted in magical thinking in which an interpretation, pushed through the media of successive consciousnesses, takes on a life of its own; poiesis generates new possibilities for experience, such as the electro-erotics demonstrated on the bench. The second points to a vision of narrative “enframing” that converts inputs into pure commodity, in which the object is devoid of meaning and used to instantiate new hierarchies of power that will always destabilize and restabilize as the ego vies for social dominance. “In the Cage” both temporally prefigures and thematically recalls Heidegger’s 1954 warning that technology holds the power to either swallow man’s essence or help reveal his “innermost indestructible belongingness.” The story suggests that technology can either reorient experience towards new possibilities or transform humans into meaningless data. Mediation, that is, bestows upon the hyperspatial, “framed and wired” self new opportunities to explore and share the ways in which it experiences human truth—beauty, intellect, pleasure; it also mirrors the physical world in that it offers new pathways to gaining and maintaining power over others. The choice will ultimately be made by the individual, but James, by emphasizing the telegraphist’s entrapment in a degrading class, reminds us that the environment creates the individual. However technology might reveal the “innermost” treasures of being alive, the process will never escape our “belongingness” in the multimedia matrix of living forms.

## CONCLUSION

In his 1899 “The Future of the Novel,” James acknowledged the seemingly obvious “truth that the future of fiction is intimately bound up with the future of the society that produces and consumes it” (247). Notions of reflexivity came naturally to James, whose characters never seem to exist but in relation to each other. Whereas James here emphasizes the contemporaneous nature of interdependent cultural processes, it has been the aim of this thesis to show that the fiction of the past has much to say about our present. James’s narratives of destabilized identities living in a world newly engulfed by electricity demonstrate models of consciousness that were posthuman before the notion of the human even thought to stray from its traditional Enlightenment sensibilities. Holding ideas of the posthuman in proximity with James’s words—holding them just close enough that they *almost* seem to touch across expanses of time and culture—has evoked the idea of a hyperspatial self that doesn’t require a stable center of identity in order to move through the world with an autonomy that doesn’t assign egocentric value to maintaining the boundary between the self and the other. Instead, the hyperspatial self experiences its world through various and infinite mediations: narrative mediations of its subjective consciousness, sensual mediations that extend its senses, and interpretive mediations through its own and other consciousnesses. James’s critical work values

interpretive mediation because of its ability to direct the art with which it engages in new directions. This thesis, likewise, has attempted to orient James's work towards novel and relevant readings. However, it also recognizes the larger need for scholarship to maintain a Jamesian attitude towards its goals within society; commentary, like art, evaporates into obscurity without circulation, and the public intellectual discourse cannot thrive without that circulation.

Much of posthuman inquiry involves taking a stance about the potential of technology and proscribing attitudes, policies, and intentionalities that accord to that view; this ethical impetus falls limp, however, when examining the current relationship of academia with the rest of the world. A disturbing gap lies between the people who are paid to do big-picture thinking about society, culture, and literature and the society those thinkers are actually studying. Moreover, the evolution of a techno-capitalist society largely proceeds along democratic lines that naturally exclude thinkers publishing in niche-journals. The internet slid under the foundations of the global economy, laid its own bricks there, and now intractably and inevitably buttresses the entire structure of global commerce. That commerce is capitalism at its purest—the individual's spending power is targeted through no medium other than the information gathered about that specific individual. What this amounts to is a reorganization of spending mediation—no merchandizers to decide what products reach the consumer's eyes and no Walmarts deciding which cheap manufacturer gets the lion's share of the market; instead, Internet commerce fractures the entire mechanism of demand into billions of individual units that make decisions based not only on individual preference but also on the e-cultural norms

circulating in the ever-flowing currents of social media. By selling our gaze (and by extension our pockets), and the information on how to attract that that gaze, we allow the Internet to become simultaneously the ultimate democratic machine and the perfect incubator of autocracy. Majority rules, but the sacrifices made to harness that power expose the hearts and minds of the people making the decisions.

Hayles, studying this multiplicitous, networked society, recognizes the power of mainstream public discourse, but ignores the need to access that power in addressing concerns about the posthuman:

Given market forces already at work, it is virtually (if I may use the word) certain that we will increasingly live, work, and play in environments that construct us as embodied virtualities. I believe that our best hope to intervene constructively in this development is to put an interpretive spin on it—one that opens up the possibilities of seeing pattern and presence as complementary rather than antagonistic. Information, like humanity, cannot exist apart from the embodiment that brings it into being as a material entity in the world. . . .As we rush to explore the new vistas that cyberspace has made available for colonization, let us remember the fragility of a material world that cannot be replaced. (*How We* 49)

The “market forces” to which Hayles refers are none other than those that will direct the unfolding of a posthuman society. According to the passage, the only recourse available to the scholar for affecting those market forces is a flaccid “interpretive spin” that may or may not convince a small group of academic readers of the importance of material embodiment in an increasingly disembodied world. Hayles’s indoctrination into the isolation of academic pursuits blinds her to the most explosive potentiality of the posthuman—that of a wired, instantaneously connected, energetically flourishing, and expansively influential public intellectual discourse.

Henry James caught a glimpse of this potential when he published “The Art of Fiction” in response to Walter Besant’s commentary on the topic and provoked newspaper responses to his own thoughts. In that essay he explains,

Art lives upon discussion, upon experiment, upon curiosity, upon variety of attempt, upon the exchange of views and the comparison of standpoints; and there is a presumption that those times when no one has anything particular to say about it, and has no reason to give for practice or preference, though they may be times of honor, are not times of development—are times, possibly even, a little of dullness. . . . Discussion, suggestion, formulation, these things are fertilizing when they are frank and sincere. (“Art of Fiction” 165-166)

As this thesis has attempted to show, humanity *en masse* lusts after art—in all forms of media—because it thirsts for novel and enchanting experience. *Especially* in an age where a piece of art can go viral in hours, intellectual discussion and response to art—“the exchange of views and the comparison of standpoints”—can inspire new permutations and evolutions of art and captivate the masses that direct the market forces that Hayles mistakenly deems inaccessible. James, in his time, reached the mediated masses and conveyed to them through narrative the ways that technology exponentially increases the possibilities for human connection and the real-time effects that he saw new media having on society. True to cybernetic theories about the reductive necessity of “observing,” James’s work achieves its authenticity and power by performing the way consciousness works; just as the observer cannot get outside the system, any attempt to stand outside our consciousness—collective or individual—and analyze it necessarily will efface its most salient characteristics. James’s idea of poesis instead produces theory and inspires the kind of discussion that cultural theory aspires to engender. Perhaps James’s collisions with posthuman thought, at their most salient level, reveal the way in

which art and the mediations it involves tap into powerful reserves of human desire. To speak of consciousness, of posthuman absorption into the ever-flowing invisible web of information that surrounds us, will always be less than our experience of it. Likewise, the love of literature that motivates the professional study of it loses its power to connect hearts and minds if the criticism produced fails to capture and perform that love. A posthuman self—a self that can recognize within its individuality its simultaneous, emphatic connection to the life around it—may prove the self most willing and able to enact the art that lights up and transforms the cyborg network of our world.

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