This seminar discusses how by contaminating their respective audience’s view of action with epistemological and psychological issues James and Hitchcock interrupt and slow down the plot of either the film or the novel. They indeed make a plea for suspending judgments and actions at a time where technologies of speed are increasingly employed to measure achievements in economics, medicine, education and society at large. This is a process that has been going on since the technological advances of the mid-nineteenth century. Neither James nor Hitchcock dismisses such scientific discoveries which help accelerate the way we act and interact with each other. They are not dismayed about them either. They warn, however, of an uncritical embrace of speed and the concomitant marginalization of isolated voices that articulate doubt about some aspects of otherwise beneficial developments. The fictions presented in their novels and in their films confront us with a reality we might want to ignore. It is a reality where speed in both cognition and action results in deleterious or lethal consequences. James’s and Hitchcock's wariness of the rush to action and judgment is all the more relevant in our digital age where we seem to have become, as Frank Schirrmacher has put it, ‘informavores’ (devourers of information).

As we shall see the suspension of judgment and action also take place in Hitchcock’s idiosyncratic notion of suspense. Both auteurs place a heavy emphasis on deceleration. This may be interpreted as a response to the ever increasing speed of socio-political and economic life in the wake of the rapid technological innovations which have kept proliferating ever since the onset of the industrial revolution. Our digital age is an offspring such innovations. Slow motion in James's novels and Hitchcock's films contaminates the speed which shapes many aspects of life from the mid nineteenth-century to the contemporary digital high point of modernity. Societal pressures in times of acceleration often result in the endorsement of quick and simple solutions. The seminar will focus on how in different and related ways James and Hitchcock complicate accelerations of both actions and judgments by endowing the audience with the suspense of knowledge that the protagonists miss due to their compulsion to move towards and to embrace what turn out to be entrapments.

Prof Michael Mack (PhD, Cambridge) is a Reader in English Literature at Durham University, UK. Formerly he has been a Visiting Professor at Syracuse University, a Fellow at the University of Sydney, and lecturer and research fellow at the University of Chicago. He is the author of over forty peer-reviewed articles and the following books: Philosophy and Literature in Times of Crisis: Challenging our Infatuation with Numbers (Bloomsbury, 2014), How Literature Changes the Way We Think (Bloomsbury, 2012), Spinoza and the Specters of Modernity (Bloomsbury, 2010), German Idealism and the Jew (University of Chicago Press, 2003), and Anthropology as Memory (de Gruyter, 2001, Conditio Judaica Series).

Presented by
School of Literature, Languages and Linguistics
ANU College of Arts & Social Sciences

Enquiries
Colette.Gilmour@anu.edu.au

This lecture is free and all are welcome

Please visit our website for further information:
sill.anu.edu.au/