PROJECT MUSE®

The Compsons Were Here: Indexicality, the Actuality, and the Crisis of Meaning in *The Sound and the Fury*

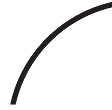
Pardis Dabashi

Modernism/modernity, Volume 24, Number 3, September 2017, (Review)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press
DOI: *https://doi.org/10.1353/mod.2017.0058*

For additional information about this article
https://muse.jhu.edu/article/668649

Access provided at 2 Jan 2020 05:23 GMT from University Of Nevada , Reno



The Compsons Were Here: Indexicality, the Actuality, and the Crisis of Meaning in *The Sound and the Fury*

Pardis Dabashi

MODERNISM / *modernity*
VOLUME TWENTY FOUR,
NUMBER THREE,
PP 527–548. © 2017
JOHNS HOPKINS
UNIVERSITY PRESS

> "The ontological scatter that is accessible to an intensively scattered perception bespeaks a crisis of the object, a crisis of meaning."
> —Howard Eiland, "Reception in Distraction"[1]

"'Is you all seen anything of a quarter down here.' Luster said.

'What quarter.'

'The one I had here this morning.' Luster said. 'I lost it somewhere. It fell through this here hole in my pocket.'"[2] *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) is propelled onto the page by an unpredictable and trivial occurrence. As the dialogue indicates, Luster loses a coin through a hole in his pocket and thus begins both the search for the money and our initiation into the Compson family history. What if the quarter had not fallen through Luster's pocket? Would the novel read differently if Benjy and Luster had not needed to pass by the golf course in search of the quarter and hear the golfer cry "caddie," the misinterpretation of which spins Benjy into reverie? Benjy then catches on the fence as he tries to pass through, which reminds him of an anterior moment when he was similarly caught, this time with Caddy. If he had not gotten caught on the fence, the section would have progressed in some other way. The novel begins by chance and Benjy's section proceeds according to chance occurrences. A similar sense of chance and unpredictability colors a response Faulkner gave to Jean Stein vanden Heuvel's question in an interview for the *Paris Review* (1956). She asks, "Does the

Pardis Dabashi is a doctoral candidate in the English department at Boston University. Her dissertation, "The Arts of Inconsequence: The Dynamics of Contingency in Modernist Literature and Film," explores the role of cinema in the modernist novel's turn to plotlessness.

narcissus given to Benjy have some significance?" Faulkner replied that it "was simply a flower which happened to be handy on the fifth of April. It was not deliberate."[3] This article will explore the implications of chance—contingency—on the formal aspect of section one of *The Sound and the Fury* and reveal the manner in which the rest of the novel responds to the conditions that Benjy provides for a contingent world bereft of coherent meaning.[4] While Benjy's section of *The Sound and the Fury* liberates the novel from the formal strictures of realist narration, any assumption of the unavailability of storied meaning elicits palpable anxiety in his brothers, who attempt to restore narrative sense in tormented, even violent ways.

In the late nineteenth century, contingency was anathema to an increasingly rationalized notion of time—based on efficiency, speed, and regularity, capitalist values that permeated a modern culture of mechanized mass reproduction, the novel's historical context. As Mary Ann Doane has argued, though contingency—the unpredictable, the deviant, the inessential—had the "lure" of "resistance to rationalization," it was "potentially threatening" because of its "alliance with meaninglessness, even nonsense."[5] Contingency held the promise of absolute freedom from structure, but Baudelaire feared that such freedom would mean "anarchy," that a meaningless "riot of details" would drown modern humanity (quoted in Doane, *Emergence of Cinematic Time*, 11). What if that unmooring from meaning, as Baudelaire and Siegfried Kracauer proposed, was the definitive characteristic of modernity? Film, according to Doane, was in a formally privileged position to structure and aestheticize the opposing forces of rationalization and contingency. The *actuality*, the earliest genre of film made popular by the Lumière Brothers, recorded un-narrativized visual data. The advent of the *event* allayed the anxiety these non-narrative films induced, by attempting to structure and confer significance on otherwise anarchically meaningless occurrences. Though Faulkner would not begin his stint in Hollywood until the 1930s, my investigation is predicated on the premise, shared by a number of Faulkner critics, that the novel evinces an early awareness of and attraction to the formal and thematic possibilities inherent in the art of cinema.[6] Through a comparison between Benjy's section, which, I propose, amounts to filmic *coverage* as opposed to narration, Quentin's fraught search for a central, governing event, and Jason's paranoid narrativizations, I will argue that the novel's critical engagement with early cinematic form determines the perceptual strategies of the three Compson brothers.

The transition from what Tom Gunning has called the "cinema of attractions" to the narrative cinema provides a theoretical and historical narrative along which Faulkner traces the desires, discomforts, and pathologies of the three brothers, and, ultimately, the modern novel. In embodying early cinematic form and exhibition practices, Benjy's consciousness is determined by contingent forces. Quentin, however, is anxious to escape the insuperability of contingency and the threat of modern estrangement from meaning, by trying to effect *meaningful* change. In the process, Quentin identifies himself with literary forms as if novelistic narrative could defuse the threat of spectacle. His section is organized around his attempt to overcome what Doane calls "uneventful time," time infected with meaninglessness. Faulkner positions Quentin's longing for

meaning and narrative order in relation to the beginnings of narrative cinema. And finally, Jason no longer interrogates the relationship between the contingent and the meaningful. Instead, to him, all signifies, all events and details participate in his "story" of victimhood and persecution. Jason fully actualizes the violence inherent to narrative construction and the radical denial of contingency intrinsic to narrative cinema.

The current scholarship on modernist literature and the new media has yet to explore how the cinema figured in literary-modernist deliberations on the processes of narrativization and emplotment.[7] As a meditation on the grounds of novelistic narrative, *The Sound and the Fury* is a diagnostic text, a master-allegory for what I consider the encounter between the modern novel and the anti-narrative contingency associated with film. It is well known that Faulkner was a frequenter of the cinema and that he even claimed of *The Sound and the Fury* that it "resembled 'the first moving picture projector.'"[8] This appeal to early film is integral to the novel's broader metanarrative about the protocols of storytelling. The novel shows how modernism detected in early film compelling examples of non-narrativity conducive to formal literary innovation. Other writers also found these features useful in self-reflectively expressing both modernism's own ontogenesis and the pained philosophical acknowledgement of existential inessentiality that such a becoming entailed. James Joyce used the cinema to think through the implications of modern contingency on the premises of the novel as a genre and the narrative meanings it *had been* capable of providing in the nineteenth century. Djuna Barnes and Sherwood Anderson invoked the contingency of the circus (early film's cultural cousin) to both dismantle realist storytelling and expose the intense human desire for meaningful emplotment. And later, in film's properly modernist period, the contingent remained aesthetically scandalous: Max Ophuls turned the dialectical relationship between narrative and contingency into the conditions for a dazzlingly beautiful—if asphyxiating—art. The threat of the contingent provokes in the works of key modernist writers the conflicted pursuit of a narrative order they know they can no longer authentically achieve; film is at the heart of this aesthetic self-reflection.[9] Those attempts at re-establishing narrative order are—as I will demonstrate in regard to Quentin and Jason Compson—conflicted, pained, even pathological.

Kracauer considered modern subjectivity to be hounded by contingency. Estranged from the pre-modern "Absolute" that was happily "saturated with meaning," moderns wander endlessly, directionlessly, trying to make sense of their alienation from authentic forms of collective belief. Early film and its modes of exhibition, he believed, represented this existential senselessness, this modern "[*h*]*orror vacui*."[10] Indeed, early film programs thrived on senselessness: "Film," Tom Gunning writes, "appeared as one attraction on the vaudeville programme, surrounded by a mass of unrelated acts in a non-narrative and even nearly illogical succession of performances."[11] Miriam Hansen explains that other exhibition sites included "variety shows, dime museums . . . penny arcades, summer parks, fair grounds, and traveling shows," where films were "arranged in the most random manner possible."[12] Though nickelodeons superseded the vaudeville film screenings, they often maintained a non-narrative, variety-show format. The earliest exhibitions showed cinematic "actualities," which, invented in 1895, were

"synonymous with 'factual film.'"[13] Actualities were non-narrative films, experiments with the capacity to record existence. They differed from the later narrative and classical Hollywood cinemas in that they captured moments of life without fitting them into larger narrative frameworks. Some of these films included men playing cards, workers leaving a factory, men watching a cockfight, a woman feeding pigeons, and a boat leaving a port.[14] Data devoid of context, actualities were anti-novelistic. They did not provide coherently meaningful narrative wholes like those of the nineteenth-century realist novel, a mainstream cultural form that would have been fresh in the memory of early film spectators. The cinema's turn to narrative in the early 1900s offered literary modernists a contemporaneous reminder of the rise of nineteenth-century narrative itself. If the realist novel had the palliative function of seizing meaning from the torrent of secularized reality, then the early narrative cinema made that original sense of estrangement once again salient, as it sought to "wrest" narrative from the chaotic "temporal flux" of the actuality.[15] Early film offered Faulkner and others a metaphorical space to think about the primordial human desire for narrative. That is, early cinema allowed modernism to deliberate once again on the process of narrativization. This dialectic between narrativization and temporal flux—channeled through film—shapes *The Sound and the Fury*.

A Compson Family Home Video

Doane borrows the concept of the index from Charles Sanders Peirce to explore the problems posed to meaning by the contingency inherent to the actuality. Peirce believed that time consists of an indivisible continuum, unable to be separated into successive instants, "[s]o that the point of time or the point of space is nothing but the ideal limit towards which we approach, but which we can never reach" (quoted in Doane, *Emergence of Cinematic Time*, 90). As Doane suggests, in denying the validity of an instant in time, Peirce also denies the possibility of full immediacy. "Any unit of time, no matter how small, will always be an *interval*, composed of smaller units of time" (90). Ultimately, for Peirce, the instant, or pure present "can yield no adequate sign of itself" (91). Nevertheless, the index is a kind of sign that attains, with the least amount of time-lag, the immediacy of the pure present's "ideal limit." Examples of indices are a pointing finger, a footprint, a weathercock, demonstrative pronouns like *this* and *here*, the photographic image, and, I propose, Benjy's section of *The Sound and the Fury* (69). Indices, according to Peirce, "are dependent upon certain unique contingencies: the wind blowing at the moment in a certain direction, a foot having landed in the mud at precisely this place, the camera's shutter opening at a given time." Crucially, the Peircian index "designates something without describing it"; it directs our attention to a thing without interpreting it. It simply says, "This is here, look at it" (92). The demonstrative pronoun, *this*, for example, "is evacuated of all content and simply designates a specific and singular object or situation, comprehensible only within a given discourse" (93). In other words, indices point to the existence of something, but they do not interpret that thing (e.g., sound is an index which only "a certain dis-

course" will help register as fury). Indices "are limited to the assurance of an existence; they provide no insight into the nature of their objects. . . . It is pure indication" (94). Kracauer found the indexicality of the photographic image particularly unsettling. In contrast to human memory, which "isolate[s] and store[s] only significant moments," the photograph archives singular and fleeting instants, lacks context with which to give them meaning, and is therefore associated with "pure contingency" and "disconnectedness" (103). But whereas photographs are always haunted by their historicity—the moment that they have captured is gone—film is able to maintain the illusion of presence by virtue of its capacity to represent movement: "The moving images are, for the spectator, 'here' and 'now'" (103).

Pier Paolo Pasolini's remarks on the long take show how indexical presentation—decontextualized data-provision—can threaten narrative sense. Early film technology did not allow the durations of the shots Pasolini discusses; yet, the one-shot structure of early actualities similarly compromised their potential to produce sense.[16] Taking the Abraham Zapruder film of John F. Kennedy's assassination (an actuality) as his paradigmatic example of the long take, Pasolini writes,

> This extreme language of action with which Kennedy is expressed to the spectators remains indecisive and meaningless in the presence in which it was perceived by the senses and/or filmed. Like every moment of the language of action, *it requires something more*. It requires systematization with regard to both itself and the objective world; it must be related to other languages of action. . . . to the actions of those at that moment surrounding him, for example, to those of his assassin, or assassins. . . . As long as such actions remain unrelated . . . they are fragmentary and incomplete languages, all but incomprehensible.[17]

Pasolini appears to conceive of "meaning" in terms of Roland Barthes's hermeneutic code. This is a set of textual relations that corresponds to and is driven toward the revelation of a truth at the narrative's end. Peter Brooks explains it as a "shaping force, allowing us to . . . see the significance of actions" with respect to "the narrative as a whole" (*Reading for the Plot*, 287). According to Barthes, the hermeneutic code—the text's "enigma"—is fulfilled or answered by units of information that constitute the proairetic code, the actions or events. In a realist text, a proairetic unit is hermeneutically meaningful only if it contributes to the revelation of a truth or the answer to a question established by the plot. Conversely, stripped of its hermeneutic function, a proairetic unit such as "a man is assassinated" is semantically indeterminate beyond the meanings of the words themselves. Within the context of a plot, "a man is assassinated" can have devastating meaning. But stripped of its hermeneutic responsibility, the proairetic unit operates merely as an index of its own content. While a narrator makes evident *why* an event is happening, an indicator (such as Benjy) simply informs *that* it is happening.

Like Zapruder's actuality, Benjy's section is non-narratively indexical and hence hermeneutically impoverished.[18] As Faulkner told Jean Stein vanden Heuvel, "I had begun to tell the story through the eyes of the idiot child, since I felt that it would be more effective as told by someone capable only of knowing *what* happened but not *why*" (*The Lion in the Garden*, 245, emphasis added). The result is a series of indexical,

 proairetic statements that merely point to the existence of objects and events. Benjy's statement "The room went away, but I didn't hush, and the room came back and Dilsey came and sat on the bed, looking at me" is no more narratively informative than the moment when he burns his hand in the fire: "I could still hear the clock between my voice. . . . My voice was going loud every time . . . My voice went louder then and my hand tried to go back to my mouth, but Dilsey held it. My voice went loud" (*The Sound and the Fury*, 44, 59). Instead, the sentences read as an indexical list of occurrences that have happened. In Pasolini's terms, they constitute an "incomplete language of action" that needs to be put in relation to other languages in order to amass hermeneutic meaning. The most glaring example of such hermeneutic poverty in Benjy's section is an observation he makes of his niece on her way to rob Jason, a robbery that, later in the novel, proves to be a climactic event. When he observes Quentin II descending the tree outside her window and running across to Jason's room, Benjy indexes the scene in hermeneutically impoverished, starkly proairetic terms:

> *I hushed, and then Luster stopped, his head toward the window. Then he went to the window and looked out. He came back and took my arm. Here she come, he said. Be quiet now. We went to the window and looked out. It came out of Quentin's window and climbed across into the tree. We watched the tree shaking. The shaking went down the tree, then it came out and we watched it go away across the grass. Then we couldn't see it*. (74)

This moment is incomprehensible in terms of its importance to the storyline Jason makes available to us later. It needs, in Pasolini's terms, *something more* to imbue it with narrative urgency. It is what he calls the "substance of cinema" that requires further manipulation before it can become film, or, in Benjy's case, narrative.

Benjy's indexical observation through the window (whose spectral function evokes a camera or a screen) evacuates Quentin II's escape of its hermeneutic significance. Compare the indexical flatness of Benjy's passage with the suspense of the same scene from the final, fully narrativized section: "'Jason,' Mrs. Compson said. 'Where is he?' She went to the door. Dilsey followed her on down the hall, to another door. It was closed. 'Jason,' she called through the door" (283). The door figures as a barrier of perspective. Were Benjy to deliver this passage, he would not see beyond the door; he is physically limited by the placement of his camera-lens eyes. "But there was still no answer, for he was hurling things backward out of the closet, garments, shoes, a suitcase," facts that only a camera inside Jason's room could capture. The omniscient narrator displays the ease with which he can avail himself of multiple languages of action. He forms a complex network of those languages, turning "substance" into film (or narrative):

> [Jason] emerged carrying a sawn section of tongue-and-groove planking and laid it down and entered the closet again and emerged with a metal box. He set it on the bed and stood looking at the broken lock while he dug a keyring from his pocket and selected a key. . . . Outside the window he heard some jaybirds swirl shrieking past and away, their cries whipping away along the wind, and an automobile passed somewhere and died away also. His mother spoke his name again beyond the door, but he didn't move. (283)

The omnipresence of perspective constitutes what film theorists would comfortably call narration. John Matthews objects to the habit many Faulkner critics have of referring to section IV as Dilsey's section, on the grounds that it in fact "has no identifiable narrator."[19] That critical habit is indeed misleading, for the disappearance of one conspicuous perspective allows the final section to take the form of a fully comprehensible narrative. As in classical cinema (which had just gained currency by 1929), the final section attains its status as narration precisely because it espouses a multiplicity of perspectives. What Hansen has called the "ubiquity" of the camera enables its "invisibility": we stop noticing the perspectives because they are everywhere (*Babel and Babylon*, 35, 81).

Rather than narration, Benjy's text is both indexical presentation and a unique form of passive reception. Quentin II unknowingly gives voice to Benjy's lack of perceptual mastery over his experience, deepening his affiliation with the cinema of attractions. Frustrated at having been caught with the man with the red tie, Quentin II complains to Jason and Dilsey, "*You all send him to spy on me. I hate this house. I'm going to run away*" (*The Sound and the Fury*, 71). The irony is that Benjy does not "spy," he merely sees. The comment highlights the difference between passively witnessing and actively searching with one's gaze, a distinction crucial to early cinematic spectatorship. The exhibitions' disjointed structure that I mentioned above produced unpredictable temporal "eruptions" rather than narrative development, Gunning explains.[20] Instead of the "linear progression of plotting and causality," he writes, the early cinematic exhibitions featured "staccato jolts" ("Now You See It," 6). Unlike the cuts in the later narrative cinema that produced narrative sense, the temporal disjunctions inherent to the cinema of attractions were illogical and arbitrary. The nonlinear and labyrinthine structure of Benjy's section—its unpredictable "jolts" from one moment in time to another—reproduces the nonlinearity of these early exhibitions.

These formats prompted a specific form of spectatorship. Gunning argues that the attraction "solicit[s] surprise, astonishment, or pure curiosity instead of following the enigmas on which narrative depends" (10). The spectator of early cinema surrenders her perception to "the unpredictability of the instant, a succession of excitements and frustrations whose order cannot be predicted by narrative logic and whose pleasures are never sure of being prolonged." "Each instant," he writes, "offers the possibility of a radical alteration or termination" (10–11). Like early spectators, Benjy does not exercise mastery over his impressions; rather, he is passive, subject to the lightest push or pull in any given spatial or temporal direction. Like them, he yields with intoxicated submissiveness to the "discontinuous experience of time" and freedom from spatio-temporal barriers (11). He allows for transitions without resistance, and, as opposed to his brother, Quentin, he does not search his mind for one memory in particular. This perceptual difference between Quentin and Benjy parallels that between classical and early cinematic viewers: "If the classical spectator enjoys apparent mastery of the narrative thread of a film . . . the viewer of the cinema of attractions plays a very different game . . . one strongly lacking predictability or a sense of mastery" (11). Benjy's abandon to formlessness manifests in the delight he takes in witnessing the flux of shadows, shapes, and lights when he goes to sleep.

Gunning's account of the emotional experience of early spectatorship underscores the affective complexity of Benjy's section. For while Benjy does not present his observations according to a narratively hierarchical schema that would imbue certain elements with hermeneutic meaning over others, the section brims with feelings that Benjy cannot effectively manage. A slipper, the smell of trees, turning left instead of right at the Confederate monument in town, the sight of the swing, the pasture—these send him into either monstrous bouts of desperate sadness and panic or states of rapt and dreamy calm. Hence, there *is* a system of hierarchization to his section, albeit not a narrative one. Rather, the order that dominates is affective, not hermeneutic.

In dislocating affect from narrative explanation, *The Sound and the Fury* appeals once again to the early cinema. Gunning explains that early audiences reacted with nervous wonder at the workings of the cinematograph. This had largely to do with the standard practice of the early Lumière screenings: the exhibitor would begin by projecting the image in its still form and subsequently spur the photograph into motion. Wonder, amazement, and shock underlay the screams and cries of early spectators.[21] Audiences would scream or "sit aghast," in both mesmerized curiosity at the workings of the cinematic apparatus and playfully anxious knowledge of the illusion of the image (Gunning, "An Aesthetic," 84). This affectively rich response was accompanied by, contingent upon, a lack of involvement with the narrative content of the image. "Rather than being an involvement with narrative action," Gunning writes, "the cinema of attractions solicits . . . [an] awareness of the film image engaging the viewer's curiosity. The spectator does not get lost in a fictional world and its drama, but remains aware of the act of looking, the excitement of curiosity and its fulfillment" (84). The early filmmaker George Méliès conveys the impression that narrative was both tertiary in the cinema of attractions and incompatible with the aims of the cultural form, which were to shock and excite: "[A] horse pulling a wagon began to walk towards us, followed by other vehicles and then pedestrians, in short all the animation of the street. Before this spectacle we sat with gaping mouths, struck with amazement, astonished beyond all expression" (quoted in Gunning, 82). Méliès negotiates between comfort and abandon; he is in awe of the viewing experience, but relinquishes any intention to make narrative sense of the image. His sensory dexterity exemplifies what Walter Benjamin has called "reception in distraction," a modern sensory "vigilance" marked by an ability to be both "carried away and in control."[22] Méliès's remark validates Benjamin's thesis that, in contrast to the older arts like the novel and painting that encouraged contemplative reception, the cinema trained modern subjects in this new form of spontaneous apperception.[23]

Note the following passage when Benjy is sitting in the carriage with his mother and the pleased disorientation of his observations; it is as if he is sitting next to the grandfather of fantastical cinema:

> "You, T. P." Mother said, clutching me. I could hear Queenie's feet and the bright shapes went smooth and steady on both sides, the shadows of them flowing across Queenie's back. They went on like the bright tops of wheels. Then those on one side stopped at the tall

> white post where the soldier was. But on the other side they went on smooth and steady, but a little slower. . . . The shapes flowed on. The ones on the other side began again, bright and fast and smooth, like when Caddy says we are going to sleep. (*The Sound and the Fury*, 11–12)

Like Méliès, who notes but does not narrativize the various components of the early cinematic image, Benjy receives in distraction the kaleidoscopic rhythms, positionings, and brightnesses of the shapes and shadows. Of the modern figures that Benjamin believes have mastered this mode of perception, the most salient here is the collector. Unleashed in a modern world that is full of *things* to observe, the collector "takes up the struggle against dispersion," Benjamin writes in *The Arcades Project*. Howard Eiland explains that modern distraction causes a "crisis of form," since the "entropic or centrifugal tendency" of modernity would seem to evade structure altogether ("Reception in Distraction," 63). Yet, "the great collector[s]," Eiland writes, are "at home . . . in the world's scatter" (62–63). They are "touched and inspired by it. They spend themselves and expand themselves in being dispersed to the current of objects. . . . Their struggle against dispersion succeeds only by dint of studious abandonment to it" (63). Like Benjamin's collector, Benjy passes through the world documentarily accounting for the dispersed objects and persons: "They were washing down at the branch. One of them was singing. I could smell the clothes flapping, and the smoke blowing across the branch"; or later, "Steam came off of Roskus. He was sitting in front of the stove. The oven door was open and Roskus had his feet in it. Steam came off the bowl. . . . There was a black spot on the inside of the bowl"; or "Caddy gave me the cushion, and I could look at the cushion and the mirror and the fire" (*The Sound and the Fury*, 14, 70, 71). Like the collector, Benjy abandons himself to these scattered observations, finding pleasure in "the primordially strewn state" of "things" (Eiland, "Reception in Distraction," 62). His perceptive abilities are unprejudiced, treating all objects, persons, and sensations as equally observable.[24]

Yet, while Benjy exhibits tranquility, he is often radically uncomfortable and overwhelmed. Faulkner transposes the playful astonishment of the cinema of attractions into Benjy's wild unease. The intensity of Benjy's baffling bewilderment, panic, and grief challenges Fredric Jameson's recent claim that affect freed the modern novel from the ideological "regime" of Balzacian "récit."[25] He suggests that Faulkner was instrumental in "lifting" the "taboo" of affect and emancipating the modern novel from the hermeneutic bondage of the classical text (Jameson, *Antinomies*, 177). In the final scene, however, Benjy's wails take on monumentally tragic proportions: "Bellow on bellow, his voice mounted, with scarce interval for breath. There was more than astonishment in it, it was horror . . . agony eyeless, tongueless" (*The Sound and the Fury*, 320). This overwhelming pain suggests that affect does not herald such an unequivocal liberation after all. Evidently, modernism still reckons with the consequences of abandoning realist meaning in a wounded, even reluctant way—especially if the abandonment involves submitting to the formal threat of cinematic spectacle. Benjy's grief is in large part due to Caddy's departure. However, Caddy was the source of narrative in Benjy's

 life; hence, in a crucial respect, his "affective intensit[y]" mourns the loss of narrative meaning (*Antinomies*, 192).

Caddy attempts to endow Benjy with the hermeneutic functions that his consciousness lacks. She tries to provide him with rudimentary social frameworks that would allow him to make sense of his observations and experiences. When he runs out into the cold to meet her, she socially contextualizes his actions: "Did you think it would be Christmas when I came home from school. Is that what you thought. Christmas is the day after tomorrow. Santy Claus, Benjy. Santy Claus" (*The Sound and the Fury*, 7). Or, in the children's deliberation on Damuddy's death, Caddy draws the appropriate distinctions between human and animal styles of burial and decomposition that Benjy's undiscerning consciousness cannot. "How can buzzards get in where Damuddy is. Father wouldn't let them. Would you let a buzzard undress you," she pointedly asks Jason (36). Elsewhere, Caddy contextualizes Benjy's physical sensation of cold: "'Keep your hands in your pockets good, now' . . . 'It's froze.' . . . 'Look.' She broke the top of the water and held a piece of it to my face. 'Ice. That means how cold it is'" (13). The tutelage (albeit failed) that Caddy provides Benjy is of a sociological order; she tries to generate for him what Erving Goffman calls *frames*, "principles of organization which govern events . . . and our subjective involvement in them."[26] Yet the social sense—narrative—that Caddy tries to lend Benjy's experience underscores all the more the absence of hermeneutic sense in Benjy's section.

In aligning Caddy with the production of narrative meaning, Faulkner challenges the dominant techniques of female objectification typical to the cinema. Laura Mulvey has argued that in film, woman is the object of scopophilia, a possessive and controlling voyeurism. While woman is an "indispensable spectacle in normal narrative film," female appearance nevertheless "tends to work against the development of a storyline."[27] Woman in the cinema tends to threaten "epistemological systems" such as narrative, but Caddy secures them for Benjy.[28] It is the male who is typically the "active one . . . forwarding the story." Typically, the male is both the agent of narrative order and the "bearer of the look of the spectator, transferring it behind the screen" (Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure," 838). Woman is the object of narrative investigation, the "conduit to . . . truth," rather than its discoverer (Doane, *Femmes Fatales*, 3). The scopophilic nature of the female image was blatant during the early cinema, when films often featured erotic images of women without narrative rationalization. Faulkner puts pressure on these typical gender roles in the cinema by making Benjy the object of Caddy's social narrativization. In creating social micronarratives for Benjy, Caddy also transfers the reader's searching mind to the diegetic world, operating *en abyme* as the arbiter of a textual and social hermeneutics. Rather than identify with the male character, as in Mulvey's account, we identify with Caddy's searching mind. Caddy's stubborn masculinity emerges from her arrogation of male "epistemophilia" despite her constriction by the male optics of possession (1).

The intensity and pathos of Benjy's emotions suggest that both the narrative poverty of spectacle and the relinquishment of perceptual mastery that it requires put pressure on the conditions of the novel as a genre. The abrupt cessation of his section is

another symptom of this formal duress. The documentary of Benjy's consciousness ends with his falling asleep and not with his death, which has significant implications on the philosophy of time and meaning that the section proposes. As Pasolini writes, "It is absolutely necessary to die, *because while living we lack meaning*." As we live, the meaning of our lives is "*in potentia*," and death

> *performs a lightening quick montage on our lives*; . . . it chooses our truly significant moments (no longer changeable by other possible contrary or incoherent moments) and places them in sequence, converting our present, which is infinite, unstable and uncertain, and thus linguistically indescribable, into a clear, stable, certain, and thus linguistically describable past . . . *It is thanks to death that our lives become expressive*. ("Observations," 6, emphasis original)

Benjy's section has presented moments of history as temporally interchangeable and thus constitutionally disorganized; he has offered what Doane would call an archive of contingent historical information. In effect, Benjy's section lends form to the contingent world of which his father repeatedly tries to convince Quentin. By pointing to the constructedness of the social norms to which Quentin clings, Mr. Compson exposes their arbitrariness, the fact that they change according to the whims of history. By stressing their historical contingency, he evacuates them of the permanent value Quentin seeks. If virginity can be socially "invented," then adhering to its contingently formed norms is similarly inessential, impermanent, and absurd (*The Sound and the Fury*, 78). If Benjy's section has presented a crisis of meaning, and if like Benjamin's collector, the most he can do is acknowledge the abundance of objects of observation, he has posed a challenge to the possibility of meaningful and formative change. Benjy's depiction of the world as an indexical archive—history as simply a series of occurrences having happened—denies change its formative gravity. After all, what would change look like in a world lacking a hierarchized narrative scheme? The temporal disorder of Benjy's section renders change ubiquitous but meaningless, reflecting in its denial of teleology the existential void Kracauer believed constituted the modern condition. The flashbacks do not fulfill the "explanatory" function of the analepses typical to classical texts.[29] Instead of producing meaning, the temporal changes in Benjy's section flag change for its own sake. The structural logic of the temporal shifts is addition, accumulation, not clarification or explanation. Quentin's father tells him that "victory is an illusion" and that "no battle is ever won. . . . They are not even fought" (76). If Benjy had language, he might say that battles *are* fought, but that their outcomes do not affect the relentless passage of time. A battle fought would merely be one more observable and archivable element of history, a collectible thing. Only death, an end, would engender change. Though Benjy might mourn unchangeability and meaninglessness, he does not experience a "crisis of form." Instead, he receives in distraction, recording everything along the way.[30]

Quentin registers as a *crisis* what Benjy reveals to be a disordered, contingent, and changeless modernity by trying to recuperate narrative sense. This crisis was mirrored in film history in the emergence of the *event* in cinema. That is, the cinema faced a similar need to assert reality's meaning, since the indexical reality presented by non-narrative actualities was unpalatable. "[S]ometime between 1902–1903 and 1907," Doane writes, "the popularity of actualities declined and narrative films began to take precedence in the various studios' productions" (*Emergence of Cinematic Time*, 142). Film began resolutely to divide temporality between "eventful and uneventful time" to structure time and give meaning to its passage (144). As Doane explains, early attempts to capture meaning in cinema resulted in films that showcased "the grandiose tropes of life, death, waste, and eternity," such as Edison's *Electrocuting an Elephant* (1903) and *Execution of Czolgosz, with Panorama of Auborn Prison* (1901) (141). Though still within the genre of the actuality, these films were the first step toward narrative cinema, incorporating narrative progression, often through cuts. The death and execution genre is relevant here because it consciously grappled with the contingent. Unlike later, classical Hollywood cinema that largely tended to ignore the vexed relationship between the meaningful and the meaningless, these films showed the crisis of form, film in search of meaning.

According to Doane, "the event provides a limit—not everything is equally filmable—and reinvests the contingent with significance" (144). Take the apparently insignificant, fleeting moment such as when Quentin observes a bird and how, like a spectator of narrative cinema, he searches for plot development:

> A sparrow slanted across the sunlight, onto the window ledge, and cocked his head at me . . . First he'd watch me with one eye, then flick! and it would be the other one, his throat pumping faster than any pulse. The hour began to strike. The sparrow quit swapping eyes and watched me steadily with the same one until the chimes ceased, as if he were listening too. Then he flicked off the ledge and was gone. (*The Sound and the Fury*, 79)

In Quentin's mind, it is as if the bird alights on this ledge to get a closer look at him. Its changing ocular perspectives and pumping throat indicate to Quentin some sort of panicked cognitive process. Finally, it takes off precisely at the moment when the clock chimes cease, as if to arrive somewhere punctually to report an urgent message about Quentin. Moreover, Faulkner's choice of the word "flick" to describe the bird's optic activity is suggestive; considering its proximity to "flicker" (a slang word used to describe early films), it is as if Quentin feels he is being *filmed*. Compare this to a moment in Benjy's section, when he also mentions a bird: "It [the flag] was red, flapping on the pasture. Then there was a bird slanting and tilting on it. Luster threw. The flag flopped on the bright grass and the trees. I held to the fence" (4). Quentin lends intention to the bird's actions, all but anthropomorphizing its movements; he "assimilat[es]" a contingent occurrence "to meaning" and comprehensibility (Doane, Emergence of Cinematic Time, 163). However, Benjy allows for the pure disconnect-

edness, *in*comprehensibility, of the bird's existence, its inassimilability to meaning. The bird, for Benjy, is just one among the riot of details, whereas Quentin forces it to symbolically participate in his search for judgment, his desire for incrimination. The image of a bird reappears throughout Quentin's section, and at one point he uneasily notes its flirtation with contingency: "The bird whistled again, invisible, a sound meaningless and profound, inflexionless" (136). While Benjy might struggle to apprehend his surroundings—he does have to hold to the fence as he watches the bird—he relinquishes perceptual control to the flow of details. He does not try to formally master or configure them. Quentin, on the other hand, attempts to gain formal mastery over cinematic contingency by seeking experiential intensities. Like the genre of the death and execution film, Quentin seeks to experience "grandiose tropes" such as incest, judgment, and suicide so as to shock meaning, as it were, into what Benjy has shown to be a nonsensical, "inflexionless" reality.

This search for meaning manifests itself both thematically and formally in Quentin's section: on the one hand, in his suicide and desire for incest with Caddy, and, on the other, the organization of his section as a wild search for memories of her, a perceptual concentration antithetical to reception in distraction. Unlike his brother, Benjy, Quentin imbues seemingly insignificant events with hermeneutic meaning; he integrates his observations and fleeting experiences into his fabricated incest plot. These include the sparrow incident cited above, his attack of Gerald Bland thinking it was Dalton Ames, or his insistence that the black man on a mule waiting for the train to move looked as if he "had been built there . . . like a sign put there saying You are home again" (86). Quentin responds in panic to the hermenetically impoverished worldview that Benjy stages, seeking to confer significance on his experience by effecting meaningful, measurable change.

To suggest that Quentin actively seeks change may seem counterintuitive, considering critics tend to believe that he fears it. Bruce Kawin has proposed that Quentin commits suicide because he cannot "bear the fact of change," while Matthews suggests that Quentin yearns to recover the physical and psychological intimacies of childhood," that his "obsession with virginity marks his inability to move from childhood to adulthood," and that it is indeed "changelessness" that he "overvaluat[es]."[31] Quentin certainly exhibits trepidation at the sight of modern machinery. On the train, he bemoans the "laboring sound of the exhaust and groaning wheels," and he seeks solace in the thought of a Southern townscape, "the mud and the niggers and country folks thronging slowly about the square, with toy monkeys and wagons and candy in sacks" (*The Sound and the Fury*, 88). In addition, that mechanized time discomfits him suggests a yearning for precaptialist, unrationalized time according to organic measurements. But then, how can we make sense of the following supplication: "[I]f people could only change one another forever that way merge like a flame swirling up for an instant then blow cleanly out along the cool eternal dark" (176)? Here Quentin imploringly articulates his desire for a passing, a poeticized and ordered transformation from existence into nonexistence. In other words, the form of change that I take Quentin to actively seek is not sociopolitical, familial, or psychological, but rather, narratological—the meaning-

ful transformation that constitutes the structure of a narrative event. As film theorist Stephen Heath argues, "a narrative action is . . . a relation of transformation such that [its execution] determines a state *S'* different to an initial state *S*."[32] Quentin is drawn to sex, death, and the written medium because he is convinced of their ability to permanently measure a form of narrative transformation made unavailable by Benjy's hermeneutically undifferentiated filmic coverage.

Matthews has observed that in the scene where Quentin puts a knife to Caddy's neck, "the language of sexuality and the language of death intertwine, reflecting Quentin's consistent association of the two" (*Faulkner and the Lost Cause*, 51). For Matthews, this is because Quentin registers incest as punishable by death. I submit that the language Quentin uses regarding these two acts suggests that it is their mutual transformative properties that appeal to him. For instance, in a conversation about Quentin's longing to lose his virginity, his father tells him "It was men invented virginity not women . . . it's like death: only a state in which the others are left," a remark that insouciantly points to virginity's constructedness, its status as a fiction fashioned by a patriarchal world. He even denies death the significance with which Quentin imbues it, suggesting that it is "only a state," but (in Quentin's mind) at least one that measurably signifies transformation. Unwilling to accept his father's theory of the fictionality of virginity, Quentin replies: "Why couldn't it have been me and not her who is unvirgin and he said, That's why that's sad too; nothing is even worth the changing of it" (*The Sound and the Fury*, 78). Otherwise put, even if Quentin were to become "unvirgin," it (like the futility of changing Benjy's name) would be unsuccessful in effecting change; it would lack meaning. Quentin's choice to use the word "unvirgin" is suggestive; the prefix signals that to his mind, the initiating act of sexual intercourse performs a measurable transformation from a previous state. As if inspired by his father's take on death, Quentin articulates his turn to suicide in terms that emphasize its ability to empirically measure change. As his section draws to its close, he thinks, "A quarter hour yet. And then I'll not be. The peacefullest words. Peacefullest words . . . I was. I am not" (174). In both cases, the ability to say, "I was virgin. I am not virgin," and "I was alive. I am not alive," draws Quentin to these two acts. In both instances, *S* would successfully turn into *S'*.

However, tragically, in the case of his own death, Quentin would be unable to witness any such transformation. He would *not* be able to say, "I was. I am not," because he would no longer be. So from whence does he speak these words? If, as Pasolini suggests, it is "[*t*]*hanks to death that our lives become expressive*,"—death arguably being the quintessential, measurable transformation from an initial *S* to an *S'*—and if it is this metamorphosis which Quentin longs for, then we see that the entire section originates from the utmost limit of existence, an unfathomable place between life and death (*S* and *S'*) or even an infinitesimally brief moment immediately following his suicide. This would explain Quentin's fascination with his own shadow, a form or extension of himself that he can both fully embody ("I stood in my shadow" or "Trampling my shadow's bones into the concrete with my hard heels") and physically supersede: "I walked upon the belly of my shadow. I could extend my hand beyond it" (*The Sound and the Fury*, 105, 96, 96). Death, for Pasolini, organizes an otherwise contingent series of

occurrences and aestheticizes their final positioning. This retrospective resignfication occurs, for example, when Quentin names specific experiences as formative, when he demonstrates acute retrospective perspicacity available only to what Pasolini might consider a consciousness acquainted with its own moment of termination: "*That was when*," Quentin tells us, "I realized that a nigger is not a person so much as a form of behavior" or "I didn't know that I really had missed Roskus and Dilsey and them *until that morning* in Virginia" and "*Ever since then* I have believed that God is not only a gentleman and a sport; he is a Kentuckian too" (86, 91, emphasis added). This ability to structure time, to designate certain moments as more significant than others, results, it seems, from Quentin's extreme proximity to the state of nonexistence, his occupation of a space so close to extinction that he can manage to utter "I was" and fleetingly experience his narrative passing. Such moments of felt significance reflect not only the assumptions inherent to classical novelistic form, but also the manner in which the burgeoning narrative cinema wrenched meaning from contingency. As Doane suggests, the narrative strategies of the death and execution genre depended on the systematic denial of "dead time," time in which nothing happens (*Emergence of Cinematic Time*, 160).

Yet, change for its own sake is insufficient for Quentin. For the time-structuring event also flirts with contingency: "The event is a deictic marker of time, a 'this is happening, this is taking place.' As such, it is pure indication, deprived of meaning" (140). Nevertheless, the event is capable of creating the conditions for distinguishing the mere "happening" from the "significant happening" (141). For instance, Topsy's death march in *Electrocuting an Elephant* (1903) radiates a palpable and grim consequentiality that is absent from the earliest actualities. This is why Quentin's desire for sex *must* be incestuous; sexual activity as such does not have the permanent value inherent in the transgression of the incest taboo. As if to avoid an indexical, filmic portrayal of an event as fleeting, contingent, and meaningless, Quentin searches for incrimination, judgment to be rendered upon him in literary form, what he believes is a medium capable of conferring significance. In the scene at the squire's office when he has been accused of stealing the little Italian girl (an accidental occurrence that Quentin absorbs into his narrative of sibling incest), he distorts the episode into an opportunity to suffer judgment. He converts an otherwise contingent event into one of supreme meaning.

> He [the squire] opened a huge dusty book and drew it to him and dipped a foul pen into an inkwell filled with what looked like coal dust. . . .
> "The prisoner's name," the squire said. I told him. He wrote it slowly into the book, the pen scratching with excruciating deliberation. . . .
> "Age," the squire said. I told him. He wrote that, his mouth moving as he wrote. "Occupation." I told him. . . .
> "What was you doing, exactly?" I told him. (*The Sound and the Fury*, 142)

Both his mad elation at having been incriminated ("I began to laugh," or "'Good afternoon,' I said, raising my hat. 'I'm under arrest'") and his readiness to offer his personal information to be written down in the "huge dusty book" suggest that he is fascinated

 by *consequences*—that his actions could have *durable* effect, that he could affect *S* such that it would permanently become *S'* (140, 141). Most of all, Quentin is fixated on the "excruciating deliberation" with which the squire inscribes Quentin's identity onto the page, giving it, in his mind, permanent value and necessity. The squire's book is the book of judgment, whose narrative faculties will imbue Quentin's crime with sacred meaning.

Quentin rages against the impermanence that Benjy's section has normalized. Quentin's desire for permanence—meaningful and measurable transformation—is reflected in his panicked concentration on memories of Caddy. In contrast to Benjy's distracted, early-cinematic perception, Quentin attempts to concentrate in the contemplative manner associated with the older arts, to evade the hermeneutically indeterminate. In his own words, "*What else can I think about what else have I thought about*" (123). In the following passage, when his consciousness arrives at Caddy, it relaxes. Both the long portions of stream of consciousness that precede this moment and the conspicuous absence of punctuation, signal Quentin's impatient, fraught search. Caddy speaks first:

> Go out a minute Herbert I want to talk to Quentin
> Come in come in let's all have a gabfest and get acquainted I was just telling Quentin
> Go on Herbert go out a while
> Well all right then I suppose you and bubber do want to see one another once more eh
> You'd better take that cigar off the mantel
> Right as usual my boy then I'll toddle along let them order you around while they can Quentin after day after tomorrow it'll be pretty please to the old man wont it dear give us a kiss honey
> Oh stop that save that for day after tomorrow
> I'll want interest then don't let Quentin do anything he cant finish oh by the way did I tell Quentin the story about the man's parrot and what happened to it a sad story remind me of that think of it yourself ta-ta see you in the funnypaper
> Well
> Well
> What are you up to now
> Nothing. (111)

Faulkner both empirically and formally stages Quentin's desire for exclusive claim to his sister. Quentin has Caddy alone in a room with him and cognitively fixates on her—he concentrates on her. When he finds her in his memory, the rhythm decelerates, and he is able to focus only on her: "Well / Well." Quentin is able to momentarily live a dream, which is to be alone with her both cognitively and physically, while *doing* nothing else: "What are you up to now / Nothing." Unlike Benjy, whose distracted, documentary-style coverage relinquishes mastery over memory and perception, Quentin desperately recuperates concentration, contemplation, and narrative control.

The Show Must Go On

Control reaches its thematic apex in Jason, in his tyrannical influence on his mother, his tormenting of Caddy, and his physical and ideological imprisonment of Quentin II. Stylistically the most comprehensible of the three brothers' sections, his no longer interrogates the contentious relationship between the contingent and the meaningful. Instead, to Jason, everything signifies, everything and everyone participates in his all-consuming narrative of victimization. Whereas Benjy's data documentation allowed for a utopian space prior to signification and causation, Jason is hounded by a perfectly opposite reality whereby he dismisses all inquiries into the possibility of meaninglessness. He exhibits what Matthews has called a "paranoid sense of persecution," a maniacally overactive hermeneutic activity, by which every detail of his past and present seems the symptom and cause of his deprivation relative to those around him (*Faulkner and the Lost Cause*, 64).[33] While Quentin longed for a coherent and empirically measurable narrative order—a coherent "story," as it were—Jason perceives all incidents and details as telling one totalizing story of injustice and dispossession.

From his maniacal perspective, he has fallen victim to myriad inequities: the financial and emotional dependence of the women in his family and their ostentatious behavior; what he considers the indolence of African Americans; the New York "Jews" and other "foreigners" who reap parasitic benefits from the United States economy; and finally, his father's alcoholism, whose expense, Jason complains, precluded the possibility of his attending Harvard like Quentin (*The Sound and the Fury*, 191–93). His sense of victimization informs even minute inconveniences: "I went on out the back to back the car out, then I had to go all the way round to the front before I found [Luster and Benjy]" (186). He perceives such minutiae as microcosmic instances of vaster inequities. For instance, when he finally does find Luster and Benjy, he notices that Luster has not put the tire on the car despite his request, an oversight that Jason sees as indicative of all African Americans' shiftlessness and untrustworthiness. He uses the opportunity to bemoan the financial burden they pose him. "'I thought I told you to put that tire on the back of the car,' I says. 'I ain't had time,' Luster says. 'Ain't nobody to watch him till mammy git don in de kitchen.' 'Yes,' I says. I feed a whole damn kitchen full of niggers to follow him, but if I want an automobile tire changed, I have to do it myself" (186). When Luster provides a legitimate explanation (that he had no one with whom to leave Benjy) Jason incorporates Benjy into his narrative of dispossession. "'What the hell makes you want to keep him around here where people can see him?' . . . It's bad enough on Sundays, with that damn field full of people that haven't got a side show and six niggers to feed, knocking a dam oversize mothball around" (187). This further propels Jason into an exaggerated, imaginary scenario in which Benjy will cause a series of unwanted expenses: "[F]irst thing I know they're going to begin charging me golf dues, then Mother and Dilsey'll have to get a couple of china door knobs and a walking stick and work it out, unless I play at night with a lantern. Then they'll send us all to Jackson, maybe" (187). His disparaging invocations of amusement park entertainment—the "side show"—and his relentless tendency to

read phenomena from his surroundings into his personal story of persecution are not conceptually divorced from one another. In fact, Jason's profound contempt for the traveling show that comes to town, and the associations with non-narrativity that that show historically evokes, logically extends from his overactive hermeneutic pursuits.

Jason's scorn for popular entertainment is rooted in his fear of public exposure. His sense that the drama of his family is being seen, watched, and that the Compsons might be on display as an object of an audience's gaze persistently incites his rage. One of his primary complaints about Luster is that he cares for Benjy in plain view, "where people can see him." Or, when he argues with Quentin II over whether it is he or Caddy who is responsible for her expenses, that "there was about a dozen people looking" makes him "so mad for a minute it kind of blinded me." On his way to depositing her at school, he deliberately takes "the back street" so as to "dodge the square," a distinctively public space (188; Matthews, *Faulkner and the Lost Cause*, 64). When Quentin II indignantly claims that she "dare anybody to know everything I do," he brusquely retorts, "Everybody in this town knows what you are. But I won't have it anymore, you hear? . . . I've got a position in this town" (189). It is publicity that unsettles Jason, the prospect of the Compson family degenerating into an *attraction*, a fear that finds expression in his choice to pejoratively deem them all a "side show." In this respect, it is only appropriate that the two characters who incite Jason's contempt the most are Benjy and Quentin II. He associates his brother explicitly with amusement park entertainment, sardonically suggesting to his mother to "[r]ent him out to a sideshow; there must be folks somewhere that would pay a dime to see him" (187). And, his periodical remarks concerning his niece's revealing clothing and excessive make-up ("'[T]hat stuff on your face does hide more of you than anything else you've got on," or "[H]er face [was] all painted up like a dam clown's") invoke thickly-concealing stage make-up and pit her not only as a prostitute, but also as a vaudeville or circus actress (187, 232). In addition, the presence in the novel of the man with the red tie invokes a host of associations with carnival, circus, traveling show, as well as early-cinematic culture.[34] Indeed, Jason's contempt for "the show" peripherally invokes film exhibitions of the early twentieth century. These promoted the modern subjectivity motivated by randomness and contingency that I have located in Benjy's section and which runs entirely contrary to Jason's paranoid and overactive storytelling.

Early film is categorized as a cinema of attractions because it promoted an aesthetic of "exhibitionism" or "display [of] visibility." In Gunning's words, there was a willingness in early films to "rupture a self-enclosed fictional world," which was best exemplified in the actors' "recurring look at the camera" ("Cinema of Attractions," 57). Early erotic films vigorously exploited this technique. In *The Bride Retires* (1902), for instance, a "woman undresses for bed while her new husband peers at her from behind a screen. However, it is to the camera and the audience that the bride addresses her erotic striptease, winking at us as she faces us, smiling in erotic display" (57). It is against the backdrop of this history that we should read Jason's discomfort and fascination with Quentin II's powerful stare and exposed body, especially given her affinity with the culture of mass entertainment. In the midst of their violent quarrel over her tardiness

for school, Jason remarks, "She looked at me, the cup in her hand. She brushed her hair back from her face, her kimono slipping off her shoulder . . . She quit looking at me. She looked at Dilsey. . . . She dropped the cup. It broke on the floor and she jerked back, looking at me" (*The Sound and the Fury*, 183). Jason and Quentin II reproduce a perverse, nightmarish version of the relationship between the spectator and actor of such early erotic films, bonded together in a near-incestuous rapport by their mutual stares: "She didn't say anything. She was fastening her kimono up under her chin, pulling it tight around her, looking at me . . . she quit fighting and watched me, her eyes getting wide and black" (184).

Quentin II's stare is also threatening because it reverses the typical gender dynamic of cinematic looking. Mulvey writes, "In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*" ("Visual Pleasure," 837). Jason's fear of being the object of spectacle betrays a fear of feminization. Since as a man, Jason would traditionally be the bearer rather than the object of the look, his ideological domination is powerfully threatened by Quentin II's stare. According to Mulvey, there are narrative strategies that can diegetically contain the threat of the spectacular female. One is "ascertaining guilt," placing the female at the center of an epistemological investigation (840). Quentin indeed subjects Caddy to unremitting interrogations in a vain attempt to control her sexuality: "*Have there been very many Caddy*," "*did you love them Caddy did you love them*," "Do you love him now," he asks, "Caddy do you love him now." "[A]re you thinking about him now," he persists, "tell me what youre thinking about tell me" (*The Sound and the Fury*, 115, 149, 157). Another strategy is the subjection of the guilty "through punishment," hence the overdetermined quality of Jason's narrativizing gestures. "This sadistic side fits well with narrative," Mulvey writes, "[s]adism demands a story, depends on making something happen . . . a battle of will and strength, victory/defeat, all occurring in a linear time with a beginning and an end" ("Visual Pleasure," 842). Jason's sadistic violence toward both Quentin II and Caddy is a strategy to contain or take revenge against unruly female sexuality and its associations with the anti-narrative temporality of spectacle.

The show in *The Sound and the Fury* is the symbol of a lurking narrative disorder and hermeneutic poverty. It is no coincidence, then, that Jason's most shocking and egregious act of violence is burning the tickets before Luster's eyes. By rendering Jason both the most comprehensible and the most destructive of the Compson brothers, Faulkner draws a connection between artistic unity and violence. Jason's section validates Heath's observation that violence always inheres in the construction of narrative precisely because of its transformative structure: a narrative is "always a violence, the interruption of the homogeneity of *S* . . . the homogeneity—*S* itself—being recognized in retrospect from that violence, that interruption" (*Questions of Cinema*, 136). In the case of *The Sound and the Fury*, Faulkner makes this prenarrative homogeneity and subsequent narrative violence intensely literal; Benjy's section is indeed homogenous, as his filmic coverage treats the significant and the insignificant with the same attention; it is perhaps not until we reach Jason's hateful and fully comprehensible section

that we realize the unadulterated quality of that pure, descriptive homogeneity.[35] Quentin's desperate search for narrative structure results in suicide. But, whereas in his desperation for narrative organization Quentin inflicts violence only upon himself, Jason's narrative of persecution punishes a range of other individuals and social groups. It abolishes the possibility of the narratively insignificant, the un-participating detail. Even Jason's greed is the financial translation of a narrative issue: his interpretive habits enable an extremely economical storytelling—everything counts and nothing is wasted. Jason's panicked generation of narrative is to be expected from one made so uneasy by looking at an object of display or being (as a member of the declining Compson family) such an object. It is as if he seeks salvation from this culture of spectacle through immediate and aggressive narrativization.

In his interview with Jean Stein vanden Heuvel, Faulkner claimed, "The aim of every artist is to arrest motion, . . . by artificial means and hold it fixed so that 100 years later when a stranger looks at it, it moves again." He goes on to say, "Since man is mortal, the only immortality possible for him is to leave something behind him that is immortal since it will always move. This is the artist's way of scribbling 'Kilroy was here' on the wall of the final and irrevocable oblivion through which he must someday pass" (*The Lion in the Garden*, 253). Faulkner describes the project of writing as both markedly filmic and indexical in nature. Moreover, his statement expresses a fundamental tension at the heart of *The Sound and the Fury*, the desire for permanence in the face of impermanence. I have aimed to demonstrate that Benjy's engagement with contingency creates the conditions for a senseless world picture, bereft of narrative order, a modern "*horror vacui*." I have suggested that Benjy's section presents reality in its most immediate, indexical form, routing its strategies through the history of early cinematic exhibition. Quentin exhibits the crisis that cinematic contingency provokes; he attempts, like early narrative film, to control the contingent by giving it permanent value and necessity. His is an overdetermined flight to narrative order whose only available actualization is self-destruction. And finally, in Jason, Faulkner demonstrates how narrativization can lead to unethical ends, that the total containment and domestication of contingent spectacle entails a moral loss. Faulkner ends the novel by restoring the fragments of Benjy's reality "each in its ordered place" with a polished and fully comprehensible prose (*The Sound and the Fury*, 321). However, this order—this new, homogenous *S'*—is tenuous. For though the knowledge of this disordered modern reality might warrant being locked away, the uneasiness that succeeds in permeating the novel's end despite the full artistic unity with which its realist narration shrouds it, suggests that the novel cannot purge the anti-narrative threat of cinematic spectacle. The fate of storytelling is the subject of *The Sound and the Fury*. Faulkner uses film as a metaphorical nexus in which to meditate on the disintegration of storytelling in modernity. Film comes to project, for Faulkner and others, the evacuation of sense—direction and meaning—from modern experience. The project of the modern novel as delineated in *The Sound and the Fury* is not to create palliative fictions, but to help point, however fleetingly and alongside filmic attempts, to this disarming moving picture.

Notes

Many thanks to John T. Matthews, Peter Lurie, Jonathan Foltz, Joshua Landy, and the reviewers at *Modernism/modernity*. I am deeply grateful for their feedback on this essay at its various stages of development.

1. Howard Eiland, "Reception in Distraction," *boundary 2* 30, no. 1 (2003): 51–66, 63.

2. William Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury* (1929; rpt., New York: Vintage, 1990), 14.

3. William Faulkner, "Interview with Jean Stein vanden Huevel (1956)," in *Lion in the Garden: Interviews with William Faulkner, 1926–1962*, ed. James B. Meriwether and Michael Millgate (New York: Random House, 1968), 237–56, 246.

4. Mark Steven uses similar theoretical language to study Benjy in "William Faulkner's Mediated Time: Capitalism, Cinema, Syntax," in *William Faulkner in the Media Ecology*, ed. Julian Murphet and Stefan Solomon (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2015), 195–215, especially 207. Steven investigates the "historical, economic, and mediated dimensions" of Faulkner's hypotactic sentences.

5. Mary Anne Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 11.

6. For an interpretation of Faulkner's work in Hollywood, see John Matthews, "Faulkner and the Culture Industry," in *The Cambridge Companion to William Faulkner*, ed. Philip M. Weinstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 51–74. See Jay Watson, "The Unsynchable William Faulkner: Faulknerian Voice and Early Sound Film," in *William Faulkner in the Media Ecology*, 93–114 for the influence of early sound film on *The Sound and the Fury*; and Sarah Gleeson-White, "Auditory Exposures: Faulkner, Eisenstein, and Film Sound," PMLA 128, no. 1 (2013): 87–100 for Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* and film sound.

7. Recent scholarship on modernist literature and film includes Friedrich A. Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter: Writing Science*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999); Susan McCabe, *Cinematic Modernism: Modernist Poetry and Film* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Sara Danius, *The Senses of Modernism: Technology, Perception, and Aesthetics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002); Michael North, *Camera Works: Photography and the Twentieth-Century Word* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Julian Murphet, *Multimedia Modernism: Literature and the Anglo-American Avant-garde* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); David Trotter, *Cinema and Modernism* (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2007); and Laura Marcus, *The Tenth Muse: Writing About Cinema in the Modernist Period* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). These studies are rich and illuminating, though they have not investigated the way that film compromises novelistic narrative order. However, Kittler's and Trotter's works on the neutrality of the medium and its propensity toward nonsense have been very helpful to me in developing my argument.

I use the term "sense" slightly differently than the way David Trotter uses it in his Cinema and Modernism. Whereas Trotter uses it to mean a representational "anti-system" that falls short of full "intelligibility," I use it to mean the narrative direction and responsibility inherent to what Roland Barthes calls the "hermeneutic code," which I will gloss later in this article. See David Trotter, Cinema and Modernism (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2007), 49–51.

8. See Peter Lurie, *Vision's Immanence: Faulkner, Film, and the Popular Imagination* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press: 2004), 11, 106.

9. I am developing these ideas in my dissertation, "Arts of Inconsequence: The Dynamics of Contingency in Modernist Literature and Cinema." I trace the extension of the contingent, anti-narrative effects of Flaubertian impersonality into the cinematic and circus metaphors of Faulkner, Joyce, Anderson, Barnes, and Ophuls.

10. Siegfried Kracauer, "Those Who Wait," in *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, trans. and ed. Thomas Y. Levin (1963; rpt., Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 129–42, 134, 131.

11. Tom Gunning, "Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, its Spectator and the Avant-Garde," in *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative*, ed. Thomas Elsaesser and Adam Barker (London: BFI Publishing, 1990), 56–62, 60.

12. Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 29.

13. Frank Kessler, "Actualités," in *Encyclopedia of Early Cinema*, ed. Richard Abel (New York: Routledge, 2005), 5–6, 5.

14. See Charles Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema: The American Screen to 1907* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990). The stagedness of these films is a source of critical debate among early-film scholars.

15. Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 140, 90.

16. For Doane on Pasolini, see *Emergence of Cinematic Time*, 104–5. While she implies that the Lumières' *A Boat Leaving Harbor* (1895) is a long take, applying that term to such a short film is not self-evident (137). For another illuminating discussion of duration and the image, see Tyrus Miller, *Time-Images: Alternative Temporalities in Twentieth Century Theory, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars, 2009).

17. Pier Paolo Pasolini, "Observations on the Long Take," trans. Norman MacAfee and Craig Owens, *October* 13 (1980): 3–6, 4, emphasis original.

18. In *Reading for the Plot*, Brooks discusses proairetic and hermeneutic desynchronization in *Absalom, Absalom!*, though he does not discuss it in relation to cinematic history. He also does not acknowledge—as this article does—modernist attempts to *re*sychronize these codes.

19. John Matthews, *The Sound and the Fury: Faulkner and the Lost Cause* (Boston: Twayne, 1991), 77.

20. Tom Gunning, "'Now You See It, Now You Don't': The Temporality of the Cinema of Attractions," *Velvet Light Trap* 32, no. 3 (1993): 3–12, 7.

21. See Tom Gunning, "An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Film and the (In)Credulous Spectator," in *Film Theory and Criticism: Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies*, ed. Philip Simpson, Andrew Utterson, and K. J. Shepherdson (London: Routledge, 2004), 3:78–95.

22. See Eiland's paraphrase of Benjamin in "Reception in Distraction," 56n10.

23. Also see Eiland, "Reception in Distraction."

24. This interpretation is inspired by Doane's analysis of Benjamin's critique of mechanical reproduction. The "technical process of reproduction reduces all things to a common denominator. They become photographble (see Doane, Emergence of Cinematic Time, 130).

25. See Fredric Jameson, *Antinomies of Realism* (London: Verso, 2013), 35.

26. Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1974), 10–11.

27. Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen, 5th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 833–44, 837, 841.

28. Mary Anne Doane, "*Gilda*: Epistemology as Striptease," in *Femmes Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 118.

29. Gerard Genette, Narrative Discourse: An Essay on Method, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), 63, 232.

30 For more on Benjy and formlessness, see Donald M. Kartiganer, "'Now I Can Write': Faulkner's Novel of Invention," in *New Essays on* The Sound and the Fury, ed. Noel Polk (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 71–98, 79.

31. Bruce E. Kawin, *Faulkner and Film* (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1977), 16; Matthews, *Faulkner and the Lost Cause*, 46, 47, 74.

32. Stephen Heath, *Questions of Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), 136.

33. For more on paranoia and narrative sense in D. W. Griffith, see David Trotter, *Cinema and Modernism*, 49–86.

34. For the critical debate about the man with the red tie, see Michelle Ann Abate, "Reading Red: The Man with the (Gay) Red Tie in Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*," in *William Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Infobase, 2008), 194n10. For the difficulty of identifying the show, also see Abate, "Reading Red," 194.

35. See Heath, *Questions of Cinema*, 131–44 for the literalization of narrative violence in Orson Welles's *Touch of Evil* (1958).