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Faulkner's Literary Historiography: Color, Photography, and the Accessible Past

PETER LURIE

IN APRIL OF 1935, the Eastman-Kodak company released what would become the most widely recognized color film stock in the world. At the time, Kodachrome was marketed with the burgeoning mass of amateur photographers in mind, a group who would benefit especially from Kodachrome's flexibility and use in what were already popular roll-film cameras. These included the Leica, a German-made "minicamera" that became an enormously successful part of the amateur photo business, even during the early years of the Depression (and notwithstanding its cost).[1] These cameras also played a role in the development in the middle 1930s of the picture magazines, most notably *Look* and *Life*, publications that, as cultural historians have amply demonstrated, played a key role in the development of a genuinely national identity and a commensurate emphasis on seeing.[2] As the Kodak corporation knew, and practitioners of the new stock soon learned, Kodachrome also produced the greatest resolution and duration of any color film that had appeared before it—and practically since. This remained true about Kodachrome until 1990, when Fuji introduced its Process e-6 Fujichrome, the first color film stock considered to have a sharper resolution and finer grain than Kodachrome. In fact, Kodachrome's color-retention was so fine that the company kept this fact a secret into the 1970s for concern that consumers would not buy the other versions of color film that Kodak also developed in the thirties, such as Ektachrome and Kodacolor.[3]

Following its presentation to a mass market, Kodachrome also quickly became the color stock of choice among professional photographers and journalists. Els Rijper has gathered some of the most (literally) indelible of these images from the historical period bracketing World War II in his book, *Kodachrome*. More immediately, however, Kodachrome also became widely used by advertisers who wished, understandably, to exploit the stock's deep saturation and capacities for retinal agitation (and attendant potential for erotic cathexis) on their target buyers.

In the same year that Kodachrome appeared, William Faulkner published his nocturnal, and thus not especially colorful or saturated novel, *Pylon*. He had set aside writing *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936) in this period because, Faulkner claimed, he needed to clarify his thinking about this longer, if not also more ambitious work. Ambitious in its scale and length, as well as in its efforts—new to Faulkner at this point in his career—to engage directly the origins and legacies of Southern history. Prior to these works, Faulkner had published *Sartoris*, his first Yoknapatawpha novel that, like others set in his fictional county, was concerned with the history of Southern families like the Sartorises. Yet the book that became *Flags in the Dust* does not train the same critical and questioning eye on the role in Southern history of race and slavery as do Faulkner's later and major works such as *Absalom*, *Go Down, Moses* (1942), or, before them, *Light in August* (1932), Faulkner's first novel specifically about race. Like those published just before it, *Sanctuary* (1931), *As I Lay Dying* (1930), and *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), *Light in August* treated a time period that was roughly contemporaneous to the period of its composition.

These facts about the production of Faulkner's major fiction are familiar to nearly all of his readers. What may be less well known, however, is the consonance they have with the introduction of the first widely disseminated color transparency film. Important to this trajectory is the move to what becomes Faulkner's overtly sociohistorical fiction, the difference between what critics have often recognized as Faulkner's formalist-aestheticist modernism in his earlier novels and his more historical fiction in works from the middle 1930s. Part of this development included a shift in representational practice on Faulkner's part, one that moved from a highly colorful pattern of description in novels like *The Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying*, and that preceded Kodachrome, to a method that resembled the formal and chromatic properties of an arguably more historical photographic mode. *Absalom, Absalom!* in particular is a novel in which Faulkner fashions what I describe as a kind of literary historiography, one defined by its relationship to an earlier black-and-white photography and to the 1930s documentary impulse. By this term I mean a novelistic practice that sought to incorporate readers' awareness of narrative historicity—not only the ways in which Faulkner relays characters' dawning engagement with the historical past, but also his way of conceiving material conditions specific to those Southerners' family, economy, or region. While described imaginatively and as part of a modernist experiment with interiority and point-of-view technique, this engagement conveys to readers the painful realities of historical change as they make themselves felt in an individual, specific consciousness—namely Quentin Compson's, but also in that of his nineteenth-

century counterpart, Henry Sutpen. Such engagement relies on sustained references to photographs and to a "photographic" perception and memory, including references to specifically nineteenth-century photographic imagery and technology such as the daguerreotype. Set in a nineteenth-century context, as in *Absalom, Absalom!*, or evoking the strikingly Manichean race politics of Jim Crow in *Light in August*, these references contribute to Faulkner's developing historicity. In addition to offering what I describe as a "black-and-white" prose style, Faulkner's later work also involved his recognition of what materialist historiography sees as a necessary temporal arrest, the sudden, even violent rupture with time's continuum that belies the false notion of an always-accessible, readily recoverable past.

Eric Sundquist has written provocatively about the "retrospective" significance of Faulkner's first major novel. His comments in *Faulkner: The House Divided* about *The Sound and the Fury*'s difference from Faulkner's later writing, specifically its "non-engagement" with the matters of race and Southern history that powerfully animate all of the works that follow, have been questioned, particularly Sundquist's rather polemical claim that "there is reason to believe that without Faulkner's work of the next ten years *The Sound and the Fury* would itself seem a literary curiosity, an eccentric masterpiece of experimental methods and 'modernist' ideas."[4] Yet while Faulkner's fourth novel indeed offers more than a kind of sideshow in literary history and Faulkner's oeuvre, Sundquist's claims have a relevance as well as a critical persuasiveness, particularly if we consider aspects of the novel that I take up here: its insistence on a play of surfaces, in addition to depth.[5]

Before turning to *The Sound and the Fury* itself, I would like to address the seeming anomaly of this account of what is arguably Faulkner's greatest achievement, the novel in which, according to Faulkner himself, he forged his modernist method and discovered the pure "joy" and "ecstasy" of writing.[6] Not incidental to that discovery, of course, is the novel's extraordinary, deep subjectivism, in particular the depth of psychology that informs nearly all of the book's characterizations and that Faulkner's experiment with interior narrative allowed. Yet, as Sundquist's chapter avers, that depth followed a more personal or characterological course; *The Sound and the Fury*, for all its innovation, was not yet the kind of novel that Faulkner was to go on to write. This is not meant as an evaluation per se; it is, rather, a way of recognizing a shift in the writer's approach to his materials and his region that occurred over the decade of the '30s.

Susan Donaldson recently offered a similar assessment of this trajectory within Faulkner's work. She asserts that "by 1931, Faulkner, like so many

other writers of his generation, had begun to look up from his own aesthetic preoccupations and become attuned to the social and economic misery engulfing his own community and that of the country at large."[7] Donaldson may attribute a greater affinity between Faulkner and the 1930s ethos of social realism and documentary than she intended. For by claiming that Faulkner's interest was in looking "up" from his writing and his "aesthetic preoccupations" to the country's and his region's economic distress, she implies a similarity between Faulkner's work and the approaches to rural poverty undertaken by individual artists as well as by the federal government in this decade. Recently, several critics have in fact made such claims about writing like Faulkner's when considered in light of documentary, redressing what they describe as an earlier distinction between documentary practices and those of literary modernism like his. Jeff Allred, for example, refers to the long-held assumption that modernism, with its penchant for formal and aesthetic innovation, putative ahistoricism, and famous demands and difficulty, was defined specifically against a documentary method understood as decidedly realist (or "unaesthetic"), politically motivated, and both "about" and "for" the masses. Ted Atkinson similarly traces this divide and refers to a 1930s "literary class war" between modernism like Faulkner's and the proletarian art that more obviously shared documentary's imperatives.[8] As such critics demonstrate, the specifically documentary work to which Faulkner's modernism has commonly been contrasted was not in fact devoid of "aesthetic preoccupations." Nor, for that matter, was Faulkner's writing of the same era unconcerned with the actual economic plight of his region. For it is during this rather narrow period that we find, indeed, a widening perspective on Faulkner's part, one that included a genuinely engaged historical critique of the South and which, stylistically as well, shared much with documentary practice and ethos.

Atkinson treats this period discretely in his recent study, *Faulkner and the Great Depression*. Of particular interest to Atkinson is drawing together the political and the aesthetic, formalist approaches to Faulkner that have evaded an elegant fusing in much Faulkner study. Atkinson's approach is useful, particularly when he offers a corrective to readings like Sundquist's that seem to adopt a more political stance toward the vexed question of *The Sound and the Fury*'s "engagement" (to use a variation on Sartre's term for the necessity of a politicized art). Tracing the oppositions in the 1920s and '30s to capitalist hegemony in what Atkinson dubs the "literary class war," one that pits social realists against practitioners and champions of high-literary modernism, Atkinson claims that "*The Sound and the Fury* moves on a spectrum between each aesthetic ideology, as the modernist

form established at the outset gradually gives way to the more panoramic social perspective that Faulkner seems to explore" in the novel's fourth section.[9] This account of *The Sound and the Fury* offers a version of the broader trajectory that I trace below: from Faulkner's more deliberately and self-consciously high-art modernism, one that in the case of an early novel like *Mosquitoes* even betrayed a lingering effect of fin-de-siècle aestheticism, but which gave way to the broader "panoramic social [and historical] perspective" that Faulkner adopted in the novels that followed.

The move in the fourth section of *The Sound and the Fury* and its shift in narrative mode is suggestive. For it is representation of the subaltern—third-person descriptions of Dilsey and the African American community—that also informed the documentary practices of the later part of the 1930s. As recent commentary has shown, that move did not involve a rejection of modernist aesthetics; documentary practice, so often considered modernism's formal and political opposite, in fact deployed many of modernism's own formal mannerisms and even its supposed difficulty or "strangeness" in its efforts to depict the working class.[10] What Faulkner offers, both stylistically and thematically in this section of *The Sound and the Fury*, can be described using a specifically photographic metaphor: a widening of his narrative perspective or lens, as he approaches first Dilsey, individually, then several other members of her family, her community, and her church.[11]

Donaldson comments on this aspect of the novel, writing that by "focusing on Dilsey herself . . . the narrative gaze makes a significant shift from the claustrophobic concerns of the Compsons . . . to a far wider and more socially aware vision." Describing Dilsey as "something like wreckage left in the wake of the white Compsons' decline," Donaldson implies an approach to her on the part of the novel that would extend into the motives for documentary practices in the 1930s. Her essay even goes on to draw a parallel between Dilsey's "clear vision" and a photographic portrait by Eudora Welty of another careworn but still formidable African American woman, "A woman of the 'thirties." In such an assessment, in other words, Faulkner's "portrait" of Dilsey may be seen to resemble those photographic portraits of other African American or rural whites by Margaret Bourke-White, Dorthea Lange, Walker Evans, or even W. E. B. DuBois in his "Negros of Georgia" images exhibited at the 1900 World's Fair.[12]

Yet where Faulkner's literary "portrait" of Dilsey may be seen to resemble examples of Depression-era imagery, it also has features that the later documentary photographs lacked. Most notably among them is the role in Faulkner's descriptive technique of that pictorial element that 1930s docu-

mentary imagery could not, before 1935, reproduce: color. While her appearance is notably weathered, Dilsey is nevertheless draped by Faulkner's prose in the striking colors of her "maroon velvet cape" and her "dress of purple silk."[13] Despite her position as the Compson's servant and within the South's labor class, in other words, Dilsey appears vividly in Faulkner's description as tinged with the colors associated with royalty. Such descriptive flourishes are important here, as are Faulkner's emphases on her "ruinous" condition. For as events of this section and the rest of the novel show, Dilsey is the only genuinely aristocratic member left of the Compson legacy—if such trappings included the notion of a nobility of spirit, as well as one of wealth or birth.

Critics have written extensively about the role of photography and, particularly, of the Farm Security Administration (FSA) documentary movement in the 1930s. Histories of photography also cite the 1930s as a crucial decade.[14] And while this movement and an attending political "vision" were indeed key features of the shift toward a newly modern cultural apparatus and state, none of the studies I've mentioned pay any attention to the arguably key development in the middle of the decade of color film. One reason for this may simply be that color played little or no role in documentary practices. Yet, as Heinz K. Henisch and Bridget T. Henisch point out, coloration was in fact a key aspect of early understandings of still photography, and they describe extensively the efforts of photographers to add color to the medium through the use of painting directly onto prints and other interventions with the process of reproduction.[15] The impact of an actual color stock appearing within the history of the medium in 1935 might then be considered significant. What I mean to offer here is a consideration of its potential effects on the work of a writer like Faulkner who was both uniquely visually and historically minded—one whose historicity, in fact, was informed by various visual preoccupations, including the impact of photography and film on an emerging national historical imagination.

There is scant evidence that Faulkner knew of Kodachrome, nor is there evidence that he considered photography's increasing cultural prominence as he approached his fiction of the 1930s. Yet his writing from this period shows a keen awareness of photography, and it plays an especial role in particular novels.[16] The yearning for empirical evidence of a writer's awareness of various cultural phenomena is a common critical longing. Yet as several scholars have more recently demonstrated, Faulkner, like other modern writers, can be seen to evince an awareness of developments in parallel fields like visual media without leaving a documented trail or trace.[17] What is of interest to me here, and that I discuss in the following pages, is the par-

ticular way in which Faulkner's writing subtly altered over the course of the same decade that saw the important rise of documentary as well as popular photography. While no record exists of Faulkner's attention to Kodachrome (or to the Leica; *Life* magazine; its founder and the editor-in-chief of Time Inc., Henry Luce; the FSA; or other key figures and phenomena in 1930s visual culture), his fiction displays a remarkable modulation across the few years that introduced both this famous color stock and saw the development of a genuinely mass operation for displaying images and presenting them as "news." It is within this broad but powerful nexus that I mean to locate a unique development, not only in Faulkner's prose strategies and their role in his historical fiction, but in this uncommonly sensitive writer's responsiveness to the cultural field.

Ilse Dusoir Lind showed some time ago that Faulkner's initial artistic ambitions were visual. Beyond his pen-and-ink drawings, the black-and-white silhouettes of the "tragic" Pierrot, Faulkner's early fiction is laced with references to particular artists, like Beardsley, and evocative of specific painterly schools.[18] An admirer of Cezanne and Matissse, like his fellow American modernist, Ernest Hemingway, Faulkner took developments in modern painting seriously, and the consonance of Faulkner's earliest modernist works with a school like analytic cubism has been a strong feature in scholarship on Faulkner's own notable experiment with multiple points of view in *The Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying*, especially.

Coloration in visual media was, of course, hardly new in 1935, when Kodachrome appeared. Nor, for that matter, was Faulkner's or other modernist writers' awareness of visual culture generally, such as the formal and aesthetic properties of modern painting. Hemingway famously compared his descriptions of the Spanish landscape to paintings by Cezanne, and Faulkner himself referred admiringly to Cezanne in an early letter home from Paris when he declared of the French artist that he "dipped his brush in light."[19] Another figure of modern art whose work Faulkner imbibed when he visited exhibitions of contemporary art over several months in Paris in 1925—and who more than even Cezanne was famous for his use of a brightened palette—was Henri Matisse. As the two most representative figures of painterly modernism in terms of color (other than the post-Impressionist Van Gogh), Matisse and Cezanne worked with a group of artists in the early 1900s who, while less well known as individuals than they, achieved notoriety as what became known as the "Fauves"—a group of painters who used a wildly vivid, even unnatural or arbitrary color ("Fauve" means "wild beast").[20]

The connection between Faulkner's visits to the Paris galleries and the appearance in America of color film ten years later is, in many ways, incidental. Yet these singular events in both the writer's life and in the advent of a particular strain of visual culture may be seen to inform Faulkner's representational practices in his novels of this period.

With the earliest novels from the 30s, we might go so far as to say that Faulkner reveals vestiges of his own longings for a European mannerism, a more gaudy or self-consciously artful style. This was certainly true of *Mosquitoes*, as readers of this slightly derivative novel have long recognized. Yet following his fiction written before 1932 and, even more pointedly, after 1935, Faulkner's writing changed, both stylistically and thematically in his more generally sociohistorical perspectives. It is of note then that the advent of color photography occurred in the same period that saw a change in Faulkner's use—or rather, disuse—of coloration in his strategies of visual description. The period of Faulkner's slightly earlier modernism—the window of 1929–30 that saw the publication of *The Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying* and the composition of the original version of *Sanctuary*—was marked by a particular kind of verbalized visual description. Several moments from these works stand out as notably lush, even Fauvist in their accounts of characters, objects, or settings. Others recall the deliberate flattening of space that Cezanne did not invent but that he used toward particular ends in his efforts to liberate painting from its traditional interactions with space in genres such as the landscape and still life. After 1935, and in particular with *Absalom*, something very different happens in Faulkner's writing. Visual practices continue; in places and ways they increase or, to anticipate my argument slightly, *deepen* in their efforts to facilitate what my title refers to as a kind of literary historiography. In a development across several of his novels, Faulkner's shift in writerly practice paralleled the surge in the 1930s of documentary, black-and white-photographers working for the Farm Security Administration such as Walker Evans and Dorthea Lange, Mary Bourke-White, and others. References to photography and photographic metaphors in *Absalom*, in particular, also recall the work of one of the first photographic chroniclers of Southern history, Matthew Brady. As the following discussion shows, such practices effect a temporal depth that "borrows" from black-and-white photography specifically its claims to historicity.

Before attending to those changes as they are wrought in Faulkner's great historical novel of 1936—one whose earliest narrated events occur in 1817 with Thomas Sutpen's childhood in West Virginia and end in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1909—I would like to demonstrate briefly my claims

about Faulkner's earlier writing. *The Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying* are marked—in the context of this argument—by two related features. They depict events set in a time period that is close to that of their writing, and are therefore less strictly historical; and they do so in a verbal style marked by an at-times florid, expressionist use of color. Some of these examples are likely familiar. I have in mind Dr. Peabody's account in *As I Lay Dying* of the color of the light at the Bundren spread. Arriving in the evening to examine a dying Addie Bundren, Peabody remarks to himself, "There is a little daylight up here still, of the color of sulphur matches," a description that serves to render the unearthly, or at the least remote atmosphere at the Bundrens's place.[21] In the preceding chapter Darl offers a similarly vibrant image of the coming evening: "The sun, an hour above the horizon, is poised like a bloody egg upon a crest of thunderheads; the light has turned copper: in the eye portentous, in the nose sulphurous, smelling of lightening" (*AILD*, 27). As we learn, this reddish efflorescence portends Addie's ensuing death. Lit up synesthetically by an imagined lightning, it also recalls the electric, oversaturated vividness of the Fauves. Later in the book appears another vivid, Fauve-like description. At the river crossing, the eyes of the Jewel's horse "roll . . . wild and baby-blue in its long pink face" (*AILD*, 93); preparing to fjord the river with his brothers, Jewel's face turns "kind of green, then it would go red and then green again" (*AILD*, 81). This description appears earlier in an even more garish example when Jewel struggles nearly alone with the weight of Addie's coffin: "In his face the blood goes in waves. In between them his flesh is greenish looking, about that smooth, thick, pale green of cow's cud" (*AILD*, 63).

If not as extravagant as these examples, the yellow that predominates in *As I Lay Dying* offers a pronounced case of Faulkner's reliance on a pervasive optical stimulus. This is clear in the reference to the gleaming "yellow surface" of the water at the river that "clucks and murmurs . . . about the mules' knees, yellow"; earlier the river appears to Tull as "just a tangle of yellow" (*AILD*, 93, 80). One paragraph describing Darl's vision of his and Jewel's return home with the wagonload of wood nearly fixates on the luminous play of yellow against other, darker hues:

> *Overhead the day drives level and* gray, *hiding the sun by a flight of* gray *spears. In the rain the mules smoke a little, splashed* yellow *with mud . . . The tilted lumber* gleams dull yellow, *water-soaked and heavy as lead . . . about the shattered spokes and about Jewel's ankles a runnel of* yellow *neither water nor earth swirls, curving with the* yellow *road neither of earth nor water, down the hill dissolving into a streaming mass of* dark green. (*AILD*, 33, italics original; emphasis added)

The Sound and the Fury is marked by a slightly less varied "palette." Yet here as well we find events punctuated by visual accents, references to colorful light or objects that play principal roles in the experience of characters (and by extension, of readers). The "bright smooth shapes" that Benjy sees every night going to sleep, or the sight of firelight, obviously soothe him. Less soothing for his older brother Jason is the shocking, electric pink of his niece's undergarment that stands out in Faulkner's third-person description of Miss Quentin's room: "The bed had not been disturbed. On the floor lay a soiled undergarment of cheap silk a little too pink, from a half open drawer dangled a single stocking." This detail recalls the "vivid pink garment . . . hanging in no wind from the upper window" that Quentin sees outside the house of the little girl he encounters during his walk in Cambridge, a detail and color that connects these two "wayward" daughters (176, 83).

Compositional elements as well as color inform Faulkner's descriptive method in this novel. In its fourth section appears the well-known description of Dilsey's church, rising into view "like a painted backdrop . . . Beside [the road it] lifted its crazy steeple like a painted church, and the whole scene was as flat and without perspective as a painted cardboard set upon the ultimate edge of the flat earth" (182). Though in his letter from Paris Faulkner referred to Cezanne's use of light, the French artist's radical experiment with a flattened perspective may well be seen to resemble the deliberate flattening of space that Faulkner fashions in his account of perspective at Dilsey's church.

There are several ways to understand Faulkner's use of a visual prose style in these novels, interpretations that do not, of necessity, recall the various European artists whose work Faulkner had seen just a few years before. Beyond or before the shared experiment in perspectivism for which much literary and painterly modernism is known, Faulkner may simply have wished to situate his reader in a particular place and time. The contemporary Yoknapatawpha novels seek to do just that; despite whatever abstractions exist in them, both *The Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying* offer readers an impression of situatedness, of place—even the otherworldly quality of the Bundrens' hilltop spread. Not a realist mimetic mode, nor yet entirely what Adorno would call art's "non-identity" with its object either, such moments in these novels, quite simply, stand out.

Yet they do so in ways that Faulkner would go on to eschew. The reasons for this disavowal are potentially varied; my claim is that they have to do with the appearance of color photography in the very middle of Faulkner's most important writing period. As many contemporary artists but also, importantly, editors, advertisers, and, of course, the manufacturing corpo-

ration Kodak knew (or wished for), color photography had uses that were highly illustrative. From the vantage of both an instrumental use of technology and of cultural history, the new film stock would be seen as a novelty that drew consumers both to the product itself and to its uses in selling other commodities.[22]

It was precisely Kodachrome's visual allure that prevented the stock from being used for less commercial purposes such as art photography. In fact, the role of color in photography of a sort that was considered specifically artistic or aesthetic did not emerge until the 1960s—most notably in the work of William Eggleston, a Mississippi native whose deeply evocative images of the rural South and of common, everyday things shifted thinking about the uses of color film. As a result, Eggleston became the first color photographer to enjoy a single-artist exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York (the 1976 show was titled, simply, "Color Photographs"). For many years, but particularly around the time of its first appearance, color photography (and film) was considered *merely* illustrative and, by extension, commercial. It was, in a word, considered a kind of photography that drew attention, not to the depth of the image (or its associations with a similarly deep temporality), but to its surface. As Nicholas Mirzoeff notes in *The Introduction to Visual Culture*, "the intrusion of color into the photographic image disrupted its claim to be accurate by distracting the eye. Its mechanical exactitude nonetheless prohibits its being considered art."[23] To this notion of the art*less* quality of color photography, we might add the charge to it—as several theorists have—of ahistoricism. "Distracting the eye" connotes a type of pleasure giving, or, at the least, an insistence on optical activity as an end in itself—rather than as a means of access to an understanding that such scopic activity serves.[24]

Against the view of color stands another form of photography whose associations are quite different. As we know well, the 1930s saw a move away from a more purely aestheticist, formal use of surface imagery and toward a certain kind of visual and photographic "depth."[25] Notwithstanding new understandings of documentary's own modernist aspects, the approach to the very idea of documenting reality advocated by the FSA photographers such as Walker Evans and Dorthea Lange differed strikingly from that which was associated with color photography or advertising. Evans's classic portraits of Southern sharecroppers were central to James Agee's approach to his journalistic subjects in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, his effort to depict them and their deprivations, as Agee argued strenuously, honestly. As Agee put it of this book and its images: "Everything is to be discerned . . . without either dissection into science, or digestion into art . . . all of consciousness

is shifted from the imagined . . . to the effort to perceive simply the cruel radiance of what is."[26] Many of Lange's images of a Depression-era America pursue a similar ennobling; certain of them are now iconic, such as her 1936 "Migrant Mother." What Lange's and Evans's photos are known for is the opposite of the commercial-illustrative uses of early color photographs. Depicting the ravages of the economy and of nature both, these photographers were committed to a pictorial version of reportage and documentation, one that sought to convey to the viewer something of the suffering and the material conditions of 1930s rural America. Placing his subjects in a natural element such as an Alabama cotton field or in a Spartan dwelling, Evans sought an unadorned aesthetic whose purpose was to draw viewers into the physical environment and geographic space depicted by the photograph.

One image is particularly interesting in the context of my argument: Evans's 1936 photograph "Hitchhikers Near Vicksburg, Mississippi" (see Figure 1). Because of its compositional elements—the evoking of the vanishing point by way of the arrangement of the road's parallel lines—it makes a deliberate play on an illusory depth. The background detail of the car, in particular, positioned between the man's head and his extended thumb, serves to draw the viewer's eye into the deep space of the image.[27] Interestingly, such pictorial depth associated with black-and-white, documentary realism also connotes a temporal dimension, one that contributes to photography's putative historicism.[28] Ever since Matthew Brady depicted the Civil War photographically, in particular the reality of violent death (arguably the ultimate "reality"), the black-and-white, silver halide photograph was associated with a type of historical Truth.[29] As the first war ever photographed, the Civil War in fact acquired its own historicity due to its mechanical representation—the idea of later generations of Americans that the photograph is a primary historical document, or that photographs themselves "are" history.

An important variation on this concept is that history, or historiography, itself is photographic. Such ideas are central to the philosophy of history advanced in certain quarters of the Frankfurt School, above all in the work of Siegfried Kracauer and Walter Benjamin. What Benjamin allows is a way to understand a set of descriptions from Faulkner's later modernism—in particular, *Absalom, Absalom!*—that both appear and operate very differently from descriptive practices from his earlier works. Whereas his earlier writing shows Faulkner's concern with vivifying his prose and his reader's response to it by a use of either quite particular colors or a more general descriptive coloration (of faces, landscapes, or things), the later novel shows Faulkner "writing" in black-and-white.

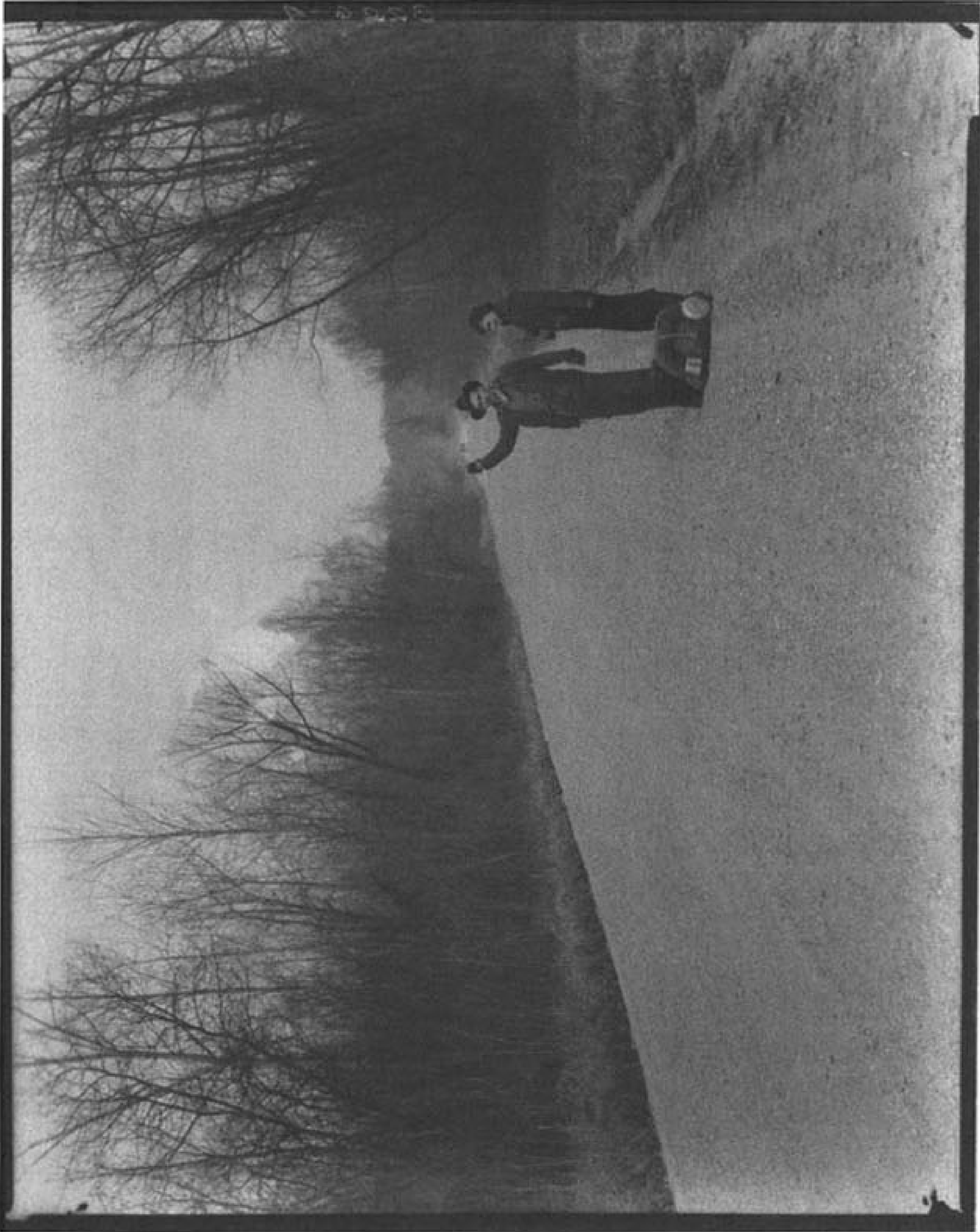

Figure 1. Walker Evans, "Hitchhikers Near Vicksburg, Mississippi" (1936). Library of Congress.

Absalom, Absalom! opens with references to and suggestions of black-and-white photography. Early in the first chapter, Faulkner's authorial narrator indicates that the way in which Quentin apprehends the Sutpen family's presence is through a photograph—or a photographic means of remembering and seeing: "Quentin seemed to see them, the four of them arranged into the conventional family group of the period . . . and seen now as the fading and ancient photograph itself would have been seen enlarged and hung on the wall."[30] Sitting in Miss Rosa's dark parlor, Quentin first encounters the "phantom" images of Thomas Sutpen and his family "resolving" out of the gloom of the Coldfield house, like a developing photograph: "Quentin seemed to watch resolving the figure of a little girl." Sutpen himself appears in Rosa's narration as a photographic negative, the "*light-blinded bat-like image . . . cast by the fierce demoniac lantern . . . in retrograde, reverse,*" and key descriptions of his offspring rely on visual mechanical reproduction. Describing Ellen Sutpen and her children's arrivals at church on Sundays, the narrator refers to "a glimpse . . . of the carriage and Ellen's high white face within it and the two replicas of [Sutpen's] face in miniature flanking her" (*AA*, 17, 142, 18).[31]

That Faulkner was aware in this period, not only of photographic means of producing images (their slow developing process converting negatives obtained on a chemically treated paper or plate), but their production by a particular commercial manufacturer was evident before he wrote *Absalom*. In one of the most well-known examples of his photographic metaphors, Faulkner refers to a moment of self-recognition for Joe Christmas in *Light in August*. Standing in the road one night during his endless wandering, Joe is discovered by the lights of an oncoming car. As it approaches, Joe "watched his body grow white out of the darkness like a kodak print emerging from the liquid."[32] It is worth noting that in a novel that uses a photographic conceit for its title—the effort to fix a particular quality of light at a certain, if also extended moment of time—and one as concerned as it is with definitions of "blackness" and "whiteness," such a Kodak print as Joe imagines is not one that he renders in color. (It could go without saying, at this point, that in 1932 he would not have been able to.) Similarly, the imagined images in *Absalom* would also of necessity appear, not as colored, but as the familiar black-and-white, sepia-toned photographic images of the nineteenth-century period that its events recall. My claim is that, with the move toward a more direct engagement with history in *Absalom*, in a novel replete with the strenuous narrative effort to examine the South's not-dead past, Faulkner sought a commensurate "pastness" or historicity for his visual method of description.

Such a return, however, does not seek to establish a continuity of present and past. Rather, Faulkner's shift toward a black-and-white descriptive mode in *Absalom* quite firmly maintained the difference between its presentness and the past. Faulkner's fiction offers a unique interest for this historical model, as his novels are frequently understood as establishing a strong continuity between events and identity in the present and the South's storied history. With *Absalom*, Faulkner offers a mode of historical narrative that evokes the powerful recognition of the past's distance—but one that nevertheless seizes on the capacity for social transformation "stored," as Benjamin put it, in prior historical events and periods. Benjamin refers to the need for historical thought to "shatter the continuum of history," his idea that history understood genuinely constitutes a break with the supposedly uninterrupted flow of time. This is because history, for Benjamin as for others (particularly in the period of European fascism in which he was writing) was properly defined by its organizing around moments of catastrophe. This conception is what prompts Benjamin's melancholic angel of history, his face turned fixedly on the "wreckage" of the past. I quote the passage in which this oft-cited figure appears, the ninth thesis in Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in full:

> A Klee painting named "Angelus Novus" shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing in from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such a violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.[33]

Such is the basis for Benjamin's emphasis on historical materialism and its alternative to traditional historiography.[34] For the latter, the past is always accessible in what Benjamin calls its false "eternal" image ("the whore called 'Once upon a time'"). Genuine historical thought, as Benjamin puts it, "involves not only the flow of thoughts, but their arrest as well"—the angel's fixation on catastrophe.[35] Donaldson describes this aspect of Benjamin's thought, writing of the need to "resist the lure of continuity and progress proffered by conventional, 'official' histories," as well as by liberal ideology, "for the fragmentation and discontinuity [Benjamin] saw defining" a more authentic historical understanding.[36] As Eduardo Cadava and other commentators on Benjamin have suggested, such interruptions are also the occasion of the photograph, its shutter opening and closing on a moment of time's flow occurring, in Cadava's words, "*between* the present and itself,

between the movement of time and itself." It is the photograph's temporal structure that Cadava claims is important and historical.[37]

Part of this importance relies on what the photographic image, like recalled moments from history, "stores"—an energy that, when revisited, releases an explosive, historical force of change. Benjamin facilitates the overture to photography and hints at the stakes involved in such a comparison when he writes, "A historical materialist cannot do without the notion of a present which is not a transition, but in which time stands still and has come to a stop." Such stoppages or caesurae amount for Benjamin to particularly loaded moments, "monads" in which are configured the shock of historical rupture. These moments are the purview of historicism because in them "the historical materialist . . . recognizes the sign of . . . a revolutionary chance . . . [one that the historical materialist] takes cognizance of . . . in order to blast a specific era out of the homogenous course of history."[38]

Several passages in *Absalom* refer to singular moments in Sutpen's or other characters' lives that possess the shock of the photographic rupture of time's flow. Their importance, in this respect, is the fact that each of them refers to a moment of recognition in which a (photographic) flash or "glare" forces a meaningful change in a character's awareness of his life in the time before and after it, a monadic break between the present and time's flow. One of these passages describes Sutpen's narration of his time in Haiti, during which his first wife emerged "for a second of the telling . . . like [Sutpen] had just seen her too for a second by the flash of one of the muskets . . . a very condensation of time which was the gauge of its own violence" (*AA*, 206). Offered here in a personal register—Sutpen's chronicle to Quentin's grandfather of his life story—this violent "condensation" of time nonetheless registers the violent break that Benjamin sees as the photographic quality of history. Additionally, this passage offers a metaphor of the photographic, revelatory glare of the camera flash in the momentary flash of the muskets, one that reveals the singular importance that this event will play in Sutpen's subsequent life history as well as that of so many others—the moment Sutpen sees as his "error" in founding a dynastic line on a Southern plantation. A similar description attends Henry Sutpen's act of showing Charles Bon the letter he received from his mother's lawyer when at college introducing the two young men: " . . . and there was no gentle spreading glow but a flash, a glare" in which Bon realizes that Henry is Sutpen's son (and therefore, his own half-brother), a moment that reveals to Bon "at once, like a flash of light, the meaning of his whole life, past" (*AA*, 258). As subsequent events in the novel prove, this revelation ultimately leads Bon to his suicidal opposition to his father's dynastic, "historical" design. The

most literally glaring example of this painful, photographic-like rupture to a character's self-awareness attends Sutpen himself. On the morning of his rejection at Pettibone's door, when Sutpen withdraws to contemplate the reason for his treatment by the butler, his dawning understanding of class antagonism occurs to him as "an explosion—a bright glare" leveling the "limitless flat plain" of Sutpen's thinking, his "intact innocence" from before this catastrophic event (*AA*, 197). In each of these cases, we can see the quality of rupture that for Benjamin attends history in its photographic shattering of time's flow.

Later in his life, of course, it is precisely the homogenous course of history that Sutpen means to preserve with his design. But Faulkner's literary historiography in *Absalom* "takes cognizance of" such an order, as Benjamin puts it of materialist history, an aspect of the novel that manifests itself in Faulkner's most highly charged use in it of photography. Provocatively, this final example also partakes of the "revolutionary chance" that Benjamin evokes in his theory of materialist history. The scene in question is Bon's introduction of Henry to New Orleans. In narrating this section of the novel, Mr. Compson makes sustained use of a photographic metaphor, describing the way in which Bon "took the innocent and negative plate of Henry's provincial soul and intellect and exposed it by slow degrees to this esoteric milieu . . . watching the picture resolve and become fixed." As he continues his tour, however, the slow build of Bon's exposure—his camera's shutter speed—increases, becoming what Benjamin would see as the momentary shock of the photographic click as the exposures become "brief, so brief as to be cryptic, almost staccato, the plate [of Henry's soul] unaware of what the complete picture would show" as Bon guides him through the nefarious city (*AA*, 91–92).[39]

What is important here is not only the manner of Bon's showing, which Mr. Compson claims is photographic and that recalls Benjamin's figure for historical understanding. What is equally important in the context of the novel and this scene is what, precisely, Bon's showing reveals. Two passing but enormously suggestive details from Mr. Compson's narration in this section will allow me to draw together the various strands of my argument. One of them is the inference Henry draws from Bon's exposing him to the supposed decadence of New Orleans. For that is a recognition of a difference, not only in his own and Bon's supposed racial and sexual values, but in Henry's awareness of history. Exposing Henry photographically to what Mr. Compson calls "the surface aspect" of New Orleans, Bon also shows Henry a relationship to capital and to labor different than the one Henry has known. "The femininely flamboyant" architecture of New Orleans im-

plies to Henry a "great and easy wealth measured by steamboat loads." Such "easy wealth" as Bon and, to Henry, other New Orleanseans enjoy is at variance with what Henry, the son of a Mississippi planter, has learned about primitive accumulation. Those steamboat loads appear in his mind's eye magically, without cause or source. As such, they suggest the mystification that Marx associated with commodities and modern consumer culture. In opposition to them is what Henry knows as the measure of wealth, one that he has learned in the agrarian slave economy of his childhood: "a tedious inching of sweating human figures across cotton fields" (*AA*, 91). Describing Bon "building gradually toward the picture which [Bon] desired [Henry] to retain, accept," and noting Henry's mental resistance to it, Faulkner uses a specific image of (materialist) historical content. Photography, evoked here as elsewhere in the novel—and as practiced outside it in the 1930s—is associated not with the surface play of light and color, but with the kind of historical content that Faulkner and his contemporaries considered historical as well as real. Tedious, sweating human labor, and subjugated labor at that, fills Henry's visual unconscious in the midst of Bon's photographical exposures.

The historical charge that for Benjamin inheres in genuine apprehensions of history, history's "monads," is further suggested in the shock that Bon means to instill. Henry is, of course, too shocked by what he sees in New Orleans and in the bordello to admit anything of his reaction. Yet in suppressing that response, Henry reveals it to Bon (and to the reader) all the more. That historical shock then registers in another of Faulkner's visual metaphors. When Bon and Henry move on from the "bazaar" of courtesans to the arena for blood feuds between the men who mean to own them, they arrive at another gated door, before which they stop. Here, "Bon knock[s] at a small adjacent doorway from which a swarthy man resembling a creature out of an old woodcut of the French Revolution erupts" (*AA*, 93). That this decidedly peripheral character speaks French with Bon is less to the point than is his appearance and his resemblance to a nineteenth-century mode of "mechanical" visual reproduction. For this example performs the kind of rhetorical gesture that I am suggesting Faulkner makes throughout *Absalom*: evoking an earlier visual-art technology in an effort to harness both the historicity of that prior mode and, as Benjamin suggests, the capacity for revolutionary energy encapsulated in an earlier historical time.[40] It is noteworthy in this respect that Mr. Compson stipulates not only the resemblance of this New Orleans laborer to an old woodcut, but that he identifies the content of that earlier mechanically reproduced image as a revolutionary one, the spirit for which events in France in 1789 had come to stand as

the signifier. Also noteworthy is the Benjaminian notion of "interruption," as the man "erupts" into view—like the genuine historical moment that interrupts the continuum of time.[41]

In showing Henry his urbane lifestyle, Charles Bon does not mean to interrupt all of Southern history. As a wealthy New Orleansean, he enjoys too much of what his position in that history affords him. At the same time, though, Bon is in fact involved in a larger act of subterfuge. His display of New Orleans courtesans to the photographic plate of Henry's provincial soul is, indeed, meant to shock his half-brother into a certain kind of historical as well as personal recognition. Initially, Bon means to disabuse Henry of certain idealized notions he has of who Bon is. Viewed from the perspective of Faulkner's broader project with the novel, however, one that at its furthest reach included a full reckoning of the South's legacies from chattel slavery and their lingering, haunting impact on white Southerners like Quentin, Bon means precisely to "interrupt" the flow of historical time. He certainly means to block the flow of that historical continuum that Sutpen intends to create in his establishing of a dynasty, a direct temporal line forward through which his father could "look ahead along the still undivulged light rays in which his descendents . . . waited to be born" (*AA*, 216). Described here as envisioning an unbroken series of male heirs, Sutpen partakes of a kind of thinking that resembles traditional, patriarchal history. Interestingly, another patriarchal character in different novel—Mr. Compson in *The Sound and the Fury*—evinces a similar apprehension of both the continuum of light and a commensurate historical continuum or unfolding. In his section of *The Sound and the Fury*, Quentin remembers, "Like Father said down the long and lonely light-rays you might see Jesus walking, like" (*AA*, 49). Yet having moved forward in his writing only a few years later, such a habit of thought is what, in *Absalom*, Faulkner questions so thoroughly and on the novel's many levels of representation: narrative, "visual," historical. Like Benjamin's historical materialist, Faulkner seeks to shatter the continuum of history that Sutpen is shown imagining. He does so through the photographic "flash" that forces itself on Henry by way of Bon, as well as through Bon's own revolutionary thrust against his father's imperial design. As we know, this thrust is one for which Bon pays with his life. Yet it is not altogether fruitless, as it serves the end of stalling Sutpen's plan and ultimately bringing it and its historical trajectory down, quite literally, in flames.

After 1935, Faulkner's writing and its relationship to light, color, and a way of imagining the (Southern) past changed. We might say, in closing, that if not the seismic shift that Virginia Woolf attributed to modern con-

sciousness that occurred for her "on or about December 1910, when "human character changed," the introduction of color film—of Kodachrome—led to a similar shift in how the modern optical unconscious understood the representation and the image of history. And that change manifested itself in Faulkner's own historical thought and his approaches to writing about historical perspective in the middle of the crucially important decade of the '30s. With *Absalom, Absalom*! or his other writing of this period, Faulkner may not have been emulating the approach to photography or to history of his contemporaries working in visual media or for the FSA. Yet, like them, Faulkner's fiction of this period—his literary historiography—by way of its black-and-white properties and its own auratic, silver-halide glow, becomes like Benjamin's angel of history, gazing on a catastrophic image of wreckage that it laments, but whose sadness and tragedy will not let it go.

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NOTES

1 See "The U. S. Minicam Boom," *Fortune* (October 1936), which pointed out that sales of the Leica doubled each year after it was first imported in 1925 to a total of 25,000 in 1936 despite an original price of $145.

2 Cara A. Finnegan and Jeff Allred recently offered similar accounts of the shift in the 1930s toward an encompassing modern and republican "sight," one at play in both national policy and in the newly national publications. Both authors begin their studies (of the Farm Security Administration photographs and of 1930s documentary, respectively) with references to inaugural speeches by Franklin Roosevelt in 1933 and '37 in which the president stressed the need for the populace to visually confront, or bravely "face," the country's economic ills. Both Finnegan and Allred also trace a symbiosis between calls like Roosevelt's and the burgeoning documentary impulse in photography and the FSA mandate, efforts to, as Finnegan puts it, "show" the problems of rural and urban poverty as a means to ameliorate them: "The New Deal instituted a range of material practices in which visual remedies were often positioned as the cure for—or at least the mode for diagnosis of—what ailed the nation." See Cara A. Finnegan, *Picturing Poverty: Print Culture and FSA Photographs* (Washington: Smithsonian Books, 2003), xi. Allred describes the origins and effects of *Life* magazine in connection with that ambition in *American Modernism and Depression Documentary* (Oxford U. Press, 2010), 167–71.

3 See Henry Wilhelm, "The Modern Era of Photography Began in 1935 with the Introduction of Kodachrome Transparency Film," *Kodachrome: The American Invention of Our World 1939–1959*, ed. Els Rijper (New York: Delano Greenidge, 2002).

4 Eric J. Sundquist, *The House Divided* (Johns Hopkins U. Press, 1983), 3. See also John T. Matthews, *The Sound and the Fury: Faulkner and the Lost Cause* (Boston: Twayne, 1991), and Catherine Kodat, "Unhistoricizing Faulkner," *Faulkner's Sexualities: Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha, 2007*, ed. Donald M. Kartiganer and Ann J. Abadie (Jackson: U. of Mississippi Press, 2010).

5 I will return to a fuller description of this quality to the novel. For now, I will mention Hortense J. Spillers's "Faulkner Adds Up: Reading *Absalom, Absalom!* and *The Sound and the Fury*," *Black, White, and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture* (U. of Chicago Press, 2003), 359–60, an account of passages from Quentin's section which she both does and does not compare directly to photography, specifically the play of light, shadow, and color in Quentin's descriptions of the boys at the fishing hole. The "flecks of sunlight" that play on their shirts or that "slant" into the scene; the fishing poles that "stencil" the road with shadow like "slanting pencils of sunlight"; the "dappled" sunlight or the "flickering" yellow butterflies that follow them—all of these visual details accrete into "photographic elements" that are "paradoxically, not *of* the photograph" but rather of Quentin's "mental landscape." Such passages, Spillers writes, "suggest that *action* in this narrative is not defined by movement through a material scene, but across the intrapsychic space of the most refined neurotic order." It is an elusive interplay of surface and depth, in other words, that she traces across this section of the novel.

6 For Faulkner's remarks about his work writing it, see "An Introduction for *The Sound and the Fury*," written in 1933 and intended for a new edition of the book, in *The Sound and the Fury*, ed. David Minter (New York: Norton, 1994), 225–28.

7 Susan Donaldson, "*Light in August*, Faulkner's Angels of History, and the Culture of Jim Crow," *Faulkner's Inheritance: Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha, 2005*, ed. Joseph R. Urgo and Ann J. Abadie (Jackson: U. of Mississippi Press, 2007), 105–6, who also refers to Richard Gray's description of a "widening of vision" in *Light in August*, which he counters to the "'sometimes claustrophobic personal focus' of both *The Sound and the Fury* and *Sanctuary*." See also John T. Matthews, "*As I Lay Dying* in the Machine Age," *boundary 2*, 19 (1992): 93, which argues that the highly stylized language of *As I Lay Dying* was one that Faulkner needed to "exorcise" in order to allow him to write his more historically engaged novels of the later 1930s: "Leaving idle metafiction, like *Mosquitoes*, behind, radically interrogating and finally exorcising the effete poeticism of Quentin Compson [in *The Sound and the Fury*] and Darl Bundren [in *As I Lay Dying*], Faulkner prepares for an experimentalism deeply implicated in the search for truth about the South in *Light in August* and *Absalom, Absalom!*"

8 Allred, *American Modernism and Depression Documentary*. See also Tyrus Miller, "Documentary/Modernism: Convergence and Complementarity in the 1930s," *Modernism/Modernity* 9 (2002): 225–41; and Ted Atkinson, *Faulkner and the Great Depression: Aesthetics, Ideology, and Culture* (Athens, GA: U. of Georgia Press, 2006).

9 Atkinson, *Faulkner and the Great Depression*, 88.

10 See Allred, *American Modernism and Depression Documentary*, 6–7, particularly his work on Richard Wright's *12 Million Black Voices* as an alternative to the FSA imperative of a direct mimesis and Allred's figure of the representational "knot" that runs through American representations of race from Melville to modernism. See also Joseph B. Entin, *Sensational Modernism: Experimental Fiction and Photography in Thirties America* (Chapel Hill: U. of North Carolina Press, 2007), 128–30, for his discussions of the disruptive, asymmetrical, and self-referential 1930s photographs of Aaron Siskind that eschew representational transparency and that foreground (and question) the viewer's role in political acts of looking.

11 We might point to a similar continuum from Dilsey and the fourth section to Faulkner's other representations of social and racial "others" in the fiction that followed *The Sound and the Fury* in the '30s: Joe Christmas and Lena Grove in *Light in August* and Charles Bon in *Absalom*, as well as class subalterns like the child version of Thomas Sutpen and, in Faulkner's short fiction, Abner and Sarty Snopes in "Barn Burning" (1938).

12 Donaldson, "Faulkner's Angels of History," 104–5. See also Shawn Michelle Smith, *Photography on the Color Line: W. E. B. DuBois, Race, and Visual Culture* (Duke U. Press, 2004).

13 William Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury*, ed. David Minter (New York: Norton, 1994), 165. Hereafter cited parenthetically.

14 Recent titles include Allred, *American Modernism*; Finnegan, *Picturing Poverty*; Entin, *Sensational Modernism*. See also Sara Blair, *Harlem Crossroads: Black Writers and the Photograph in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton U. Press, 2007). See also John Raeburn, *A Staggering Revolution: A Cultural History of Thirties Photography* (Urbana: U. of Illinois Press, 2006), and Michael L. Carlebach, *American Photojournalism Comes of Age* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997).

15 See Heinz K. Henisch and Bridget T. Henisch, *The Painted Photograph 1839–1914: Origins, Techniques, Aspirations* (University Park: Penn State U. Press, 1996).

16 See Stuart Burrows, *A Familiar Strangeness: American Fiction and the Language of Photography, 1839–1945* (Athens, GA: U. of Georgia Press, 2008), esp. chap. 3, "Vanishing Race: Faulkner's Photographic Face." Burrows describes the way in which the repeated references to photographs in *Absalom, Absalom!* in particular reveal Faulkner's understanding of photography's paradoxical "erasure" of history (through its surplus of images) and his sense of "the past . . . endlessly returning in the form of its own absence" (119–22).

17 See Atkinson, *Faulkner and the Great Depression;* Burrows, *A Familiar Strangeness*. See also Peter Lurie, *Vision's Immanence: Faulkner, Film, and the Popular Imagination* (Johns Hopkins U. Press, 2004).

18 Ilse Dusoir Lind, "The Effect of Painting on Faulkner's Poetic Form," *Faulkner, Modernism, and Film: Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha, 1978*, ed. Evans Harrington and Ann J. Abadie (Jackson: U. Press of Mississippi, 1979), 127–48. Lind describes both Faulkner's time spent in New Orleans among a self-consciously "modern" group of painters as well as his own early ambitions to be a visual artist. For other accounts of the role of Faulkner's early drawings, see also Judith Sensibar, *The Origins of Faulkner's Art* (Austin: U. of Texas Press, 1984), and Lothar Hönnighausen, *William Faulkner: The Art of Stylization in His Early Graphic and Literary Work* (Cambridge U. Press, 1987). Lind directly traces a connection between two Symbolist paintings—Rudolph Bresdin's "The Comedy of Death" and Gustave Moreau's "*Les Prétendants*"—and descriptions that appear in Faulkner's *Mosquitoes*. Moreover, she finds in this early novel and in Faulkner's juvenilia (his play *Marionettes*), as well as in more mature works like *The Sound and the Fury*, echoes of Beardsley's illustrations, particularly those for Oscar Wilde's *Salomé*, and connections to other "decadent" or Symbolist nineteenth-century writers (132–35).

19 Joseph Blotner, *Faulkner: A Biography* (New York: Random, 1984), 161.

20 Lind, "Effect of Painting," 143, finds a pronounced use of color in Faulkner's earlier writing that, to her, dovetails with his travels to Europe and his encounter with modern painting. Declaring that "brilliant and intense color often appears" in his novels of the period that followed, she cites a near-contemporary reader of Faulkner and an observer of the art scene, Wright Morris, who compared certain Faulkner novels to visual art in his article "Violent Land: Some Observations on the Faulkner Country," *Magazine of Art* 45, (March 1952): 99–103.

21 William Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, in *Novels, 1930–1935* (New York: Library of America, 1985), 29. Hereafter cited parenthetically as *AILD*.

22 Kodachrome would also be used to document in ways that were both like and unlike "documentary," black-and-white photography. Rijper, *Kodachrome*, 13, forcefully shows the stock's role in creating images that were both themselves nearly permanent (Kodochrome's preservation value, especially when maintained in cold-storage facilities, could last for hundreds or even, argues Wilhelm, "Modern Era of Photography," thousands of years) and that formed indelible impressions on the collective visual memory. These include historical events such as the gathering in Yalta of Roosevelt, Churchill, and Joseph Stalin in 1945 (or Leo Durocher managing a game for the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1946). That Kodachrome was especially useful for promoting images of glamour, however, as opposed to history is evident in the several production stills that appear in Rijper's *Kodachrome*, including photos of Veronica Lake, Susan Heyward, and Dorothy Lamour, or a portrait of the cosmetics mogul Helena Rubenstein and several reproductions from *Vogue* magazine. Notably vivid is the picture of Jane Russell in a publicity still with a blood-red background for *The Outlaw*, from 1943.

23 Nicholas Mirzoeff, *The Introduction to Visual Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 62. Such comments recall the very terms that surrounded the first appearance of photography itself, that is, whether its scientism and supposed "mechanical exactitude" prevented it from being considered as anything but a tool for empirical observation.

24 This is a similar line of argument that Fredric Jameson offered in the 1980s, in the context of moving images, about what he termed "the nostalgia film," his contention that in commercial historical cinema, history becomes reified into a consumable image. See "On Magic Realism and Film," *Signatures of the Visible* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

25 Recall the shift away from photography like that of Alfred Steiglitz's, which in the early 1900s and through Steiglitz's Gallery 291, his group Photo Secession, and his magazine *Camera Works* had established a painterly autonomy to artistic photographs.

26 James Agee, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1941). Agee is quoted in Alfred Kazin, *On Native Grounds: An Interpretation of Modern American Prose Literature* (New York: Eynal & Hitchcock, 1942), 495.

27 Allred, *American Modernism and Depression Documentary*, 103–6, discusses the importance, during the decade of the '30s, of the car and what he terms "automobility," the new capacity to relocate or experience the bodily sensation of movement through space that paralleled the era's increasing acceleration and convergences of space and time through the radio and the telephone, photography magazines, and air and train travel. He refers to Anse's diatribe against the "modern" phenomenon of the road in *As I Lay Dying* when Allred describes "the emergence of a new and distinctly modern 'roadside' topos [as] one of the most distinctive features of American modernity."

28 This claim is not limited to the middle and late thirties, which saw the release of both *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1939) and the appearance of Kodachrome. It does, however, sharpen in this period, due to what appear in retrospect as the stark differences between earlier photography and the new color film. The indexical effects of black-and-white still photography exemplified by the FSA artists, that is, made claims to a kind of "truthful" representation of reality that the early color stocks did not attempt. As Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Shocken, 1968), 222, writes: "The manner in which human sense perception is organized, the medium in which it is accomplished, is determined not only

by nature but by historical circumstances as well." Such historical circumstances as the Great Depression, in combination with the appearance in 1935 of color film, led to an effort by photographers to organize vision in particular ways.

29 A similar case might be made for the collection of crime-scene photos by the New York tabloid photographer, Weegee, *Naked City* (New York: Essential Books, 1945). Like Brady, Weegee became notorious as well as famous for his efforts to formally manipulate his subjects—an act of intervention that nevertheless did not prevent Brady's and Weegee's pictures from making a claim on absolute "truth" for their respective audiences. In reference to Brady's images, Rob Kroes, *Photographic Memories: Private Pictures, Public Images, and American History* (Lebanon, New Hampshire: U. Press of New England, 2007), 84, cites a *New York Times* article from July 1862, one that responded to Brady's "Incidents in the War" exhibit and that declared Brady's battlefield photographs "nearly as interesting as the war itself" and worthy of "honorable recognition" for making "Photography the Clio of the War" (*New York Times*, "Photographic Phases" [21 July 1862]: 5). Oliver Holmes wrote about Brady in an 1863 issue of the *Atlantic*: "Let him who wishes to know what war is, look on these series of illustrations" ("Doings of the Sunbeam," *Atlantic Monthly* 12 [July 1863]: 11–12; cited in Kroes, *Photographic Memories*, 86). On the staged quality of Brady's compositions, see Alan Trachtenberg, "Albums of War," *Reading American Photographs: Images as History—Matthew Brady to Walker Evans* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1989).

30 William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom! in Novels 1936–1940* (New York: Library of America, 1990), 10–11. Hereafter cited parenthetically as *AA*.

31 See Burrows, *Familiar Strangeness*, 116–18, which reads such descriptions of the expressionless, reproducible "Sutpen face" as figurations that express photography's erasure of distinctness, individuality, and history.

32 William Faulkner, *Light in August, in Novels 1930–1935* (New York: Library of America, 1985), 478.

33 Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 257.

34 Donaldson, "Faulkner's Angels of History," 103, writes persuasively about the affinities between Faulkner and Benjamin's historicism. She sees characters like Lena Grove, Gail Hightower, and particularly Joe Christmas as embodying their Southern culture's "wreckages" and "debris," faults and cracks in Southern codes of race, purity, and gender into which they fall and upon which the reader and, at key points, the novel's characters gaze mournfully and regretfully, like Benjamin's angel.

35 Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 262.

36 Donaldson, "Faulkner's Angels of History," 102.

37 Eduardo Cadava, *Words of Light: Theses on the Photography of History* (Princeton U. Press, 1997), 61. Cadava likens Benjamin's famous "Theses on the Philosophy of History" to photography and the claims they make for a different conception of temporality in relation to the modern subject. See esp. Thesis XV, "Caesura."

38 Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 262, 263. Finnegan, *Picturing Poverty*, 243 n23, points out that in its earliest phases, photography was literally explosive. Before 1930, when the flashbulb was introduced in the United States, photographers needed to use an exploding flash

powder in order to take pictures when there was not ample light. The new technology of the flashbulb thus "took much of the danger out of" the medium. What Benjamin avers, writing in the 1930s, is that photography's temporal structure nonetheless retained this element of dangerous or explosive destruction.

39 Burrows, *A Familiar Strangeness,* 120, reads this passage and its metaphor as suggestive of photography's material history. As Mr. Compson narrates it, he refers to Bon's fixing and removing "without obliterating one line the picture, this background, leaving the background, the plate prepared and innocent again" (*AA,* 88). As Burrows puts it, such an account of a photograph being "reusable . . . is not without some historical justification—because of expense, daguerreotype plates were often used more than once."

40 Kroes, *Photographic Memories,* 84, notes that in the nineteenth century, the photographic images that most Americans viewed were reproductions of photography (such as those made famous by Brady's pictures of the Civil War), manufactured through more commonly affordable technologies such as the lithograph or the woodcut. Interestingly, Kroes also suggests that such reproductions of reproductions effected both an erasure of the initial power of photographs like Brady's and the actual circumstances of violent, regional conflict that those images indexed—i.e., the disquieting facts of battlefield corpses rendered with such intense immediacy by Brady's camera. "Photography is a mechanical art, yet it is capable . . . of producing a *punctum,* an aura, an iconic force, that gets lost in translation to a different medium of mass reproduction, such as lithography or the wood engraving" (84). Faulkner's reference to the woodcut may then be understood as an effort to recapture the actual circumstances in which photographic content was disseminated in the period that this portion of his novel depicts. Importantly, it may also be understood as part of his general effort in his modernism to question such acts of historical erasure and popular forgetfulness about the Civil War prompted by various forms of visual media.

41 As Benjamin, *Illuminations,* 261, notes of the renewal of energy from past events, "History is the subject of a structure whose site is not homogenous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of the now. Thus, to Robespierre ancient Rome was a past charged with the time of the now which he blasted out of the continuum of history. The French Revolution viewed itself as Rome incarnate." Though Bon means to effect a very different kind of rebellion, his actions with Henry and throughout the novel pose a significant challenge to Sutpen's own "feudal-aristocratic" design, i.e., Sutpen's plan to establish a plantation and dynastic line of sons on a decidedly white, patriarchal primogeniture.