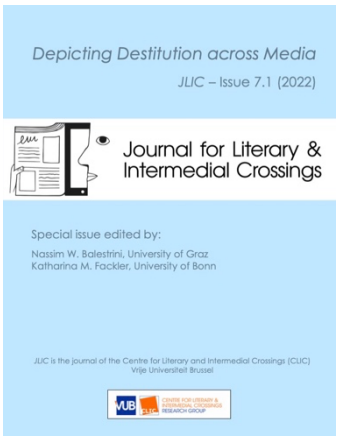

Journal for Literary and Intermedial Crossings

ISSN: 2506-8709

Journal homepage: https://clic.research.vub.be/journal

Submit your article to JLIC

Poverty in Color and in Black and White: Proximity and Distance in Intermedial Representations of Destitution

Margit Peterfy – University of Heidelberg

Issue: 7.1

Published: Spring 2022

To link this article: https://clic.research.vub.be/volume-7-issue-1-2022-depicting destitution-across-media

To cite this article: Peterfy, Margit. "Poverty in Color and in Black and White: Proximity and Distance in Intermedial Representations of Destitution." *Depicting Destitution across Media*, special issue of *Journal for Literary and Intermedial Crossings*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2022, pp. d1-33.

Poverty in Color and in Black and White: Proximity and Distance in Intermedial Representations of Destitution

Margit PETERFY

University of Heidelberg

The title of this essay has been inspired by a statement of the writer and film director Béla Tarr, who once said "[w]ith black and white you can keep more of a distance" (Wagner and Lethen 3). Others have made similar claims, for example: "Furthermore, black-and-white photography is more capable of abstraction than is color photography, for it is farther removed from the objective world's complex variety of hues" (Peeler 96). In general, to most photographers and lovers of photography, this statement seems almost a truism, and few would disagree that it describes a widely recognized or at least assumed effect. But in spite of the consensus, the question of what "distance" actually means and implies does not have a simple answer. In the following, I will discuss this question with respect to representations of poverty from an intermedial perspective which includes the aspect of color – or its absence – not just in photographs, but also in texts.

Given that our experience of the world is polychrome, any representation in black and white reduces the range of stimuli. In consequence, it could be stated that what is presented that way can be interpreted as a simplified, or abstracted, form of the direct experience (cf. Coleman 8). However, upon further reflection it becomes clear that this idea of "distance" in black-and-white photography only makes sense because of the general availability of color photographs. When monochrome photography was the only option, there was no question that it was an immediate, indexical representation of reality. As the result of a physical-chemical process, black-and-white

photography was not thought of as "distant" at all: On the contrary, it was seen as the most direct and indexical way of creating a visual representation.[1] In fact, it was understood as an expression generated by a purely mechanical process that could take place without any human involvement. In 1839, John Talbot, one of the inventors of this new technology, described such images as follows: "the art of photogenic drawing, […] the process by which natural objects may be made to delineate themselves without the artist's pencil" (qtd. in Kemp 17). Note the rather convoluted construction around the transitive verb "delineate themselves"; the agency is wholly transferred to the represented. Thus, photographs' "proximity" to their objects was assumed to a degree that seems highly naïve to us today. For example, Arthur Conan Doyle, the inventor of the most cerebral of detectives, was convinced of the reality of "fairies" when he was presented with photographic prints of the so-called Cottingley Fairies in 1920. These were blatant fakes that made use of cardboard cut-outs, but for Doyle, they proved the existence of fairies – because they were photo-graphs, i.e., pictures drawn by 'light' and not by humans (Owen 1994).

The mapping of the distinction between poly- and monochrome representations onto the understanding of proximity and distance is further complicated by the question of how we should conceptualize this spatial metaphor once we part with the notion that photographs are purely mechanical representations of reality. Statements like Tarr's cannot be taken literally, after all: The actual distance between the camera and the filmed or photographed object is the same, whether the final photograph is in color or in black and white, as is the viewing distance to the print or screen. So, the distance mentioned here must be understood in a figurative sense, and more narrowly, as a cognitive or psychological category relating to the reception process of a representation. It is all the more astonishing that distance is seldom part of theoretical discussions

[1] On photography as an indexical sign (in the semiotic sense after C.S. Peirce) see Lefebvre (12-13).

within the field of art history, literary studies, or in general aesthetics. One of the few exceptions is Werner Wolf's discussion of distance as opposed to aesthetic illusion and immersion.[2] Wolf points out that aesthetic illusion is different from a naïve confusion of art with reality (or from delusion, or from hallucination). He also emphasizes the importance of a certain cognitive intervention, even in the case of an immersive aesthetic experience: "actual aesthetic illusion does involve a border crossing, but only in our imagination, and one in which a certain mental as well as actantional distance or reservation never vanishes entirely" (Wolf, "Aesthetic Illusion" 14-15). Further, Wolf locates aesthetic illusion also between the poles of "total rational distance and complete (and predominantly emotional) imaginative immersion" (16-17). With the addition of the adjectives "rational" and "emotional," supplementary information is delivered to the poles represented by "distance" and "immersion." Wolf's dichotomy is, however, not quite one, at least not on the lexical or literal level. The antonym to "distance" is "proximity," not "immersion" or "illusion." To point this out does not invalidate Wolf's discussion but supplies an additional perspective. In the following, I will emphasize the importance of this spatial metaphor because it offers advantages for a semiotic discussion of an intermedial theory of color representation.

Although a metaphor referring to a fundamental phenomenon in space suggests a single, universal framework, the interpretation of any given historically situated mediation of experience is more complex. The intermedial representation of poverty has its own tradition, which developed as part of a complex interaction between individual aesthetic choices and political, economic, and other constraints. Such constraints included the availability of technology both on the production and on the reception side. Carol Quirke points out in her study of news photography and America's

[2] Wolf discusses "distance" in the "Introduction" to his edited volume *Immersion and Distance: Aesthetic Illusion in Literature and Other Media* (2013). It is striking, however, that none of the twelve other contributors refer centrally to "distance" in their essays.

working class that the use of photographs in the contradictory portrayal of labor underwent a marked change in the first decades of the twentieth century:

> By the late 1930s, however, technologies and distribution methods brought news photos to audiences more rapidly, camera use was democratized, and national mass audiences were built. Labor's status would be transformed in the pages of an ever more national, standard, and photographic mass media. (Quirke 18)

These production and reception patterns were the background against which also other photographic conventions developed, including the marginal presence of color photography during the Great Depression. In her thoroughly researched and highly informative dissertation from 1991, Sally Stein traces the various aesthetic strands and technologies of color representation within the photographic record of this era (*The Rhetoric*).

In this paper, building on these and similar studies, the relationship between text and image will be understood as always uniquely historical and not governed by fixed, universal laws. Therefore, the history of images of destitution in American visual culture will be discussed in the first part. I will then turn to one case study, to James Agee's textual representation of color – as opposed to the famous monochrome photography of Walker Evans in their joint work *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941). This is a canonical "intermedial" work, but surprisingly enough, the relationship between text and image with respect to color does not seem to have received any critical attention.

My investigation into the various modes of color representation in Agee's and Evans's famous photobook about the lives of tenant farmers in the American South during the Great Depression, together with some philosophical, artistic, and linguistic theories of "color" will provide the basis for a final discussion of the metaphorical "proximity" and "distance" in intermedial representations of poverty. I will argue that discussions of representations and their

degree of proximity to the lived experience, whether in verbal text or visual media, are always specific, individual, and contested concepts (as formulated in Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Remarks on Color*), and are unavoidably situated in specific historical and local cultural contexts.

About the Theory and Practice of Photographic Representations of Poverty

American reform movements of the nineteenth century started out by making use of narrative or dramatic sentimental strategies to move their audiences to charitable actions. Besides novels such as *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1851/52) by Harriet Beecher Stowe or temperance plays in the vein of the popular melodrama *The Drunkard* (1844), many lesser-known texts which intended to provoke sympathy and/or to catalyze reform were printed, often in religious newspapers and publications. The strategies employed in these works centered around sentimental narratives and described the effects of material destitution in order to create empathy. In addition to developmental arches, writers made use of descriptions, often called "word-pictures," in the hope that readers would "imagine" these scenes and, in the next instance, engage in benevolent actions on the basis of these evoked mental images. Beyond relying on texts and on readers' imaginations, reformers also started to use actual images in their campaigns, for example the widely circulated allegorical representation of a "Drunkard's Progress."[3] With the spread of photography, abolitionists also made use of the new medium because they counted on the indexical qualities and advantages of photography: Opponents of slavery were able to point to the claim of objective representation of slaves' maltreated bodies when demanding the end of slavery (Fox-Amato).

After the Civil War, reformers began to utilize photographic images of poverty (on glass slides), which were projected in so-called magic lantern shows. The images were commented on

[3] Several versions of a drunkard's life represented as an "arch" can be found in the digital collections of the Library of Congress (https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/91796265/).

by a performer or sometimes also accompanied/underlaid with atmospheric music. Magic lantern shows were used for entertainment and educational purposes, but also in religious contexts, in church-based institutions, mostly in illustrated lectures on the crusade to save the souls of the community. Charles Musser, in his *The Emergence of Cinema: The American Screen to 1907,* describes this kind of show as a mixture located between sentimental entertainment and work for a good "cause," and as a precursor to cinema (42). We can even find meta-level reflections on the mediality of the shows, as put forward in a newspaper report from 1899:

> An ounce of picture is worth a ton of talk. A word sometimes goes into one ear and out of the other, but a picture never goes into one eye, and out of the other. No, no. The picture strikes the brain and leaves an impression. ("Ministers")

When it came to questions of philanthropy and charitable institutions, this kind of impression was of course what was sought after. Nevertheless, most of these images were rather conventional, sentimental arrangements. Often, they were hand-colored to create a more entertaining spectacle that embellished and enhanced the initial impetus for reform.

It took Jacob Riis's photographic innovations to introduce a new style of representing poverty. Initially, he also made use of the lantern show, including sentimental commentary and musical accompaniment, before he published his now iconic photographs in his book *How the Other Half Lives* (1890). A police photographer, Riis had become a professional eyewitness to the dismal conditions of proletarian urban life, and in 1888 he began in his lantern shows to display photographs of life in New York slums. Since the 1940s, Riis's position at the origin of American social documentary photography has been firmly established on the basis of the (sometimes literal) snapshots he was able to take with his innovative methods, which made ambitious and original use of portable lighting and flash photography in New York slums. Although his reformist intentions were not as clear-cut as they seem to us today (Stange, "Jacob Riis" 296-97) and although he also

was known to have staged some of his images, it needs to be emphasized that the effect of his photographs was not just due to their subject matter of utter poverty and destitution, but also to the fact that the audiences were simply not used to such views, especially in the case of images taken inside buildings. The interiors he photographed, for example, were actually characterized by their darkness – in this case, the flash completely distorted this impression.[4] But the result was conceptually important: It revealed the chaos, the dirt, the cramped conditions, the forlorn faces of the inhabitants, and it made up in suggestion what it lacked in other sensory experiences, such as odor or noises.

Today, we generally recognize Riis's photographs as highly influential for the whole genre of reform photography (Hales 173-74), but from the perspective of media history and intermediality the individual steps of this development deserve some scrutiny. Several of Riis's artistic choices and pioneering practices relied also on the possibilities afforded by technological innovation. As Peter B. Hales has shown, Riis and other photographers both struggled with and exploited new inventions, whether on the level of taking pictures or of printing and reproducing them. Above all, Riis's practical adoption of flash-photography contributed to a separation between Riis and the existing visual traditions, as summed up by Hales: "The split between the idealistic gouache of things as they should be and the glare of the *Blitz* on things as they were is crucial to an understanding of Riis's work" (175). The first critical reactions testify to the revolutionary impact of *How the Other Half Lives*, even though out of 43 illustrations 28 were etchings based on Riis's photographs, and only fifteen were actual halftone reproductions of the photographs. These illustrations in the first edition were enough, however, to provoke strong, both positive and negative critical reactions (Hales 179). In fact, in the second edition of *How the Other*

[4] As Peter B. Hales writes: "As a result [of the powerful flash] the surface of things yields data Riis himself probably couldn't have guessed were there until he saw the proof prints" (194).

Half Lives the publishers (Scribner's) experimented further with the illustrations, as Bonnie Yochelson reports:

> Perhaps Scribner's was reacting to the criticism that *How the Other Half Lives* was illustrated by poorly printed pictures from instantaneous photographs. It was attracted to the cost-effectiveness of using halftones made directly from photographs, but was struggling with the aesthetic risks of the new, still primitive medium. (Yochelson 206)

The conflicts between innovation, reform, business considerations, and artistic choices created a representation that lay outside the coordinates of certain habitual expectations and thus led to visual effects that were literally 'too close for comfort.' This kind of "proximity" can manifest itself in shock and disgust – but can also be overcome by the development of new perception habits.

In her study *Picturing Poverty: Print Culture and FSA Photographs*, Cara A. Finnegan delineates some other strands of these traditions. The representation of destitution battled with a specific and controversial problem: the distinction between the "deserving" and the "undeserving" poor. In the context of the culture of meritocracy, which motivated the myth of the "American Dream" even before the term existed, poverty was often treated as the result of an individual moral flaw, so that the respective poor person was seen as not worthy of society's charity (Finnegan 10). In particular, Finnegan discusses the next big step in the history of poverty representations taken during the Great Depression, when – funded by the Farm Security Administration of President Roosevelt's Works Progress Administration employment program – otherwise unemployed professional photographers created a visual record of the hardships of many Americans. Several of these images have become "American icons" (Rieser), while the problems of the power imbalance between potentially self-interested observers and the dignity of the humans in front of the lens have also been explored (Böger; Fluck; Lemke; Stott). Moreover, it became clear that,

although the FSA claimed to be producing a photographic record of the "deserving" poor, there were also some ambivalent reactions and expressions of doubt with respect to the assertion that the FSA photographs were "typical" and not just selected as the most extreme examples for the creation of a desired political effect (Finnegan 19). Nevertheless, the persuasive force of the right kind of photograph for bringing about social change seemed immediately obvious to many, for example the young African American photographer Gordon Parks, who joined the FSA in 1941: "I saw that the camera could be a weapon against poverty, against racism, against all sorts of social wrongs" (qtd. in Puskar 169).

Still, the moral question of what it means to "use" people and their individual life stories as objects of study or as parts of an ideological argument cannot be entirely dismissed with the argument of good intentions. This dilemma weighed particularly heavily on James Agee's conscience while he was working with Walker Evans on various journalistic projects. As Carol Shloss claims in her study *Invisible Light: Photography and the American Writer*, the representation of human destinies in James Agee's and Walker Evans's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941) has by now become a "central document – perhaps the central document – of art's struggle with social responsibility during the Great Depression" (196). The moral challenge relates to the thin line between voyeurism and artistic ambition, on the one hand, and selfless documentation with only the interest of the photographed persons in mind, on the other. Although one might assume that the people who were photographed may have legitimately hoped that being photographed will make their poverty and utter want generally known and might thus result in some kind of help, there is no record of any kind of direct positive impact of the book or other representations on the lives of the photographed that I have been able to identify.[5]

[5] There is more evidence to the contrary, see, e.g., Maharidge and Williamson. When Agee and Walker first met the families they ended up writing about, there was some expectation on the husbands' side that they were involved in

Although Agee recorded his compunctions, he himself idolized the status of Walker Evans's photography, likening Evans's camera to an "ice-cold eye […] incapable of recording anything but absolute, dry truth" (211). Such a position is easily refutable, as there is never a disinterested view. In his article "Poverty and Recognition in American Photography," Winfried Fluck deconstructs the notion that the photographs of the Farm Security Administration during the Great Depression are uniquely truthful. Fluck sums up his understanding of such "aestheticization of poverty" as follows: "a redefinition of the poor in terms of a pastoralism that draws new inspiration from a modernist search for authenticity" (80). For Fluck, an essential part of this modernism is a lack of "decoration, false ornaments, or other forms of artful deception" (81).

Whether Fluck rejects the modernist tenet that decoration equals deception and unnecessary embellishment, or whether he just criticizes the instrumentalization of the poor for the modernist agenda of what he calls a "programmatic dehierarchization" (82), his argument has a direct link to a central point of Sally Stein's dissertation *The Rhetoric of the Colorful and the Colorless: American Photography and Material Culture Between the Wars* (1991). Stein argues that most photographers (there were a few exceptions) employed by the Farm Security Administration rejected the use of color in their photography because of its association with advertising and commercialism, and thus "conformed to an anti-modern, 'pastoral' ethos" (*The Rhetoric* 341). Stein's study makes a very good case for the historicity of any interpretation of images because she also mentions advertising theory's original skepticism towards images as being too close to "all forms of pleasure, spectacle, of what in the advertising trade was known as 'display,' in favor of techniques that seemed to operate in a direct cause-and-effect manner" (11). This reservation was, as she also shows and we can still experience in our everyday lives, later

some kind of out-relief. As Maharidge and Williamson write: "It's not known if the journalists did anything to correct this misconception" (20).

completely abandoned. But the most important part of Stein's thesis shows that photography, at least photography created with artistic ambition by professional photographers, did not just favor black-and-white photography but even consciously *disavowed* color photography:

> At the risk of mixing metaphors, it could be said that thirties black and white photography tended to muffle the din of commerce by nullifying the impact of color. The strain of desire for pleasure and change was virtually (and virtuously) eliminated from documentary's field of vision. (Stein, *The Rhetoric* 191)

The case of color v. black and white for the large-scale documentary effort of Great Depression photography is complex, as it needs to take into consideration various other constraints, both technological and economic. For example, although Roy Stryker, the chief of the FSA photographic operations, tried to introduce more color photography into the public record of the Great Depression, he encountered strong resistance from editors in whose eyes "these early FSA color documents never warranted the extra printing cost" (Stein, "Toward a Full Color" 16). Still, as Stein also argues, Stryker's conviction that the "cumulative file would be an invaluable historical source" indeed led to our contemporary study of the color documentation of the Great Depression. In short, the privileging of monochrome photography over color prints on a larger scale was certainly also a question of material cost. Nevertheless, from an analytic (i.e., not habitual or economic) point of view it remains astonishing that a genre of representation that claims to be "documentary," that is, directly reflecting the lived reality of ordinary people, so readily disposed of such a large and unavoidable part of experience as color.

Stein calls the use of black-and-white photography in the documentary style "tautological": She argues that once a certain number of monochrome photographs had gained publicity, they became not just pointers to individual situations and events but also markers of a style leading to

a 'documentary effect.'[6] Thus, what used to be the result of a negative choice (i.e., avoiding association with commercialism and advertising, or rejecting additional cost) became an essential, foregrounded, and positive part of the visual rhetoric, also influencing the editorial decisions of magazines (Stein, *The Rhetoric* 207). Stein further refers to a number of contemporaneous examples that showed a "philosophic" and ultimately male, elitist rejection of color, and she closes her study with an indictment of those intellectuals who encouraged "mythic transformations of poverty into images of purity" (*The Rhetoric* 3). Although Stein places this discourse of "purity" firmly into the historical context of the US-American culture of advertising and its visual discourses, the rejection of color on the grounds that colors are effeminately "frivolous" has a long tradition in Western art. I will return to this point in the final part of this paper.

Within the context of the Great Depression, most scholars discussing the representation of poverty during this era do not seem to miss color in documentary renderings of "the familiar, the real, the actual" (Finnegan xiii). Canonical studies of the era's photographic record by Stott (1986) and Trachtenberg (1989) take it for granted that the overall impression of the era is monochrome. Whether this was the result of aesthetic preference or a lack of critical interest might be the topic of another study, but the lacuna begs the question: What *was* the color of poverty during the Great Depression? In the wake of Sally Stein's discoveries, the archives have divulged most of this polychrome record, and with the publication of books such as *Bound for Glory: America in Color, 1939-1943*, the images are now even available in print format. Nevertheless, Stein can claim as late as in 2015 that there is still no place for color photography from the Great Depression era:

> Although increasingly accessible in a variety of publications, as well as online, these images even now tend to spawn disproportionate expressions of shock. Maybe the reason is simple: for those with only secondhand 'postmemory' of the Great Depression's widespread and

[6] With many thanks to Nassim Balestrini for suggesting this term, which foregrounds the conceptual gap between programmatic rules and the actual manifestation and reception of anything intended as "documentary."

> sustained anxiety about economic security and social status, a world infused with color is counterintuitive. (Stein, "Toward a Full Color" 16)[7]

In spite of Stein's argument that, up till today, the photographic record and thus postmemory of the Great Depression have been dominated by monochrome impressions, the role of colors was not entirely ignored even at the time. Beside the existing photographic record, we can also find the occasional written commentary on this, for example by Margaret Bourke-White:

> As we penetrated the more destitute regions of the South, I was struck by the frequent reminders I found of the advertising world I thought I had left behind. Here the people really used the ads. They plastered them directly on their houses to keep the wind out […]. The effect was bizarre. And inside, the effect was equally unexpected. The walls from floor to ceiling were papered in old newspapers and colorful advertising pages torn from magazines. (Bourke-White, in Bourke-White and Caldwell 128)

Bourke-White, whose *You Have Seen Their Faces* (1937, with texts by Erskine Caldwell) belongs to the best-known photobooks of the era, has been celebrated, but also criticized, for her unflinching approach to the people she portrayed. Among others, James Agee blamed her for exploiting underprivileged people (Goldberg 228). It is true that Bourke-White did not exhibit the restraint of Walker Evans, but more recent critics have come to see her perspective as allowing for more actual recognition of her photographic objects' individuality and also their emotional state (Rabinowitz 150-52). The quotation above from her memoirs complements Sally Stein's theories about the antagonistic culture of consumerist advertising. Bourke-White describes here her astonishment in the face of the unexpected appearance of the colorful advertising world on and in the houses of the poor. From her point of view, especially as someone who was familiar with consumerist ideology in advertising (Goldberg 140), the adjective "bizarre" might be appropriate.

[7] The term "postmemory" was first introduced by Marianne Hirsch (1997) to describe memories of, mostly traumatic, events that are not based on the first-hand experience of these events, but on stories, photographs, and other channels of mediation.

But such a choice of words betrays her own aesthetics, tastes, and expectations, which all marked her as an outsider and member of a privileged class. If anybody had asked the inhabitants of these houses why they were using these advertising materials, they would not have used the word "bizarre" to describe the intended effect. From a functional point of view, the ads, printed on paper, had a specific, historically established function. Poor people, such as pioneers, builders of log houses, tenant farmers had long used newspapers to insulate their dwellings. But there was also an additional function associated with this kind of tapestry: The newspapers, and especially the ads, were decorative ornaments, or "pretty," and available at very little or no cost (Peterfy 2011).

Fig. 1. Hine, Lewis. *Scott's Run, West Virginia. Employed miner's family – Sessa Hill*, 1937. Still Picture Records Section, Special Media Services Division, National Archives and Records Administration, https://catalog.archives.gov/id/518391. Accessed 28 Aug. 2022.

This photograph was taken by Lewis Hine; it is in black and white, and we have to *imagine* that bits of this improvised wallpaper were probably made up of color prints. Bourke-White's retrospective memories furnish a "missing link" in the history of the documentary thirties: they remind her readers that the black-and-white postmemory of the Great Depression is the result of a very specific mediation. But while Bourke-White's observation in her memoirs must count as rather marginal in the corpus of texts about the Great Depression, in Walker Evans's and James Agee's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* we have a canonical example presenting the same kind of corrective to the monochrome photographic record, not in the photographic material but in the text. Surprisingly, as already mentioned, Agee's verbal descriptions have never been "seen" as standing in an intermedial conflict with Walker Evans's photographs: The powerful impact of the photographic record in this book is still monochrome. This includes the considerable scholarship about the aspect of intermediality in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, where the "documentary" style of the book is generally seen as defining the black-and-white postmemory of the era. Thus, even in recent articles dealing with problems of representation and intermediality, the question of the place of color in a supposedly realistic and/or documentary work does not receive any critical attention.[8] A compounding explanatory factor for this critical blind-spot is Agee's own explicit and programmatic privileging of photography, in particular of Walker Evans's photographs: "If I could do it, I'd do no writing here at all here. It would be photographs" (Agee and Evans 13).

Textual Reference to Color in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*

When it comes to the representation of poverty (or any other subject that is associated with victimhood), the position of the person communicating on behalf of the victim is ethically

[8] Cf. otherwise highly interesting discussions (Cosgrove; Fluck; Lehtimäki; Rabinowitz; Reed) but also a canonical work such as William Stott's *Documentary Expression and Thirties America* (1986).

precarious. Any semblance of voyeurism or of self-interest (such as artistic vanity or potential material gain) might diminish the credibility of the creator of the representation (Szalay 25). Agee was acutely aware of this when he wrote about his observations while living with the objects of his scrutiny, just as he felt the responsibility of his task to create a text that was truthful, based on "discerning" and "perception" (Agee and Evans 11). At some point in his "Preamble" he uses an example to clarify how he feels this "perception" works in his case: He asks his readers to sit very close to a loudspeaker, turn it all the way up, and listen to music:

> Concentrate everything you can into your hearing and into your body. You won't hear it nicely. If it hurts you, be glad of it. […] Is that what you hear pretty? or beautiful? or legal? or acceptable in polite or any other society? (Agee and Evans 15-16)

The answer is, of course, no; anything perceived at such close proximity has to dispense with enjoyment – aesthetic or otherwise. Michael Staub (1988) discusses Agee's "torment" to do justice to the demanding task at hand as the foregrounding of meta-level reflections about the nature of documentary representation and its reception. But Agee also thinks about the effect of his writing, and his only excuse for doing it is that he expects to fail:

> As it is, though, I'll do what little I can in writing. Only it will be very little. I'm not capable of it; and if I were, you would not go near it at all. For if you did, you would hardly bear to live. (Agee and Evans 13)

Again, he employs a metaphor of proximity and refers to the effect of such proximity. As readers, we have to do with his, in his eyes, "defective" text. Although he constantly thematizes his shortcomings, in the end, he succeeds in giving his readers otherwise inaccessible information about the people he encountered. Agee's second-best solution includes minute descriptions of his surroundings, including the one aspect that Evans's photographs completely miss out on: color.

Some of the most famous photographs in the book are portraits, which are generally highly esteemed and considered works of art in their own right, in the sense of Lehtimäki's praise: "The subtle but marked aesthetic composition of the photographs adds dignity and strength to Evans's subjects" (69). Irrespective of the criticism that it is exactly this kind of aestheticization that is problematic because it reflects the tastes of a pastoral sensibility, as Fluck has argued, it is only in Agee's descriptions that we can learn about the colors of these people's world. Agee observes, for example, a young African American couple walking down the road:

> He was in dark trousers, black dress shoes, a new-laundered white shirt with lights of bluing in it, and a light yellow, soft straw hat with a broad band of dark flowered cloth and a daisy in the band; she glossy-legged without stockings, in freshly whited pumps, a flowered pink cotton dress, and a great sun of straw set far back on her head. (Agee and Evans 40)

There is no identifiable photograph of this couple in the book – in fact there is not a single photograph showing an African American person. But even if there were one, it would not render the colors of the scene, which convey the sense of style and the importance of the occasion of the couple's walk. Later, as part of the same situation, Agee expects Evans to turn up and take photographs or, as Agee puts it, to "do what he wanted whether he had permission or not" (Agee and Evans 41). Agee, however, is very conflicted about the encounter, and he worries that he might have embarrassed, even frightened this couple by following and observing them (41; see also Dorst 49). But by noticing and then describing various details of their individuality, including the cheerful "flowered" patterns of the fabrics, donned for a festive occasion, Agee creates a kind of atmospheric proximity that could not be transmitted in a black-and-white photograph.

A surprisingly large number of the photographs in the book are of houses and of shacks, many of them added by Evans in the second edition of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* in 1960, after Agee's death (Trachtenberg 74). This in itself is information that calls into question the

precise collaborative nature of the book – especially given the already mentioned dominant visual record of the photographs. Significantly, Agee also describes several houses in great detail. For example, he writes about the porch and the front of "The Gudger House":

> Three steps lead down at center […] Just below and beyond it is a wide flat piece of shale the color of a bruise …This piece of land … its dead red yellowness glows quietly, a look of fire in sunlight […] But here […] stands up, on its weak stem, one fainting pale magenta petunia, which stares at its tired foot. (Agee and Evans 139-40)

This quotation emphasizes the colors of the scene, and it is full of information that Evans's photographs cannot deliver. Additionally, it has a poetic quality, invoking certain associations, connotations, and symbolic categories. When Agee says that a piece of shale has the "color of a bruise," this is not just a random physical description of a material object. A bruise results from an injury, and by using exactly this word, the description becomes evocative of the whole existential fragility of the farmers who live in this house. To see the land in terms of "dead red yellowness" and "fire" is to conjure up devastation by heat and also, possibly, an association with inferno and trials of hellfire. The magenta petunia seems to try to offer some resistance against all these tribulations, but it is "fainting," "pale," and "tired," – and thus hardly a match against the forces surrounding it.

Similarly, when Agee talks about the interiors of the houses of the families, which he also does extensively, he uses a very deliberate, highly poetic vocabulary. The wood and the boards of the house are not just described as brown or grey, but Agee creates a carefully crafted range of word-pictures. The simplicity of one of these houses is associated with "Doric architecture," and although the homestead is celebrated for the typical straight lines and simple angles of this style, the description is extravagant, almost ecstatic in its asyndetic elaborateness:

> […] in full symmetry of the sun, the surfaces are dazzling silver, […] at night, the balanced masses, patient in the base world, from rain, out of these hues of argent bone the colors of agate, the whole wall, one fabric and mad zebra of quartered minerals and watered silks. (Agee and Evans 146)

This description is not reflected in any of the most likely corresponding photographs that we can find at the beginning of the book (significantly, there are no captions or references to individual photos in the text). The hyperbolic, colorful, highly ornamental style stands in a strong contrast to the restraint of the photographs. There is a sense of splendor, of the exotic even, that has the character of a secret, arcane knowledge about this house. The emotional involvement betrays intimacy – which mirrors such an intense personal proximity that it constantly feels too intrusive, for which Agee uses the word "spying" (125). But, given the metaphor of the loudspeaker, the effect is certainly consistent with Agee's pronouncements to get as "close" as possible, even if the experience hurts.

That Agee's descriptions generally do not follow the principle of Evans's purity and restraint becomes probably most obvious in the following three-page long passage, from which I can only quote here selectively:

> The Ricketts are much more actively fond of pretty things than the other families are, and have lived here longer than they have, and in obedience of these equations the fireplace wall is crusted deep with attractive pieces of paper into the intricate splendor of a wedding cake or the fan of a white peacock: calendars of snowbound and staghunting scenes pressed into bas-relief out of white pulp and glittering with a sand of red and blue and green and gold tinsel, and delicately tinted; other calendars and farm magazine covers or advertisements of doglove; the blesséd fireside coziness of the poor; indian virgins watching their breasts in pools or paddling up moonlit aisles of foliage; fullblown blondes in luminous frocks leaning back in swings, or taking coca-cola through straws, or beneath evening palmleaves, accepting cigarettes from young men in white monkey-coats, happy young housewives at resplendent stoves in sunloved kitchens, […], happy or mischievous or dog-attended or praying little boys and girls, great rosy blue-eyed babies sucking their thumbs to the bone in clouds of pink or blue […] kittens snarled in yarn, or wearing glasses, or squinting above pink or blue bows […] color photographs of summer salads […] young couples admiring newly acquired brown and brocade davenports. (Agee and Evans 199-200)

My chosen images from the extensive list focus on motives containing explicit color terms or objects that are connected with generally agreed-upon colors. In the book, the list is much longer, and many of the described items could be colorful, but are not necessarily so. Readers might be tempted to just skim over the inventory after the first page. But this would disregard Agee's explicit directions. By following Agee's eye from one item to the next, we become aware of every snippet that will then build up to form a most accurate impression. Discussing the essence of realism in Agee's work, T.V. Reed compares it to a kind of "Cubist sociology" (162). For Reed, Cubism implies a multiplying of approaches to the objects of study over time. Additionally, I see in this highly apt intermedial reference to Cubism also an emphasis on a technique that spurns the single, vanishing-point perspective of photography. Finally, making sure to include also the evocation of individual colors (whether explicitly present or just implicitly there) Agee creates with all this informational "noise" another manifestation of the kind of proximity which he demands at the beginning of his book when he invokes the image with the loudspeaker. I assume that Agee's ideal reader would be able to immerse himself or herself into the world of the tenant farmers to a degree that must be characterized as too intimate, too embarrassing, too intrusive.[9] This kind of proximity hurts because with every detail, Agee transforms the reader from a sympathetic onlooker into a spy and voyeur – which are both terms Agee used for himself in the book (for a discussion of voyeurism, see Rabinowitz; Szalay 25).

Surprisingly, Agee writes in a footnote that he thinks the objects would be "much better recorded in photographs for which there is not room in this volume" (Agee and Evans 201). This is a strange explanation: Why is there no "room" for these? And how can he avoid the fact that his description is so much closer to the actual experience than a black-and-white photograph,

[9] T.V. Reed talks about Agee's listing of extensive detail as a kind of ironical statement on the fact that the book was marketed as "sociology" (164).

including as it does the perception of color, and thus is full of suggestions and associations about the inner lives of the people who hung them up? In spite of Agee's regretful statement, we can find one photograph of a decorated fireplace in the book:

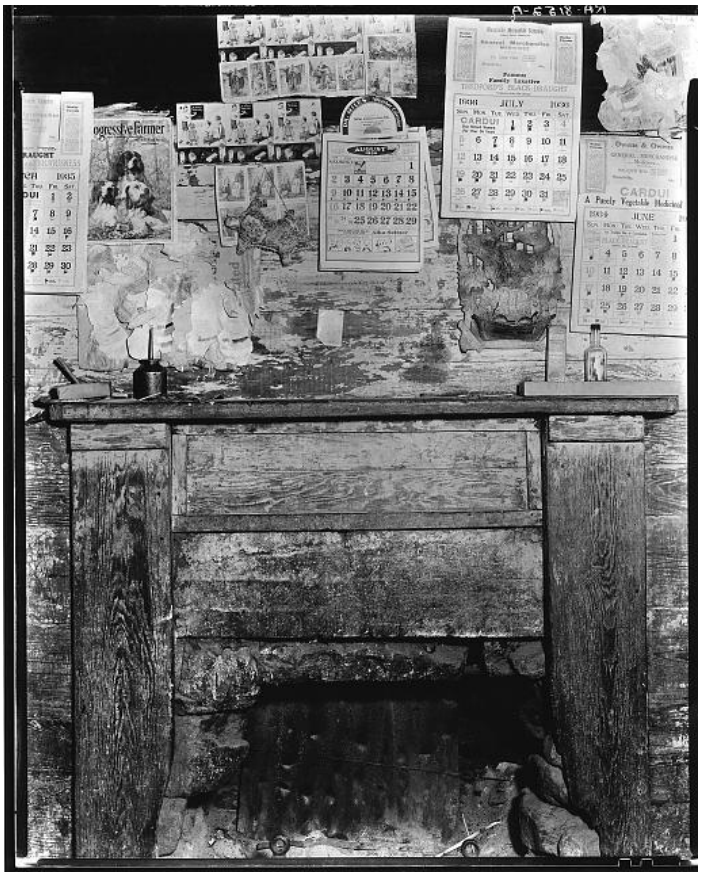

Fig. 2. Evans, Walker. *Fireplace with Pictures Above Mantle in Frank Tengle's Home, Hale County, Alabama,* 1936. Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, https://www.loc.gov/resource/fsa.8c52260/. Accessed 28 Aug. 2022.

In the photograph, which was only added to the second edition of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* in 1960, after Agee's death, some of the grey gradation appears like dirt, not a possible color, and thus certainly does not convey the impression of "attractive pieces of paper." Still, many of these prints would have been exactly the kind of advertising that, according to Sally Stein, the photographers of the FSA rejected as part of the gaudy, superficial commercial culture of the time,

and that Margaret Bourke-White described as having a "bizarre" effect (see above). Agee on the other hand, interprets the use of this collection as part of an active interest in decoration, and thus conveys a true interest and sympathy for the perspective of the tenant families. Some of the cuttings from magazines certainly carried escapist potential for the inhabitants, but Agee recognizes and respects them also as expressions of an aesthetic preference. Significantly, he does not call this wall rendered into a scrapbook "bizarre," as Bourke-White did, but simply reports on the ornamental choices of the inhabitants, without any ironical distancing. He talks about this also in context with another house, quoting Mrs. Gudger:

> The only direct opinion I got on the houses as such was from Mrs. Gudger, and it was with the tears coming to her eyes: 'Oh, I do hate this house so bad! Seems like they ain't nothing in the whole world I can do to make it pretty.' (Agee and Evans 210)

Especially in the light of some of the photographs of the interiors, we can see Mrs. Gudger's statement as a corrective to the aestheticization of poverty.[10] By quoting Mrs. Gudger directly, Agee conveys here valuable information about the aesthetic needs of somebody who is forced to live in dire poverty and deprivation. Taken together with the description of the wall decoration in the house of the Rickett family, Agee's writing style tries to avoid any potential middle-class "othering."

Placing the monochrome photographs beside descriptions using explicit color terms is interesting in itself, but in combination with Agee's meta-level reflections on the problems of representation through language (as opposed to the supposedly direct, because indexical medium of photography) it is also rather bewildering. There is only a paradoxical conclusion to be drawn

[10] While Stein mentions this statement in her dissertation, she does not give credit to Agee for his efforts to document some of this "prettiness" in his text, and quotes only those descriptive passages that support her argumentation. Stein misses a chance here to acknowledge Agee's contribution to a more colorful historical record of the Great Depression, albeit only in writing (Stein, *The Rhetoric* 345-46).

from the examples above. In spite of his repeated meta-level statements about the superiority of photography over textual descriptions, Agee's textual performance literally tells another story. Thinking of photobooks not just in the sense of media combination, but also of media change (Rajewsky 55), Agee's representation is more documentary in the sense that it addresses also many aspects of the world of the farmers that the monochrome photographs semiotically cannot represent, for example, color. Although this is just one aspect beside others, such as odor or sound, which are all part of Agee's interpretation of a "documentary poetics,"[11] it is the aspect of color as evoked in the text that stands in intermedial contrast to the photographs. Agee's text becomes a counterweight to the power of the stunning black and white aesthetic of Walker Evans' photographs within *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, and to the general 'postmemory' of the Great Depression as a monochrome universe.

"Proximity" and "Distance" in Representations of Poverty: The Role of Color in Text and Image

At the beginning of my essay, I quoted David Peeler's statement about the abstraction that he sees in black and white photographs. Later in his text, he also refers to color photography:

> Toward the decade's end, they made a few experimental color pictures that are much weaker than their earlier works. Though depicting virtually the same people and places, the color pictures are neither glum nor heroic, but seem instead merely ordinary and familiar. (Peeler 96)

Here we encounter the situation already described by Sally Stein in her dissertation, or in her more recent article, in which she identifies an undue reduction (resulting in a retrospective, circular

[11] In his "Preamble," Agee requires the reader to imagine that they are sitting very close to a speaker so that what they hear is actually painful, while he also alludes to other sensory experiences: "If I could do it, I'd do no writing here at all. It would be photographs; the rest would be fragments of cloth, bits of cotton, lumps of earth, records of speech, pieces of wood and iron, phials of odors, plates of food and of excrement" (Agee and Evans 13).

judgment) of the photographic record of the Great Depression ("Toward a Full Color" 16). I agree with her, but for a fuller historical overview, the field of study should be even wider. Starting with the already presented case study, I suggest it is not just color photography that deserves further exploration, but the representation of color in texts in the sense of "literary visuality" (Isekenmeier 325)" or "readerly visualization" (329). Individual instances of visualization, in turn, need to take into account internal relations of color concepts in the work as well as interpretations of color from other media, so that we can talk about a phenomenon of intermediality here.

Most importantly, we have to acknowledge the ways the overall relevance of "color" changes when references to it appear in different media. In many traditional studies of intermediality, the focus is on texts and images with semantic content and referentiality: Such and such a text or image represents *something* or symbolizes *something*, and the theories are concerned with the question of how this semantic content or meaning-making process is expressed in another medium or in a different system of communication. But with respect to color, the demands on the interpreter become even more challenging. On the one hand, the world as such is colorful without intentional meaning, in the sense that, for example, a rainbow does not "mean" anything in nature beyond being the result of a specific physical phenomenon. In a visual representation it will mean something in most cases, but not *necessarily* so (when it is used simply as an ornament or flourish, as a "pretty" detail in a child's drawing, for example, or in news footage where the rainbow is completely accidental). When it comes to texts, however, any reference to a rainbow is essentially *always* meaningful and thus open for interpretation – even if it is just used to illustrate the pathetic fallacy, i.e., when the rainbow *pointedly* does not invoke any of the conventional symbolism associated with it (happiness, hope, queerness, etc.). Similar considerations are valid for the

importance of cultural conventions when defining borders between media, both with respect to their semantic and structural characteristics (Wolf, "Intermediality" 253).

At the same time, staying *within* the representational codes of color, the scholarly consensus is that it is impossible to create a universal taxonomy: "The sheer multiplicity of color codes attests to the profound subjectivity of the color sense and its resistance to categorical thought. Color does not conform to one paradigm, chart, or episteme" (Riley 1). Even studies about the semantics of color terms are dominated by historical and comparative approaches (Rosch; Biggam 8). This is due to the impression that, as John Gage states in his study *Color and Culture: Practice and Meaning from Antiquity to Abstraction*, "there is far more to color than meets the eye" (8). What he means by this is that our habits of visual appreciation are often at odds with objective knowledge of optical (or physical) phenomena. In other words, historical interpretations are more important for representational practices than the actual colors of the physical world. He mentions, for example, the hierarchy of values inherent in certain materials in Renaissance times which meant that the prime meaning of certain colors was not in the optical or aesthetic effect but in the knowledge of its price and value. Attempts to interpret images without the awareness of this hierarchy will lead to readings that are irrelevant at best and misleading at worst (Gage 9).

Since in the natural world colors have clearly a predictable value for survival, cognitive psychologists have also tried to find rules for the functioning of colors with respect to human psychology (Riley 298). There is no room here to discuss all the theories in detail that have been developed, but starting with the earliest reflections on colors by Empedocles and Democritus, we can point to various theories of color in Plato's and Aristotle's works, and even later to Roman theorists (Gage 14-15; Riley 20-21). Although most thinkers considered color an essential feature of verisimilitude, other positions developed as well. Take, for example, Lucretius in his *De rerum*

natura, who thought that colors were secondary or, even worse, just some kind of deceitful camouflage. His argument was based on his observation that blind people do not need color to grasp the world; they can understand everything around them by delineating the contours of things. This observation has been repeated in variations by philosophers, arguing for the superiority of the "line" (Jehle, Steinbrenner and Wagner 7-10). But this fear of color and the conclusion that color is simply secondary or deceitful dismisses the work of artists who use color to express their specific vision. Lucretius's position is just one of the early examples that connects the use of colors to normative and moralistic convictions, either preferring "the line" or "color," and ascribing positions and interpretations to them (Riley 5). The suspicion of colorism has its best-known example in Winckelmann's (and his followers') appreciation of the monochrome world of antiquity, and the shock and disappointment inherent in the realization that the revered sculptured had been painted in gaudy colors (Le Rider 21-22). The reasons for the use and for the rejection of color in cultural contexts are varied throughout the ages and thus obviously not tied to some universal rules of perception. Whatever physiological rules and patterns can be scientifically established, it seems that they are always influenced by historical and cultural factors. In art history, as in literary history, we speak of the impact of traditions or institutions; but more generally, we can also speak of "habit" in the way C.S. Peirce used it: For him, the final interpretant of a sign was a "habit." Peirce's definition can be paraphrased, with Marjorie Miller, as a "network of patterned expectations" (71). In other words, the interpretation of colors in cultural productions, whether in text or image, will always be influenced by their very specific reception situations.

Even Sally Stein's claim that photographers rejected color photography because its decorative and consumerist associations were seen in a feminized context (*The Rhetoric* 176-78)

has precursors in the history of color interpretation. For French theoreticians of the nineteenth century, such as Charles Blanc, color was female and line was male:

> The union of design and color is necessary to beget painting just as is the union of man and woman to beget mankind, but design must maintain its preponderance over color. Otherwise, painting speeds to its ruin: it will fall through color just as mankind fell through Eve. (qtd. in Riley 6).

Stein's conclusion that related considerations (even if not as an explicit consequence but as a typological parallel) also existed throughout the documentary thirties is an interesting observation – especially for readers today who will not readily accept an ideological argument masquerading as universal truth.

With respect to the theme of poverty, the representation of material and spiritual destitution happens almost always from a distance (including temporal distance) and is addressed at outsiders[12] (such as benefactors, politicians, sensation seekers). It follows that the striving for the "documentary effect" is characterized by an effort to overcome this distance and to create a close connection, a proximity. By extending our critical purview beyond the dichotomy "black and white" vs. "color" in photography to the evocation of color in written texts in the sense of "literary visuality" or "readerly visualization" (Isekenmeier 325, 329), we can come to a more nuanced appreciation of what it means to create proximity in a mediated experience. In conclusion, my reflections about the meaning of "color" in photography, in text, and also in intermedial works about poverty, all keep coming back to the necessity of historical and contextual interpretation of color terms and concepts, in the sense of Wittgenstein's statement about the "nature" of color: "And nature here is not what results from experiments, but it lies in the concept of color" (12).

[12] Agee was painfully aware of the problem that the farmers would not be able to afford the book and thus initially urged Houghton Mifflin to publish it on cheap paper (Hersey 8). An additional benefit, to Agee, would have been that the book would not outlast fifty years.

Since a “concept” is always cultural and mediated, it is up to us – readers and critics – to do the interpretative work and to make full use of references to colors in order to get closer to our subjects. The definition of “proximity” and “distance” is therefore not absolute, but always the result of a certain situated reception.

Works Cited

Agee, James, and Walker Evans. *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. 1941, edited by John Hersey. Houghton Mifflin, 1988.

Biggam, Carol Patricia. *The Semantics of Color: A Historical Approach*. Cambridge UP, 2012.

Böger, Astrid. *People's Lives, Public Images: The New Deal Documentary Aesthetics*. Narr, 2001.

Caldwell, Erskine, and Margaret Bourke-White. *You Have Seen Their Faces*. Viking, 1937.

Coleman, A.D. "Mama, Don't Take Our Kodachrome Away." *The American Invention of Our World: Kodachrome 1939-1959,* edited by Els Rijper, Delano, 2002, pp. 8-15.

Cosgrove, Peter. "Snapshots of the Absolute: Mediamachia in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*." *American Literature,* vol. 67, no. 2, June 1995, pp. 329-57.

Dorst, John. "On the Porch and in the Room." *New Critical Essays on James Agee and Walker Evans: Perspectives on Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, edited by Caroline Blinder, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, pp. 41-69.

Fannigan, Cara A. *Picturing Poverty: Print Culture and the FSA Photographs*. Smithsonian, 2003.

Fluck, Winfried. "Poor like Us: Poverty and Recognition in American Photography." *Amerikastudien/American Studies,* vol. 55, no.1, 2010, pp. 63-93.

Fox-Amato, Matthew. *Exposing Slavery: Photography, Human Bondage, and the Birth of Modern Visual Politics in America*. Oxford UP, 2019.

Goldberg, Vicky. *Margaret Bourke-White: A Biography*. Harper and Row, 1987.

Hales, Peter B. *Silver Cities: The Photography of American Urbanization, 1839-1915*. Temple, 1984.

Hersey, John. Introduction. *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men,* by James Agee and Walker Evans, Houghton Mufflin, 1988, pp. 5-14.

Hirsch, Marianne. *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory*. Harvard UP, 1997.

Isekenmeier, Guido. "Literary Visuality: Visibility – Visualisation – Description." *Handbook of Intermediality*, edited by Gabriele Rippl, De Gruyter, 2015, pp. 325-42.

Jehle, Oliver, Jakob Steinbrenner, and Christoph Wagner. "Einleitung." *Farben in Kunst- und Geisteswissenschaften*, edited by Steinbrenner, Jakob, Christoph Wagner, and Oliver Jehle, Schnell & Steiner, 2011, pp. 7-20.

Kemp, Wolfgang. *Geschichte der Fotografie: Von Daguerre bis Gursky*. C.H. Beck, 2011.

Lehtimäki, Markku. "A Cultural Poetics of the Photo-Documentary: James Agee and Walker Evans's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* Revisited." *Intermedial Arts: Disrupting, Remembering and Transforming Media*, edited by Leena Eilittä with Liliane Louvel and Sabine Kim, Cambridge Scholars, 2012, pp. 63-78.

Lemke, Sieglinde. *Inequality, Poverty, and Precarity in Contemporary American Culture*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.

Lefebvre, Martin. "The Art of Pointing: On Peirce, Indexicality, and Photographic Images." *Photography Theory. Vol. 2*, edited by James Elkins, Routledge, 2007, pp. 1-15.

Le Rider, Jacques. *Farben und Wörter: Geschichte der Farbe von Lessing bis Wittgenstein*. Böhlau, 2000.

Maharidge, Dale, and Michael Williamson. *And Their Children After Them: The Legacy of Let Us Now Praise Famous Men: James Agee, Walker Evans, and the Rise and Fall of Cotton in the South*. Seven Stories, 1988.

Miller, Marjorie C. "Peirce's Conception of Habit." *Peirce's Doctrine of Signs: Theory, Applications, and Connections*, edited by Vincent M. Colapietro and Thomas M. Olshewsky, De Gruyter, 1996, pp. 71-78.

"Ministers Not in Favor of Pictorial Aids." *The North American*, [Philadelphia, Pennsylvania] 7 Nov. 1899, vol. 9, *Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers*. https://nl-sub-uni-goettingen-de.ubproxy.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/download/logpdf/nlh-ncn:5DXI-1899-NOV07:LOG_0134.pdf Accessed 18 Dec 2022.

Musser, Charles. *The Emergence of Cinema: The American Screen to 1907*. U of California P, 1994.

Owen, Alex. "'Borderland Forms': Arthur Conan Doyle, Albion's Daughters, and the Politics of the Cottingley Fairies." *History Workshop,* vol. 38, 1994, pp. 48-85.

Peeler, David P. *Hope Among Us Yet: Social Criticism and Social Solace in Depression America*. The U of Georgia P, 1987.

Peterfy, Margit. "Bild, Text, kulturelle Praxis: Zu ikonografischen Konstellation in der Kulturwissenschaft." *Kulturtheorien im Dialog: neue Positionen zum Verhältnis von Text und Kontext*, edited by Oliver Scheiding, Akademie, 2011, pp. 257-79.

Puskar, Jason. "Black and White and Read all Over: Photography and the Voices of Richard Wright." *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal*, vol. 49, no. 2, 2016, pp. 167-83. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/44030590. Accessed 15 Dec. 2022.

Quirke, Carol. *Eyes on Labor: News Photography and America's Working Class*. Oxford UP, 2012.

Rabinowitz, Paula. "Voyeurism and Class Consciousness: James Agee and Walker Evans, 'Let U Now Praise Famous Men'." *Cultural Critique,* vol. 21, Spring 1992, pp. 143-70.

Rajewsky, Irina O. "Border Talks: The Problematic Status of Media Borders in the Current Debate about Intermediality." *Media Borders, Multimodality and Intermediality*, edited by Lars Elleström, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, pp. 51-68.

Reed, T.V. “Unimagined Existence and the Fiction of the Real: Postmodernist Realism in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*.” *Representations,* vol. 24, no. 4, 1988, pp. 156-76.

Rieser, Klaus. “Preface: Icons as a Discursive Practice.” *US Icons and Iconicity*, edited by Walter Höbling, Klaus Rieser, Susanne Rieser, LIT, 2006, pp. 7-16.

Riley, Charles A., II. *Color Codes: Modern Theories of Color in Philosophy, Painting, and Architecture, Literature, Music, and Psychology*. UP of New England, 1995.

Rippl, Gabriele. *Beschreibungs-Kunst: Zur intermedialen Poetik angloamerikanischer Ikontexte (1880-2000)*. Fink, 2005.

Rosch Heider, Eleanor. “Universals in Color Naming and Memory.” *Journal of Experimental Psychology,* vol. 93, no.1, 1972, pp. 10-20.

Shloss, Carol. *Invisible Light: Photography and the American Writer 1840-1910*. Oxford UP, 1987.

Stange, Maren. “Jacob Riis and Urban Visual Culture: The Lantern Slide Exhibition as Entertainment and Ideology.” *Journal of Urban History,* 1989, pp. 274-303.

---. *Symbols of Ideal Life.* Cambridge UP, 1989.

Stein, Sally Ann. *The Rhetoric of the Colorful and Colorless: American Photography and Material Culture Between the Wars*. 1991. Yale University, PhD Dissertation.

---. “Toward a Full Color Turn in the Optics of Modern History.” *American Art,* vol. 29, no. 1, Spring 2015, pp. 15-21.

Stott, William. *Documentary Expression and Thirties America*. Oxford UP, 1986.

Szalay, Michael. *American Literature and the Invention of the Welfare State*. Duke UP, 2000.

Trachtenberg, Alan. “Walker Evans’s Contrapuntal Design: The Sequences of Photographs in the First and Second Editions of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*.” *New Critical Essays on*

James Agee and Walker Evans: Perspectives on Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, edited by Caroline Blinder, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, pp. 71-77.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Remarks on Color*, edited by G.E.M. Anscombe, Basil & Blackwell, 1977.

Wolf, Werner. "Intermediality." *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*, edited by David Herman, Manfred Jahn, and Marie-Laure Ryan, Routledge, 2005, pp. 252-54.

---. "Aesthetic Illusion." *Immersion and Distance: Aesthetic Illusion in Literature and Other Media*, edited by Werner Wolf, Walter Bernhart and Andreas Mahler, Rodopi, 2013, pp. 1-66.

Yochelson, Bonnie. "Jacob A. Riis, Photographer 'After a Fashion.'" *Rediscovering Jacob Riis: Exposure Journalism and Photography in Turn-of-the-Century New York*, edited by Bonnie Yochelson and David Czitrom, New P, 2007, 121-227.