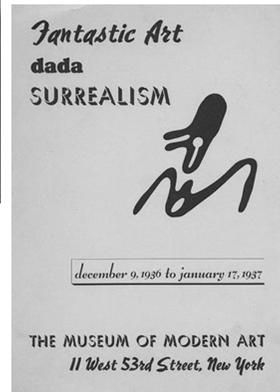
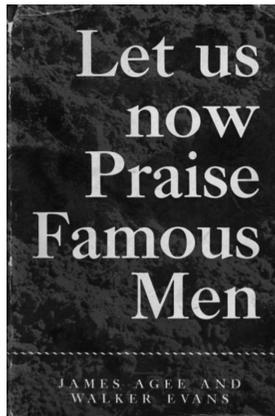




André Breton, father of Surrealism. Image by Henri Manuel, 1927. Wikimedia Commons. Left inset: cover of the first edition, 1941. Right inset: Museum of Modern Art's Surrealism exhibition poster, 1936.



The Influence of Surrealism on *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*

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Abstract: The experimental nature of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* has generated debate among scholars regarding its style, structure, and generic classification. The book has been traded among various literary camps: it is an example of the 1930s documentary genre, a work of modernism, and a classic of literary journalism. Offering a rationale for not only James Agee and Walker Evans's lyrical style but also the book's complicated reception history, this study suggests that *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* is a work of Surrealist art. There is little scholarly work documenting the influence of Surrealism on *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, yet Agee and Evans were intimately connected to the movement. This study examines these connections in addition to the presence of Surrealist artistic practices, such as automatic writing and the treatment of found objects as art objects, in the book. The goal of this research is to show that the way in which Agee and Evans perceived reality was shaped by Surrealism and thus their collaborative work documenting the lives of tenant farmers necessarily reflects a Surrealist turn of mind. More broadly, this research suggests that by widening the cultural context in which *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* is read, new pathways uncovering the importance of literary journalism to multiple facets of U.S. culture, including the visual arts, might be found.

Keywords: literary journalism – documentary – surrealism – *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* – James Agee – Walker Evans

Let Us Now Praise Famous Men is a strange book. It began as an assignment given to James Agee while he was working for *Fortune* magazine. Agee chose photographer Walker Evans to take pictures that would accompany the article. Agee was supposed to report on the conditions of tenant farmers in the South for the magazine's "Life and Circumstances" series. Instead, he wrote a book that includes sexual fantasies about the female tenant farmers, memories of masturbating at his grandfather's house, and a description of overalls that is 536 words long. The original article was rejected by *Fortune*. After it was rejected by *Fortune*, it was rejected by multiple book publishers.¹ As Norman Sims notes, it was only by chance that Houghton Mifflin agreed to publish the book,² and since its original publication in 1941, critics have puzzled over how to make sense of it and what even to call it.

Though Lionel Trilling praises James Agee and Walker Evans's overall achievement, he notes in his 1942 review that "some of the introspective and meditative passages turn furiously purple."³ Alfred Kazin writes that it is the "documentary book written to end all documentary books."⁴ In a similar vein, William Stott observes that *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* is a "classic of the thirties' documentary genre," but "[l]ike many another classic, it epitomizes the rhetoric in which it was made, and explodes it, surpasses it, shows it up."⁵ Miles Orvell suggests that the structure of the book is a "defiant puzzle, a confusion of false starts and premature endings, a trunk full of fake bottoms."⁶ More recently, in her introduction to the *New Critical Essays on James Agee and Walker Evans: Perspectives on Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, Caroline Blinder acknowledges that compared to other documentary work that featured photography and writing, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men's* construction is different: "The photographs preceded the text, they were uncaptioned and less obviously illustrative and the writing, intensely lyrical, discursive, and philosophical, dispensed with any apparent sociological rigor."⁷

It is perhaps because the book's content is so dizzying that it defies the boundaries of genre. Emily Sun writes that the book moves "between such traditions as poetry, autobiography, philosophy, theology, and, of course, journalism."⁸ It is easy to understand, then, how such a book could be co-opted by various literary camps. When *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* is not being read in the context of Depression-era documentary work—one of the more popular contexts in which to read the book—it is read as a work of Modernism. In his book, *American Modernism and Depression Documentary*, Jeff Allred suggests that it is the yoking of high and low culture that demonstrates how *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* participates in the movement of Modernism:

Agee and Evans place their sympathies with the Gudgers' tendency in myriad ways throughout the text: for example, Agee's choice to live at the Gudgers' house throughout his trip; Evans's choice to place photographs of the Gudgers before those of the other two families; and the disproportionate number of pages devoted to descriptions [of] the Gudgers' home and family members. This sympathy between elites and a certain kind of "folk" sensibility is one of the most prominent hallmarks of literary modernism, ranging from Pound's revisions of Provençal and Anglo-Saxon epic poetry to Lorca's experiments with traditional Iberian lyrics in his *Poem of the Deep Song* (1931) to the "renaissances" that wedded "folk" materials to a modernist poetics in African American and Irish writing of the early twentieth century.⁹

The book is also considered a classic of literary journalism. Unlike more traditional works of journalism, Agee "did not want to use the individuals he had befriended to illustrate a social problem. Instead, he emphasized their dignity in the midst of privation, and the complex actuality of their daily lives."¹⁰ The emphasis on dignifying the tenant farmers rather than illustrating a social problem through them led to a more personal journalism, one where Agee's own subjectivity is a key feature. But even under the umbrella of literary journalism the perception of the book's meaning and purpose has changed. In his 2000 book, *A History of Literary Journalism: The Emergence of a Modern Narrative Form*, John Hartsock initially saw Agee's literary journalism in terms of what William Stott called "instrumental" documentary, meaning Agee's writing was designed to "prompt social awareness."¹¹ However, in his 2016 book, *Literary Journalism and the Aesthetics of Experience*, Hartsock changes his position:

His [Agee's] was less a material instrumentality, however, and more a psychological and philosophical instrumentality aimed at trying to help readers (and himself) understand the subjectivities of poor white southern tenant farmers by means of the concrete metaphors reflecting distinctive intersections in time and space. (In a sense, he was attempting in his own way a kind of cultural documentary reflected and refracted through interior consciousness.)¹²

Hartsock's change in position is demonstrative of just how frustratingly ambiguous *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* is, yet his description of Agee's writing as reflecting a more "psychological and philosophical" instrumentality might actually help illuminate the intensely experimental nature of the book.

Agee and Evans were both connected to Surrealism, and the foundations of Surrealism were shaped by a Freudian exploration of and investment in

unconscious desires, the kind of “psychological and philosophical” context Hartsock hints at above. The basic connections between Agee, Evans, and the Surrealist movement are numerous. For example, in a letter to Father Flye¹³ from January 1937, Agee writes that he was “very much moved by the big Fantasy and Surrealism Show.”¹⁴ Agee is referring to the 1936 MoMA exhibit produced by Alfred Barr called *Fantastic Art, Dada and Surrealism* that featured works by artists such as André Breton, Marcel Duchamp, and Salvador Dali. Importantly, Walker Evans’s photographs were also included in this show.¹⁵ Moreover, in 1940, *New Directions in Prose and Poetry* published a section from the not yet published *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* “in the same issue . . . as a section devoted to ‘Values in Surrealism’ that contained ‘A Surrealist Anthology,’ ‘A Surrealist Pocket Dictionary,’ an interview with Nicolas Calas, and essays on surrealism by Calas, Herbert J. Muller, and Kenneth Burke,”¹⁶ indicating that it was not only Evans’s photographs but also Agee’s prose that seemed suitable for publication among other works of Surrealism. Thus, extending Hartsock’s argument, it may be possible to show that Agee and Walker produced a work of cultural documentary that “reflected and refracted” not interior consciousness but rather unconscious desires, and thus find a new framework that helps explain the book’s obtuse nature.

There is little scholarly work that unpacks the connections between Agee, Evans, and Surrealism. Two of the more extensive treatments of the topic are now more than a decade old. In his 2007 book, *Pop Modernism: Noise and the Reinvention of the Everyday*, Juan Antonio Suárez suggests that *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* can be read as a work of Surrealist art, but he does not produce an extensive close reading of the book. His interest is not in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* specifically; instead, he is interested in Agee’s work with film. *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* is thus given only a cursory glance.¹⁷ A year later, Hugh Davis’s book, *The Making of James Agee*, made a convincing case for why *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* exemplifies Surrealist ethnography.

Davis carefully articulates the parallels between *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* and Surrealist writer André Gide’s *Travels in the Congo*.¹⁸ Davis’s focus, however, is primarily on Agee, and his book is meant to serve as a corrective to Agee’s posthumous reputation as a man aloof from the day-to-day influences of his time. Though Davis does discuss the influence of Surrealism on Walker Evans, the photographs Evans took for *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* take a back seat in Davis’s close reading of the book’s text. This analysis is meant to revive the discussion of Surrealism’s influence on *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* and to demonstrate that both Agee’s writing and Evans’s photographs are actual expressions of Surrealist practices. To do this, key features of Surreal-

ism—automatism, the use of dissonance and synesthesia, and the treatment of found objects as art objects—will be explored alongside Agee and Evans's engagement with them in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. This research offers a rationale for the strange nature of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* that takes seriously a formerly neglected cultural influence on both Agee and Evans. The broader implications of avant-garde art's influence on documentary work will be addressed in the conclusion.

Agee and Words: Surrealism's Automatism, Use of Dissonance and Synesthesia

Psychic automatism is a defining element of Surrealism. The poet André Breton is widely recognized as the founder and leader of Surrealism who articulated its core principles in his 1924 *Manifestoes of Surrealism*. Breton's ideas were shaped by the work of Sigmund Freud, and much of what drives the Surrealist movement involves finding ways to access the unconscious. In his 1924 manifesto, Breton wrote:

We are still living under the reign of logic. . . . The absolute rationalism that is still in vogue allows us to consider only facts relating directly to our experience. Logical ends, on the contrary, escape us. It is pointless to add that experience itself has found itself increasingly circumscribed. It paces back and forth in a cage from which it is more and more difficult to make it emerge. . . . Under the pretense of civilization and progress, we have managed to banish from the mind everything that may rightly or wrongly be termed superstition, or fancy; forbidden is any kind of search for truth which is not in conformance with accepted practices. It was, apparently, by pure chance that a part of our mental world which we pretended not to be concerned with any longer and, in my opinion by far the most important part—has been brought back to light. For this we must give thanks to the discoveries of Sigmund Freud. . . . The imagination is perhaps on the point of reasserting itself, of reclaiming its rights.¹⁹

Breton believes experience is suppressed by rationality; experience, in his words, functions like a caged animal. It was Freud's unlocking of the unconscious that Breton saw as the key to reclaiming the power of the imagination and breaking the "reign of logic." Breton did not advocate, though, for a full release into the dream world or a complete abandonment of rationality. Instead, he wanted a "future resolution of these two states, dream and reality . . . into a kind of absolute reality, *surreality*."²⁰ Thus Surrealism can be characterized, in part, as a movement which sought to unleash the power of the unconscious, but which also sought to meld the power of the unconscious with reality. The question then is how, exactly, does one do this? For Breton, the method by which one accesses the unconscious is the defining element of

Surrealism, literally. In the *Manifesto* he writes:

I am defining it [Surrealism] once and for all:

SURREALISM, *n.* Psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express—verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner—the actual functioning of thought. Dictated by the thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern.

ENCYCLOPEDIA. *Philosophy.* Surrealism is based on the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of previously neglected associations, in the omnipotence of dream, in the disinterested play of thought. It tends to ruin once and for all all other psychic mechanisms and to substitute itself for them in solving all the principal problems of life. The following have performed acts of ABSOLUTE SURREALISM: Messrs. Aragon, Baron, Boiffard, Breton, Carrive, Crevel, Delteil, Desnos, Eluard, Gérard, Limbour, Malkine, Morise, Naville, Noll, Péret, Picon, Soupault, Vitrac.²¹

The means of accessing the unconscious involves thinking and writing freely without the imposition of reason, and automatism is how one does this. Breton models his version of automatism off Freud's methods of psychoanalysis: "Completely occupied as I still was with Freud at that time . . . I resolved to obtain from myself what we were trying to obtain from them, namely, a monologue spoken as rapidly as possible without any intervention on the part of the critical faculties, a monologue consequently unencumbered by the slightest inhibition and which was, as closely as possible, akin to *spoken thought*."²² What automatic writing provides is the opportunity to inhabit a certain frame of mind, one where a writer would be particularly open to imaginative possibilities. To engage in automatic writing, Breton writes, "Put yourself in as passive, or receptive, a state of mind as you can. Forget about your genius, your talents, and the talents of everyone else."²³ It is crucial to the process of automatic writing that one remain in this passive, receptive state. This state of mind prevents reason, logic, or anxieties about fame and talent from blocking access to the unconscious and thus allows one to remain entirely open to possibility. This openness is reminiscent of an almost childlike frame of mind, and Breton suggests that Surrealism is an avenue by which one could return to childhood: "The mind which plunges into Surrealism relives with glowing excitement the best part of its childhood."²⁴ Children and childhood became tropes in Surrealism because of their relationship to the imaginative, wild elements of human thought that Breton sought out. David Hopkins observes, "The cult of the child in Surrealism was possibly more extensive and systematic than in any other movement. Essentially, one

can see it as an inheritance from Romanticism, with the child seen as close to the sources of the ‘marvelous’ (Breton’s central measure of poetic/aesthetic value).²⁵ Automatism, then, is more than just an activity or creative writing exercise; it is a frame of mind that allows one to access a source of creativity un-impinged by rationality.

In his journals dating 1936–41, the years he was working on *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, there is evidence that Agee was well versed in the ideas animating Surrealism and that these ideas, in turn, influenced his work. Agee, like Breton, was familiar with the works of Freud and was reading Freud while writing *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*.²⁶ Yet Agee’s connection to the ideas of Freud is more intimately linked with Surrealism when he writes about the production of the book; more specifically, Agee is concerned with the state of mind he must occupy in order to write to his satisfaction. In one journal he writes, “I had better, as a crutch, get myself into as near as I can a baby state of mind. . . . the other end of it is, to become much more deliberate and conscious of what I am trying to do than I am.”²⁷ Agee’s desire for a “baby state of mind” is contrasted with what Agee *least* desires: to become “more deliberate and conscious” as he writes. This mirrors precisely what Breton advocates for automatic writing. In a letter Agee wrote to Father Flye while in Frenchtown, New Jersey—the place where Agee composed much of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*—he writes, “I’m very much more drawn toward innocence, and the relaxed or abandoned brain, and simplicity and childhood, and the so-called . . . ‘sub’-organic, than I’ve appeared by the ways I’ve written; . . .”²⁸ Agee notes here that his writing has yet to reflect his interest in the “abandoned brain,” which is perhaps why, at the end of the first journal entry mentioned above, Agee writes: “End of Alabama book: series of reprises—musical form, elliptic.”²⁹ There is an implicit connection here between Agee’s desire to inhabit a less deliberate frame of mind and an imagined ending of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* that is reflective of this state of mind. The ending of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* would, indeed, take up a kind of musical form that exposes its Surrealist underpinnings.

At the end of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, Agee produces a lengthy meditation on what he believes are the sounds of two foxes he and Walker Evans hear as they lay on the front porch of the Gudger home. The sounds are dissonant and require from Agee a reproduction of such dissonance in order to capture their astonishing effect. Surrealism’s engagement with dissonance took more than one form, particularly because dissonance is more associated with music than with writing. However, Agee describes the fox calls in explicitly musical terms. He compares the effect the sound has on him to “listening to the genius of Mozart at its angriest and cleanest,”³⁰ and writes

of the co-mingling of the two fox calls: “By use only of silences, without changing their stanzaic structure, these two calls went through any number of rhythmic-dramatic devices of delays in question and answer, of overlappings, of tricks of delay by which each pretended to show that it had signed off for the night or, actually, that it no longer existed.”³¹ Agee’s task is to recreate the dissonance he hears, and he does this in a manner quite similar to other Surrealist writers. Peter Stockwell argues the following:

Much surrealist writing depends on the creation and manipulation of *dissonance*. . . .

[S]urrealist writing can approach the effect of synchronous dissonance by piling up quickly successive phrasal clashes so that the sense of temporal ordering offered by sequentiality is undermined. The effect can be compared with the multimodal experience of clashing sounds, language, and images that was often characteristic of surrealist events. At the International Surrealist Exhibition in London (June, 1936), André Breton delivered a lecture on “*Limites non-frontières du Surréalisme*,” while Dylan Thomas toured the room offering teacups of boiled string, asking ‘Do you like it weak or strong?’ while an electric bell was intermittently sounded. This multiple dissonance approaches the synchronous effect, and the rapid succession of phrases makes it very difficult to toggle attentionally between elements.³²

When Agee describes the sounds, he writes, “It was perhaps most nearly like the noise hydrogen makes when a match flame is passed across the mouth of a slanted test-tube. It was about the same height as this sound: soprano, with a strong alto illusion. It was colder than this sound, though: as cold and as chilling as the pupil of a goat’s eye, or a low note on the clarinet.”³³ Agee describes the sound of the foxes in terms that go beyond hearing. The sound feels “cold and chilling” like the look of a goat’s eye; the sound also resembles the “height” of a soprano’s voice. Agee represents the fox calls through an arsenal of senses, including touch and sight, and the effect is similar to Breton and Thomas’s experiment with dissonance in that one’s attention is “toggled” between Agee’s sensory exploits. The difficulty in splitting one’s attention between sensory elements serves as a reminder that:

our cognition of the senses is continuous and linked rather than being separate modules in the mind. . . .

In effect, the dissonant elements occur too fast for each one to be resolved adequately, so the unresolved dissonance from the last few phrases persists in recent memory.³⁴

The rapid piling up of sensory experiences brings the senses together, allowing an experience of the world without the barriers imposed by a discern-

ing, rational mind. Agee continues his descriptions of the sound in this vein: “One time it [the fox call] would be sexual; another, just a casual colloquy; another, a challenge; another, a signal or warning; another, a comment on us; another, some simple and desperate effort at mutual location; another, most intense and masterful irony; another, laughter; another, triumph . . .”³⁵ The dissonant sounds turn into a cognitive dissonance; the meaning of the sounds, their intentions, change and shift as they are being heard. As a result, dissonance produces not a single apprehension of sound but a wide-ranging sensory experience that reverberates through consciousness. Davis suggests that this breaking down of sensory and cognitive barriers is precisely what is occurring in the final section of Agee and Evans’s book: “The foxes’ performance collapses the boundaries between instinct and consciousness, life and art, Agee and Evans, the speaker without words and the listener who hears them.”³⁶ The dissonant sound of the foxes creates the collapsing of boundaries between instinct and consciousness that Agee himself desired and that he recreated in his writing. Readers get close to synchronicity, a collapsing of boundaries, through dissonance in Agee’s contrasting sensory descriptions. In this way, Agee connects the style and philosophy of Surrealism. His use of dissonance manifests a collapsing of cognitive boundaries and demonstrates that his desire to write with an “abandoned brain” and his idea that the “end of Alabama book” should be a “series of reprises—musical form, elliptic” were connected and realized through his writing. This is also the case for Agee’s actual experimentation with automatic writing.

In their collection of Agee’s journals, notes, and manuscripts, Michael Lofaro and Davis provide seven examples of Agee’s automatic writing that were most likely produced in 1936 when Agee was on sabbatical from *Fortune*. This was the sabbatical he took immediately before heading south with Evans to Alabama. Agee does, as Breton outlines in his manifestoes, record whatever thoughts, aural stimuli, and sensations come into his mind. He begins one entry explicitly detailing his task: “Writing first thing comes into my mind. Point being nothing does when you watch for it.”³⁷ Agee acknowledges here that the benefit of automatic writing is that it allows material to come to mind that otherwise would not when you consciously attempt to conjure it. In other places in his automatic writing, Agee demonstrates a compelling awareness of what the practice offers. Consider the following passages: “You lose the gestures of childhood: they return suddenly with gladness, etc. & in dreams. the early gestures of childhood.”³⁸ These passages demonstrate again that Agee was immersed in the practice of automatic writing as well as the theory behind it, specifically the interest in returning to childhood as a source of creativity. Moreover, automatic writing reinforced in Agee the importance

of engaging multiple senses in his writing. For example, in one of his passages of automatic writing, Agee notes the following: “Crooked shore. Crippled shore. Crippling the shore. / Smell of water hits like sound of weltering tin on iron. Taste & quality, dead, of galvanized iron, of Zinc. / Absolutely necessary cut loose from self. Possibly best is to write voluminously & carelessly. Make writing the living & get inside it as you are inside living.”³⁹ Agee’s senses are co-mingling here: the water hits like a sound before its metallic taste is registered. Immediately after, Agee draws a connection to his work as a writer who needs to “get inside it [writing] as you are inside living.” In many of the passages of automatic writing that follow, Agee registers experience in synesthetic terms describing things like “cold flowers,”⁴⁰ and wheels that “delicately taste each other. Wheels taste and turn each other. TASTING THE TIME THEY TURN. . . . THE WHEELS DELICATELY TASTE THE TIME THEY TURN.”⁴¹ After this last passage, Agee recognizes that his senses are working together. He then writes the following: “SIGHT HEARING TOUCH SMELL TASTE.” This is followed by, “TASTING THE EARTH” and “TASTE EXHAUSTION.”⁴² Through the process of automatic writing, Agee connects the power of sensory experience with his task to write *inside* experience, to embody it and not merely to evoke it. His use of synesthesia as a means of manifesting this embodiment is present not only in his automatic writing but also in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*.

One of the more obvious examples of Agee’s engagement with synesthesia in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* is the section Agee dedicates to the odors of the tenant family homes. In this section, though, Agee moves beyond merely describing odors in terms of comparable scents and describes them in terms of their feel. This is reminiscent of the end of the book where Agee describes the sound of foxes as “cold.” He describes the smell of the Ricketts home as hard to get used to because the odors are “sucked into all the wood, and stacked down on top of years of a moldering and old basis of themselves . . .”; the odors of the Woods’ house are “blowsy, moist and dirty”; and the smell of the Gudger home is “younger, lighter.”⁴³ Agee draws on the experience of touch, using words like “stacked” and “blowsy” and “lighter,” to communicate the experience of smell, continuing the use of synesthesia that characterized his automatic writing. These descriptions carry through the entirety of the book. In a list of things that bring Agee joy is “the taste of a mountain summer night.”⁴⁴ The jam he eats at the Gudgers’ house tastes “a deep sweet purple tepidly watered.”⁴⁵ The blue color of George Gudger’s overalls is “delicious.”⁴⁶ Spring water might “break in the mouth like crystals”⁴⁷ and in another instance the taste of water is described as having an “an ugly, feathery, sickening taste.”⁴⁸ This last description is particularly compelling because it

evokes a specific piece of Surrealist art: Meret Oppenheim's *Object*. The work was displayed at the 1936 *Fantastic Art, Dada and Surrealism* show, mentioned in the introduction to this study, that Agee was "very much moved by." Her work has been referred to as a "paradigmatic surrealist object."⁴⁹ Oppenheim's piece is a teacup, saucer, and spoon covered entirely with fur. Oppenheim's *Tasse, soucoupe et cuillère revêtues de fourrure (Fur-Lined Teacup, Saucer, and Spoon)*, 1936⁵⁰ represented Surrealism's interest in taking ordinary, everyday objects and recontextualizing them to reveal unconscious meaning. Heyrman describes the piece as synesthesia literalized: "Oppenheim's [work] makes references to the varieties of sensual pleasure; fur may delight the touch but it repels the tongue. And a cup and spoon, of course, are made to be put in the mouth. It provokes the viewer into imagining what the fur lined cup might feel like to drink from and forces the anti-graceful sensation on a mixture of the senses."⁵¹ Her fur-lined teacup produces contradictory reactions. On the one hand, the fur seems soft and inviting. On the other hand, the fur adorns objects usually made for consumption, thus making the fur seem repulsive when considered alongside the sensation of taste. Will Gompertz argues that "Two incompatible materials have been brought together to create one troubling vessel. Fur is pleasing to touch, but horrible when you put it into your mouth. You want to drink from the cup and eat from the spoon—that is their purpose—but the sensation of the fur is too repulsive. It's a maddening cycle."⁵² The attraction-repulsion one might have to Oppenheim's work testifies to its broader purpose and its importance to the movement of Surrealism. Covering a teacup and saucer in fur is inviting the unfamiliar into the familiar; in so doing, Oppenheim's "*Object* exemplifies . . . Breton's argument that mundane things presented in unexpected ways had the power to challenge reason, to urge the inhibited and uninitiated (that is, the rest of society) to connect to their subconscious . . ."⁵³ Agee's repeated use of synesthesia in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* takes up the Surrealist enterprise of challenging one's perception of familiar, everyday objects through surprising and unexpected sensory combinations.

Agee and Evans: Surrealism's Found Objects

Agee's Surreal descriptions both work with and challenge Walker Evans's photographs. While Evans was as intimately connected with Surrealism as Agee, Agee expresses an implicit anxiety about some of Evans's photographs for which Agee's Surrealist writing functions as a kind of corrective. Critics often read Agee's experimental prose as an effort to match the representational power of Evans's photographs. James Burrows notes the following: "James Agee's dense, intermittently lyrical, occasionally opaque 1941 photo-text *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* . . . has been repeatedly characterized as the

attempt to render in prose the justly famous Walker Evans photographs that open the book.”⁵⁴ However, this assertion overlooks the moments in the text when Agee is critical of Evans’s photography, particularly the family portraits. For instance, Agee imagines how Mrs. Ricketts must feel about the process of having her family documented by Evans. Agee writes, “. . . and Walker setting up the terrible structure of the tripod crested by the black square heavy head, dangerous as that of a hunchback, of the camera; stooping beneath cloak and cloud of wicked cloth, and twisting buttons; a witchcraft preparing, colder than keenest ice, and incalculably cruel . . .”⁵⁵ Evans’s preparation for documenting the family is depicted in distinctly negative terms here: the camera is cold as ice, its structure is terrible, and Evans is the witch beneath the cloak.⁵⁶ Later, Agee’s fear about what will happen after the photographs are taken is made clearer. He writes that the Ricketts, by standing in front of the “cold absorption of the camera,” are laid bare in their “shame and pitiableness” only to be “fried into and laughed at.”⁵⁷ The “cold absorption of the camera” objectifies the Ricketts and they become Other, rendered in a state of alterity. This primes the road for viewers not to empathize with their condition but instead to view it with *schadenfreude*, that is, malicious joy. Though Agee complained about language’s limited ability to justly render reality, Burrows goes on to suggest that Agee contradicts his own statements in the book about photography’s advantage over language:

The critical insistence on the literalness of Agee’s constant complaint that language is not literal enough fails to take account of the fact that the text constantly contradicts its own declared shortcomings: Agee apologizes for being unable to write seriously of bareness and space, before embarking on some of the lengthiest descriptions of emptiness ever published; he insists on the superiority of the camera, only to enumerate precisely those sensations—odors, sounds, tastes, texture—unavailable to photography⁵⁸

Agee’s emphasis on sensation, outlined in the previous section, serves to produce in writing what Agee felt Evan’s portraits could not: the felt, lived experience of the tenant farmers. Interestingly, Agee reserves his critique of Evans’s photography for the portraits Evans took of the family. When it came to the objects Evans documented, Agee is less concerned. At one point, he even defers to Evans’s photographs in place of his own writing. When describing the kitchen of one of the tenant homes Agee writes, “In the opposite side of the kitchen is a small bare table from which they eat; and on the walls, what you may see in one of the photographs.”⁵⁹ This deferring to a photograph without additional comment is unusual in the text and does not occur with frequency. That it occurs around a picture of ordinary, everyday kitchenware is perhaps not coincidental. Evans’s photographing of found

objects link his work in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* most directly with Surrealism, and it is perhaps because of the way in which these photographs evoke the uncanny, embodied world of the tenant farmers that Agee felt more comfortable with them than the portraits.

Other evidence supports the idea that Agee and Evans shared a particular interest in found objects and that they hoped to manifest this interest in projects outside of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. Agee and Evans were both collectors of cultural products: Evans collected postcards and clipped images from newspapers and Agee was interested in crime-scene photographs from detective magazines.⁶⁰ These collections reflected a particularly American spin on Surrealism, one that began with Julien Levy's 1931 show, simply called "Surrealism." Dickran Tashjian observes that "Levy understood that Surrealism, far from being a mere style, required cultural assimilation if it were to take root in America."⁶¹ In order to give Surrealism a specifically U.S. flavor, Levy turned toward "Americana that was surrealist, as evidenced by a 'frieze of negative photostats, a series of shocking cover-page seriocomic collages from the New York *Evening Graphic*, the yellowest of vulgar journalism and incredible Americana featuring the story of 'Peaches' and her 'Daddy' Browning."⁶² Evans had long been a collector of U.S. cultural artifacts, particularly the "penny postcards—the most ubiquitous form of photography of their day By his death, Evans had amassed a collection of over nine thousand cards, a treasure house of American vernacular architecture and anonymous photography."⁶³ In addition to voraciously collecting postcards, Evans composed a "scrapbook of newspaper and magazine clippings . . . , thirty-five loose album pages with the working title *Pictures of the Time*."⁶⁴ The scrapbook includes frequent "pairings of high and low, 'civilized' and 'primitive' images from the pictures press. Evans's album contains clippings from the German illustrated magazine *Der Querschnitt*, which was known for similarly witty juxtapositions of photographs for satirical effect."⁶⁵ In short, Evans's scrapbook reflects the trend of finding the Surreal in the "real." Indeed, when Breton visited Evans in his darkroom and saw "his penchant for torn posters, fragmented words, and junk, Breton declared that he had a surrealist turn of mind."⁶⁶ Agee had plans not only for Evans's collection but also his own, similar collection, though this collection does not survive today.⁶⁷ Davis notes that in a letter to Archibald McLeish in 1938, Agee proposed that he and Evans "be set up to office space and to ease and choice in getting news pictures, COMPLETELY INDEPENDENT of the weekly production of the issue, *and* in our work COMPLETELY INDEPENDENT of detailed responsibility to any editor, for two or, better, three months, as an experimental department."⁶⁸ Agee's idea was that he and Evans could work through the

picture archive at *Life* in a special, “experimental department,” but republish those pictures without their original, familiar context. Though Agee proposed to work at *Life*, he did not want to necessarily work *with* McLeish. Davis points out that in a letter to Evans, Agee writes, “Another thing that ‘occurs’: that a fair way of indicating to them why neither you nor I would give a fuck to work in the Magazine Proper would be to present their looking-over your Scrapbook as is, and my advertising and hate-art similarly arranged.”⁶⁹ Here Agee references his own collection of work, seemingly akin to Evans’s, as evidence that the goal of the *Life* project was radical experimentation with cultural products. The “experimental department” at *Life* never came to fruition, but Agee and Evans were clearly interested in recontextualizing Americana, and the photographs for *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* manifest the growing roots of Evans’s desire to expose the surreality of everyday objects.

Evans: Photography and Surrealism’s Found Objects

Walker Evans had first-hand exposure to the emergence of Surrealism in Paris in the 1920s. His work was also routinely displayed in Surrealist exhibits throughout the 1930s. In 1926, Evans went to Paris to study French at the Sorbonne.⁷⁰ While there, Evans frequented Shakespeare and Company, where Surrealist writers, including André Gide and Kay Boyle, also spent time.⁷¹ During his year abroad, Evans undertook a translation of the Surrealist novel *Moravagine* by Blaise Cendrars, and his translation would eventually be published in *Alhambra*. This is the first time that Evans’s written work appears in print, but it is also the site of his first published photograph. Evans also worked on the translation of another Surrealist writer’s work, Gide’s autobiography *Si le grain ne meurt (If I Die)*.⁷² This is fortuitous because Agee, while writing *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, was reading Gide’s *Travels in the Congo*. Davis argues that Gide’s influence on Agee is one of the reasons *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* qualifies as a work of Surrealist ethnography.⁷³ Evans’s translation of Gide in the 1920s⁷⁴ shows he was also well-versed in Gide’s work, likely even before Agee was. Evans’s engagement with Surrealism moves beyond just a surface-level familiarity with Surrealist writers and artists, though. Like Agee, Evans demonstrated an awareness of and interest in art as the exploration of the unconscious and dreams. In a 1930 letter to his roommate Hans Skolle, Evans writes,

Had a wonderful dream last night. Where in the hell do all those details come from. Really, literature, all the greatest descriptions I know are so much watery smudge to the least of my dreams. I suppose the best thing about dreams is the abolition of time. After one like last night’s I spend the day tasting the tail ends of lovely unearthly moods without a headache. I think my powers lie mostly there, in dreams.⁷⁵

Here Evans acknowledges the power of dreams in a way that echoes the sentiments of Surrealist thinkers, such as Breton, detailed earlier. Moreover, Evans's photography often engages explicitly with the Surrealist concept of "objective chance," which exposed "the uncanny and coincidental manifestation of conscious or unconscious subjective desires in the lived realm."⁷⁶ The manifestation of objective chance came through the exploration of everyday objects which provides a compelling link between documentary work and theories animating Surrealism. For example:

. . . Breton found in the disarray of the local flea market a privileged site for discovering an unexpectedly poetic meaning clinging to objects that had fallen out of current systems of function, value and exchange . . . : "I go there often, searching for objects that can be found nowhere else: old-fashioned, broken, useless, almost incomprehensible, even perverse—at least in the sense I give to the word." The interruption or deflection of an object's initial purpose and commodity value, then, provided the key to its rescue, unlocking something dormant within it.⁷⁷

The objects of everyday life, particularly ones that appeared useless, had revelatory potential when seen or placed in a new context. The task of a Surrealist artist would be to unlock that new context and, in the process, expose the uncanny, extraordinary quality of everyday objects. Throughout his career, Evans undertook this task. In the passage that follows, Evans describes his interest in photographing a dressing table in Mississippi in 1945:

This shows what I call "unconscious arrangement." It's a kind of eternal theme, though I'd never seen it done. Again, it's something I collected. You've got to collect. This is a piece of the anatomy of somebody's living. . . . I was visiting Biloxi. Greek fishermen, shrimp fishermen, lived nearby. Their homes were all together. A friend got me inside. The artist gets rewarded by finding a thing like this. You know that people haven't seen this this way, and here you're able to show it to them, to say "Look at this with me, look at the expression of the value of pictures, the instinctive joy in pictures this dressing table shows." The great simple appeal of the picture, here it is among Greek fishermen, decorating their house with love and excitement, and plain direct pleasure.⁷⁸

Evans notes that what is particularly valuable to him in shooting these domestic spaces is that "people haven't seen that this way," indicating that Evans, like other Surrealists, saw everyday objects, or "found objects," as concealing meaning it was the artist's job to reveal. Evans's exploration of everyday objects also manifested in his series of roadside photographs, particularly his photographs of billboards. Again, Evans took objects otherwise ignored and, through the process of both photographing and editing them, imbued

them with meaning. Commenting on one of Evans's billboard photographs, Rosenheim writes, "Clearly the Surrealists' trick of isolating a form from its natural context also played a part in this study. Photographing the billboard head-on and with the sun high in the sky, he [Evans] flattened the works and their shadows into their work. He eliminated the roadside and all but one feeble cypress tree that emerges from behind the billboard, an ironic token reference to the real world."⁷⁹ In altering the context of an everyday object, Evans's work is directly linked with the work of other Surrealist artists.

Evans's interest in shooting everyday objects and domestic spaces in order to reveal "unconscious arrangements" carries into the photographs he took for *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. Evans's selection of photographs for the book demonstrates that he was uninterested in participating in the more dominant trends of journalistic photography at the time. Rosenheim notes that while Evans "made quick studies of the family engaged in daily farm work, including chopping wood, fetching water from the well, and picking cotton . . . he elected to exclude these images of general agricultural activities from the book's first edition, instead settling on a formal, antijournalistic presentation made up primarily of portraits and interiors."⁸⁰ The interior shots that Evans made reflect the Surrealist interest in everyday objects, and Evans included several photographs that anticipate his 1945 shot of the dressing table in Mississippi. In the Alabama photographs, Evans focuses on the mantle of the Ricketts family home. These photographs show the same kind of Surreal juxtapositions Evans used in his scrapbook collection. In one photograph, the mantle can be seen almost in its entirety, with the wall above the mantle covered in calendars, newspaper pictures, and various other decorative items. In the picture that follows, Evans has zoomed in on the mantle. Rosenheim describes this strange sequence as follows:

In one . . . , a small photograph, its lower left corner clipped off, is centered over the mantelpiece. The flash reflects directly off the picture's glossy paper surface, throwing a white haze over the subject, an elderly woman standing in a field looking directly at the camera. In appearance, pose, and expression she recalls Evan's portrait of Katie Tingle. Curiously, the same snapshot appears in another photograph made outside the house; Evans removed the photograph and nailed it to an exterior wall, once again his background of choice, pairing it with a smaller and even more dog-eared snapshot of four children sitting in the dirt . . . ⁸¹

Taking into consideration the depth of Evans's engagement with the work of Surrealism, the removal of the photograph of the elderly woman and its repositioning alongside the photograph of the children is not nearly as curious as it might initially seem. The recontextualization of found material was not

only something Evans was already doing when he photographed the tenant farmers, but also something that was inspired and informed by Surrealism. The new placement of the photograph is a Surrealist gesture that is revelatory of deeper meaning: that the children playing in the dirt are bound to become the elderly woman as the cycle of tenant poverty continues.

Agee takes a keen interest in the mantel of the Gudger home. Around the objects he nearly obsessively catalogs, Agee creates an almost religious reverence. When Agee is describing the mantel above the fireplace, it falls under a section titled “The Altar.” Similarly, the contents of a table drawer are listed under a section called “The Tabernacle.”⁸² The objects listed under these sections would not ordinarily qualify as special, yet Agee’s careful cataloging and detailing of them, along with giving them a new, religious context, makes them other than what they seem; these objects are an index of the family who keeps them and thus they have a life beyond their use-value. Agee writes:

In the table drawer, in this order:

A delicate insect odor of pine, closed sweated cloth, and mildew.

One swooning-long festal baby’s dress of the most frail muslin, embroidered with three bands of small white cotton-thread flowers. Two narrow courses of cheap yet small-threaded lace are let in near the edge of the skirt. This garment is hand-sewn in painfully small and labored stitchings. It is folded, but not pressed, and is not quite clean.

One plain baby’s dress of white cotton; a torn rag; homesewn, less studiously; folded.

Another, as plain, save for pink featherstitching at the cuffs. Torn, not folded.

Another, thinlined gray-blue faded checks on a white ground. The silhouettes of two faded yellow rabbits, cut out at home, are stitched on the front, the features are x’d in in pink thread. . . .⁸³

Like Evans, Agee is recontextualizing ordinary objects, encouraging readers to see in them the extraordinary way they are seen by the family who owns them. Emily Sun writes that:

The descriptions of both Agee and Evans allow us to see the fireplaces as murals where the members of the families produce collages, where they themselves produce isolatable images.

. . . Perhaps the most suitable captions for them would be: “Look at this with me, look at the expression of the value of pictures” these fireplaces show.⁸⁴

Agee goes beyond just recounting the objects he finds. One of the last items he uncovers in the “tabernacle” is a torn piece of newsprint. Agee cata-

logs this item as he did the others, “[a] scissored hexagon of newsprint,” but takes a step further by actually reproducing the content of the newsprint, including descriptions of images, on the page:

GHAM .NEWS

hursday afternoon, March 5, 1936

Price: 3 cents

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The effect of reproducing the newsprint on the page is that it both looks and reads like a work of poetry. Breton, too, found it possible to create art out of the language of everyday life. In his *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, he writes, “It is even permissible to entitle POEM what we get from the most random assemblage possible (observe, if you will, the syntax of headlines and scraps of headlines cut out of newspapers).” What follows is an excerpt from the “POEM”:

POEM

A burst of laughter
of sapphire in the island of Ceylon

The most beautiful straws

Have faded color

Under the locks

. . . .⁸⁶

Breton’s version might be more organized than the one reproduced by Agee, but they both testify to the way in which the language of everyday life could be, in the eyes of Surrealists, transformed into art. The content of the paper was transformed once by the Gudgers, in their hexagonal cutting and keeping of the paper, and is transformed again by Agee to reinforce, as Sun noted above, the way tenant families produce “isolatable images” in their repurposing of everyday material. Suárez notes that:

Like Evans did in his photographs, Agee delved into the way farmers modified found objects . . . to suit their own purposes and to aestheticize their surroundings. These interventions expressed desires and fears, revealed an entire conception of the world, and bore testimony to the determination to survive and wrench beauty from an inhospitable environment.⁸⁷

It might be the case that the surreal nature of these objects stems originally from the tenant farmers repurposing of them. Yet Agee and Evans both recognize this gesture and emphasize it repeatedly throughout both the photographs and the text, transforming, as do other Surrealist artists, ordinary objects into expressions of human desire.

Afterword: Beyond *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*

After *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* was published, both Agee and Evans continued avant-garde pursuits. After returning from Alabama, Evans started taking photographs in the subways of New York using a camera he concealed in his coat. This project would eventually become *Many Are Called*, and Agee wrote the introduction to the book.⁸⁸ *Many Are Called* can be understood as a response to the portraits Evans took for *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. Agee was not the only one to notice that Evans's portraits leaned more toward the traditional than the avant-garde. Margaret North points out that in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* "compositional choices and visual signs like carried objects or tattered clothing [link the tenant farmers] to traditional portraiture and a traditional subject-artist relationship."⁸⁹ In *Many Are Called*, however, the concealed camera meant Evans's was " 'shooting blind,' guessing the precise composition of his pictures as he took them."⁹⁰ When Evans described his work in *Many Are Called*, he interestingly wrote that it was a "rebellion against studio portraiture. . . . I was angry [he said]. It was partly angry protest—not social, but aesthetic—against posed portraiture."⁹¹ Considering that Evans's photographs for *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* bear some resemblance to studio portraiture, then Evans's rebellion might have been against himself. Implicitly, Evans's work in *Many Are Called* responds to Agee's concern about the photographs of the tenant farmers. Evans relinquishes some of the control he wielded in Alabama in a way similar to Agee's implementation of psychic automatism in his writing. The "passivity and receptiveness" of Evans's camera in *Many Are Called* does with portraits what Evans did with objects in Alabama; they capture "the *unconscious* self: the self that is only perceived by a stranger in passing, the self that never appears in the bathroom mirror but can sometimes be glimpsed in a plate-glass shop window, before you recognize the reflection as your own."⁹² The unconscious arrangements of Evans's domestic interiors find their corollary in the portraits of *Many Are Called*.

One of the projects Agee undertook after *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* was an experimental film called *In the Street*. The film was a collaborative effort between Agee, Helen Levitt, and Janice Loeb. Like *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, the movie is often considered in the context of documentary work. Yet, as Suárez notes,

In the Street is clearly more than straight reportage. . . . [the film] shows that automatic registration yields an undecidable real and that popular practice, even seemingly innocuous children's games, contains undertones of disintegration and fear. . . .

Uncertainty, ambiguity, and a vaguely unnamable excess make the film a record of untutored popular expressiveness *and* a surrealist artifact.⁹³

The “automatic registration” to which Suárez refers comes from the use of hidden cameras which were a key feature of the film's production and provide a path back to the kind of experimentation Evans was undertaking in the production of *Many Are Called*:

[*In the Street*] was shot in East Harlem and on New York's Lower East Side during 1945 and 1946 using hidden cameras and a right-angle view finder, a device that allowed for unobtrusive filming and that had been used by Paul Strand for his pictures of street characters published in *Camera Work* in 1917 and, after him, by two of Levitt's main influences, Ben Shan and Walker Evans.⁹⁴

The automatic registration of the hidden camera, used by both Agee and Evans, might be mistaken for straight reportage, but it was not employed to document reality. It was, instead, an instrument for the expression of a Surrealist belief that reality was a cover for unconscious longings, desires, and fears. The point here is not that Agee and Evans were not documentarians. Instead, the point is to consider more thoroughly what Agee and Evans might have perceived reality to be and what influences shaped the consciousness and unconsciousness of both men. Understanding the connections to Surrealism and the manifestation of Surrealist practices in Agee and Evans's work is one means to this end.

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Notes

- ¹ Sims, "The Discovery of the Depression," 149. Sims notes that Harper and Brothers and three other publishers rejected the manuscript.
- ² Sims, 149. Sims points out that it was through the influence of a Harper editor's wife that Houghton Mifflin eventually agreed to publish Agee and Evans's work.
- ³ Trilling, "Greatness with One Fault in It," 101.
- ⁴ Kazin, *On Native Grounds*, 495.
- ⁵ Stott, *Documentary Expression*, 266.
- ⁶ Orvell, *The Real Thing*, 273.
- ⁷ Blinder, introduction, 1–2.
- ⁸ Sun, *Succeeding King Lear*, 127.
- ⁹ Allred, *American Modernism*, 102.
- ¹⁰ Kerrane and Yagoda, *The Art of Fact*, 417.
- ¹¹ Hartsock, *A History of American Literary Journalism*, 185. See also, Stott, *Documentary Expression*, 238, 240, quoted in Hartsock, 177–78.
- ¹² Hartsock, *Literary Journalism and the Aesthetics of Experience*, 38.
- ¹³ Father Flye met Agee when Flye was a teacher at St. Andrew's and Agee was just nine years old. The two developed and maintained a friendship until the end of Agee's life. In 1962, Father Flye published the letters he and Agee exchanged over the course of their friendship.
- ¹⁴ Agee, *Letters of James Agee*, 95.
- ¹⁵ Barr, *Fantastic Art, Dada and Surrealism*, 4.
- ¹⁶ Davis, *The Making of James Agee*, 108. In the text, the term surrealism appears both capitalized and in lowercase: that is, Surrealism and surrealism. Quotes have been fact checked and where there are inconsistencies across sources, the inconsistencies remain, per the original sources. Within the study, every effort has been made to capitalize Surrealism when the term refers to the movement and to use lowercase when the term refers, not to the movement, but rather to the phenomenon, i.e., surreal, keeping all other mentions lowercase.
- ¹⁷ Suárez, *Pop Modernism*, 237, 240, 250.
- ¹⁸ See Davis, *The Making of James Agee*, particularly " 'Syncopations of Chance': *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* as Surrealist Ethnography," 105–198. See also, Gide, *Travels in the Congo*.
- ¹⁹ Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, 9–10.
- ²⁰ Breton, 14.
- ²¹ Breton, 26 (emphasis in original).
- ²² Breton, 22–23 (emphasis in original).
- ²³ Breton, 29.
- ²⁴ Breton, 39.
- ²⁵ Hopkins, "Re-enchantment," 271.
- ²⁶ Agee, "Notes remembered," 117.
- ²⁷ Agee, "Not by any stratagem," 34.
- ²⁸ Agee, *Letters of James Agee*, 107.
- ²⁹ Agee, "Not by any stratagem," 34.

- ³⁰ Agee and Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, 413.
- ³¹ Agee and Evans, 411.
- ³² Stockwell, *Language of Surrealism*, 71–72 (emphasis in the original).
- ³³ Agee and Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, 409.
- ³⁴ Stockwell, *Language of Surrealism*, 71, 75.
- ³⁵ Agee and Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, 411–12.
- ³⁶ Davis, *The Making of James Agee*, 160.
- ³⁷ Agee, “Writing first thing,” 198.
- ³⁸ Agee, “SERVICE IN EXISTENCE,” 205 (emphasis in original).
- ³⁹ Agee, “clouds as if they lay,” 203 (emphasis in original).
- ⁴⁰ Agee, “SERVICE IN EXISTENCE,” 205.
- ⁴¹ Agee, “THE TINDERING STARS,” 208 (emphasis in original).
- ⁴² Agee, 208 (emphasis in original).
- ⁴³ Agee and Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, 136.
- ⁴⁴ Agee and Evans, 201.
- ⁴⁵ Agee and Evans, 366.
- ⁴⁶ Agee and Evans, 236.
- ⁴⁷ Agee and Evans, 114.
- ⁴⁸ Agee and Evans, 168.
- ⁴⁹ Mileaf, *Please Touch*, 147. See also, MoMA, *Object*, MoMA Learning; Heyrman, “Art and Synesthesia.”
- ⁵⁰ Mileaf, 146.
- ⁵¹ Heyrman, “Art and Synesthesia.”
- ⁵² Gompertz, *What Are You Looking At?*, 258.
- ⁵³ MoMA, *Object*.
- ⁵⁴ Burrows, “The Power of What Is Not There,” 117.
- ⁵⁵ Agee and Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, 322.
- ⁵⁶ Agee and Evans, 321–22.
- ⁵⁷ Agee and Evans, 321.
- ⁵⁸ Burrows, “The Power of What Is Not There,” 117.
- ⁵⁹ Agee and Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, 167.
- ⁶⁰ Davis, *The Making of James Agee*, 90.
- ⁶¹ Tashjian, *Boatload of Madmen*, 41.
- ⁶² Tashjian, 41.
- ⁶³ Rosenheim, “‘The Cruel Radiance of What Is,’” 66.
- ⁶⁴ Eklund, “‘The Harassed Man’s Haven of Detachment,’” 121.
- ⁶⁵ Rosenheim and Eklund, *Unclassified*, 214.
- ⁶⁶ Rathbone, *Walker Evans: A Biography*, 180.
- ⁶⁷ Davis, *The Making of James Agee*, 90.
- ⁶⁸ Agee, “Letter to Archibald Macleish,” in Lofaro and David, *James Agee Rediscovered*, 28 (emphasis in original), quoted in Davis, *The Making of James Agee*, 94.
- ⁶⁹ Agee, letter to Evans, 27 July 1938, 1, James Agee Collection, Harry Ransom Research Center, U of Texas, Austin, box 11, folder 12, 1, quoted in Davis, *The Making of James Agee*, 95.

- ⁷⁰ Rathbone, *Walker Evans: A Biography*, 24.
- ⁷¹ Hambourg, "A Portrait of the Artist," 10.
- ⁷² Rosenheim and Eklund, *Unclassified*, 32, 36.
- ⁷³ Davis, *The Making of James Agee*, 131–38.
- ⁷⁴ Evans, "Translated Excerpt of Andre Gide's *Si le grain ne meurt*."
- ⁷⁵ Rosenheim and Eklund, *Unclassified*, 145.
- ⁷⁶ Susik, "Chance and Automatism," 250.
- ⁷⁷ Fijalkowski, "The Object," 197, quoting André Breton, *Nadja*, translated by Richard Howard (New York: Grove Press, 1960), 52.
- ⁷⁸ Katz, "Interview with Walker Evans," 84.
- ⁷⁹ Rosenheim, "'The Cruel Radiance of What Is,'" 57.
- ⁸⁰ Rosenheim, 90.
- ⁸¹ Rosenheim, 94.
- ⁸² Agee and Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, 143, 145.
- ⁸³ Agee and Evans, 145.
- ⁸⁴ Sun, *Succeeding King Lear*, 144, 149.
- ⁸⁵ Agee and Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, 146.
- ⁸⁶ Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, 41.
- ⁸⁷ Suárez, *Pop Modernism*, 250.
- ⁸⁸ Evans, *Many Are Called*.
- ⁸⁹ North, "The Significance of Walker Evans' *Many Are Called*," 35.
- ⁹⁰ Fineman, "Notes from the Underground," 107.
- ⁹¹ Walker Evans, interview with Jeffrey W. Limerick, 1973, cited in Gilles Mora and John T. Hill, *Walker Evans: The Hungry Eye* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1993), 219, quoted in Fineman, 108.
- ⁹² Fineman, "Notes from the Underground," 109.
- ⁹³ Suárez, *Pop Modernism*, 240–41, 255.
- ⁹⁴ Suárez, 237–38.

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