

SITUATING:

HISTORIES OF SITE

[Part A]

MEMPHIS AMERICAN ART MUSICOLOGY PHOTOGRAPHY

- Heavily influenced by the writings of Baudrillard, the camera becomes a tool of the future, more evident in the development of street photography. As the heir of the nineteenth century flâneur, the street photographer is both detached from and a part of city life, allowing a perspective from which to observe and comment upon modern life.
- **1906:** Alfred Stieglitz helps found the "Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession" after the successful formation of The Camera Club of New York.
- **1909:** W. C. Handy composes the "Memphis Blues," considered the first blues song. Handy describes the blues as representing the life of "the underprivileged and underpaid class from Missouri to the Gulf," a common medium through which any such individual might express his personal feeling in a sort of musical "religion."
- (bottom left: Beale Street, 1906)
- (bottom right: W. C. Handy's Memphis Orchestra, 1918)

SOUTHERN MODERNIST LITERATURE

- THE "LOST CAUSE" YEARS
- Authors Mark Twain and Kate Chopin were instrumental in taking the focus of Southern writing away from a nostalgic memorializing of the Confederacy cause. With their depictions of the South's social complexities and difficult histories, Twain and Chopin left a legacy of Southern literature that was frank in its depictions of race and social inequalities and rooted in the idiosyncrasies of place.

SOUTH MAIN CONTEXT

- The city of Memphis consists of a regular street grid on the banks of the Mississippi River, centered around the trade and commerce brought by the great riverway.
- (right: Main Street, early 1900s)
- (above: first trade, early 1900s)

MEMPHIS AMERICAN ART MUSICOLOGY PHOTOGRAPHY

- **1897-1927:** Flâneur and pioneer street photographer Eugene Atget aims to do photography the streets of Old Paris before they are lost to modernization.
- (top left: *Eglise des Petits* taken by Atget, 1912)
- **1924:** Louis introduces the "candid camera" (top right: 35 mm Leica camera)
- **1921:** Man Ray and Duchamp produce *New York Dada*, Surrealist works, juxtapose the strange with the everyday (top left: photograph by Man Ray, 1923)
- **1924:** Louis introduces the "candid camera" (top right: 35 mm Leica camera)
- **1926:** The Memphis Jug Band is the first to make a commercial music recording in Memphis (pictured bottom left)
- **1929:** the Arnette Luncheon Orchestra starts its professional career on Beale (pictured bottom right)

SOUTHERN MODERNIST LITERATURE

- **1935:** the famed "Shoreline Night on Beale Street" depicts at the Palace Theater, with host Nat O. Williams, a notable journalist, educator, and philanthropist, this rare refuge for the city's African-American population helps make stars of locals, including Duke Thomas, B. B. King, and Bobby "Blue" Bland
- (bottom left: Nat O. Williams radio program)
- (bottom right: the Palace Theater, 1929)

SOUTH MAIN CONTEXT

- A growing population, fed by those moving from the rural Delta, undergirds the city's financial success. A steady stream of bus, trolley, streetcars, and trolleys pass through the train stations of South Main.
- (left: corner intersection, c. 1940s)
- (above: Central Station, c. 1930s)

MEMPHIS AMERICAN ART MUSICOLOGY PHOTOGRAPHY

- **1936:** Eudora Welty shows her photographs for the WPA, taken in Mississippi in the early to mid-1930s, at a small gallery in New York City (top left: *The Rocks, State Fair*)
- **1938:** Walker Evans, American photographer shown at the MCM, first exhibition in the museum devoted to the work of a single photographer (top left: *The Fickels Family*, 1936)
- **1940s:** Eastman Kodak popularizes the dye transfer process for printing color work, a method of making color prints before the invention of color film, and derived from the methods used by Technicolor (top left: dye transfer Kodak ad from mid-1940s)
- **1941:** Walker Evans and James Agee publish (at *Us Now Press*) *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, a portrait of rural poverty in Hale County, Alabama during the Great Depression
- **1950s:** era of the retrospective-yet-titled New York School, which included Diane Arbus, Richard Avedon, Helen Levitt, and Weegee, among others. (top right: photograph by Helen Levitt, New York, 1942)
- **1950:** Sam Phillips founds Sun Studio and Sun Records at 709 Union Avenue in Memphis (pictured bottom left)
- **1951:** Jackie Brenston and the Delta Cats record the first rock and roll single, "Rocket 88," at Sun Studio; several notable rock and roll, country, and rockabilly artists record at Sun, including Johnny Cash, Elvis Presley, Carl Perkins, Roy Orbison, and Jerry Lee Lewis
- **1954:** Dewey Phillips is the first to play Elvis Presley on the radio from his studio in the Hot Club (bottom right: photograph of Presley)

SOUTHERN MODERNIST LITERATURE

- **SOUTHERN RENAISSANCE**
- *The Southern Review*, founded by Robert Penn Warren and Cleanth Brooks
- Southern poetry under the Vanderbilt "Fugitives"
- Southern Agrarian movement
- William Faulkner, Katherine Anne Porter, Thomas Wolfe, Robert Penn Warren, and Tennessee Williams rise to reinvent

SOUTH MAIN CONTEXT

- The popularity of the automobile changes the energy and form of the city. Now, travelers to downtown Memphis are more likely to live by car, enter from Westcott, descend on train.
- (left: South Main Street, early 1940s)
- (above: Main Street, c. 1940s)

MEMPHIS AMERICAN ART MUSICOLOGY PHOTOGRAPHY

- **1962:** John Szarkowski becomes Director of the Department of Photography at the MCM, (top left: *Wineyard from Barn* by Stan Kowalski, 1967)
- **1960s:** Greatly influenced by Pop Art, Edward Ruscha documents the vernacular of Los Angeles (top right: maquette for *Every Building on the Sunset Strip*)
- **1966:** Jim Stewart and Satellite Artion found Stax Records; Stax becomes the center of Southern soul music, and a recording place for racially integrated bands and operated by a racially integrated staff
- (bottom left: the Stax studio, located in a renovated movie theater at 926 East McLemore Avenue)
- (bottom right: one of Stax's biggest successes, Booker T. & the M.G.s)

SOUTHERN MODERNIST LITERATURE

- *Do Not Misdemean* by Harper Lee wins the Pulitzer Prize in 1960
- *Crime Needs Hustlers*, *Sleeping Men*, *Brown*, Eudora Welty, Ramsey O'Connor, Garret McGinnis, and Truman Capote rise to reinvent

SOUTH MAIN CONTEXT

- By the 1960s, Main Street was the site of protests and demonstrations for civil rights. Sometimes using "unreal" as justification, those with means moved out of the city center and dressed from inner-city development. The "Urban Renewal" movement largely resulted in large-scale demolition of historic and iconic buildings. (left: Ernest C. Witte's *I Am A Man*, Sanitation Workers Strike, 1968)
- (left: Beale Street, c. 1970s)
- (above: "Urban Renewal" surrounding The Peabody, c. 1970s)
- (above: demolition of Hotel King Cotton, 1964)

MEMPHIS AMERICAN ART MUSICOLOGY PHOTOGRAPHY

- **1976:** William Eggleston's *Guide* shows at the MCM, organized by Szarkowski
- This exhibit is the museum's first solo exhibition of color photographs. Later critics see the show as a watershed moment in the history of photography, where color photography is accepted as art. (top left/right: from the show *Black Bayou Plantation* and *Un-Edged*, 1976)
- **1971:** *Arctient* Studio moves to its Madison Avenue location in Midtown, partly an effort by Stax to record rock and pop music (top left: the two recording rooms of Arctient)
- **1972:** one of Arctient's successes, Big Star releases their first record #1 record and Radio City (top right: photograph of the band)

SOUTHERN MODERNIST LITERATURE

- John Kennedy Toole wins the Pulitzer Prize for *A Confederacy of Dunces* in 1981

SOUTH MAIN CONTEXT

- In the early 21st century, Main Street attracted the attention of the visitors looking to attract consumers and residents back to downtown. Further north, these developments were larger in scale, by causing the part of town where a remnant of financial and civic buildings still stood, and where trolleys could be most easily driven. The ground South Main area was found to be ripe for small, independent sites of redevelopment. A collection of art galleries and studios led to its classification as an arts district.

MEMPHIS AMERICAN ART MUSICOLOGY PHOTOGRAPHY

- **1990s:** Eggleston continues to show and publish his work. Monographs include *Peabody*, *Mississippi*, and *Arctient* and *Arctient* (top left: Eggleston's *The Hasselblad Award*, both photographs from *Arctient*'s *Mississippi*)
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- **2008:** *Democratic Camera*, Eggleston retrospective at The Whitney
- **2009:** Eggleston publishes *Paris* (both photographs from the monograph)
- **2000s:** A group of philanthropists and former Stax employees form a foundation to use the former site of Stax and its legacy as a catalyst to redevelop the surrounding area. The Stax Museum of American Soul Music, the Stax Music Academy, and the Beale Street and Sun Studio are built (pictured: bottom row)
- **2013:** *At War with the Obvious*, shows at the Met; the corresponding publication describes Eggleston's as "the most important photography's most prolific and influential exemplar." The publication notes his photographs have become too ubiquitous for generations of artists, musicians, and filmmakers from Nan Goldin to David Byrne to the Coen brothers, and David Lynch
- **2014:** Eggleston's *A-Z* series shows at the Gagosian Gallery (photograph from show)

SOUTHERN MODERNIST LITERATURE

- **2010s:** The music community in Memphis remains decentralized, without the megarecord labels or dense city center that ensured aged before. The original sites of the city's musical history exist as opportunities for tourism (as at Stax - shown bottom-right), and as opportunities to continue music production on a smaller scale (as at Arctient - shown bottom-left)

SOUTH MAIN CONTEXT

- *"The human being, unseen, remains the reason these photographs of place carry such power to move and disturb us -- and, by the end, somewhat hearten us. ...A clear spring rises somewhere on the home place, for the human strain begins there for Mr. Eggleston, and we see it in what follows: it turns into a river that runs through, or underneath, every place succeeding it. Whatever is done to block it or stop its flow, it surfaces again. Pure human nature provides itself in likely or unlikely places."*
- EUDORA WELTY WRITES THE INTRODUCTION TO EGLESTON'S *THE DEMOCRATIC FOREST*, 1989