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### Recalcitrant Intervention

Walker Evans's Pages

David Company

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# Recalcitrant Intervention

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- 1 Thirty-five years after his death, the understanding of the work of Walker Evans has become markedly split between the walls of the modern museum and the printed page. Evans the 'museum artist' is of course the legacy of a long-standing relationship with New York's Museum of Modern Art that began in the 1930s and culminated with a retrospective in 1971, the terms of which still define the mainstream understanding of his work. His relationship to the page also began in the 1930s. There were several books, some comprising folios by Evans accompanying writing by others: Hart Crane's *The Bridge* (1930); Carleton Beals's *The Crime of Cuba* (1933); *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men: Three Tenant Families*, co-authored with James Agee (1941); and Carl Bickel's *The Mangrove Coast* (1942). Here Evans's photographs stood apart from the text, resisting the slick and usually unreflective integration of word and image that dominated magazine photo-essays and photobooks. He also published three monographic books: *American Photographs* (1938), *Many Are Called* and *Message from the Interior* (both 1966), in all of which the editing and sequencing is as significant as the images themselves.<sup>1</sup> His relationship with magazines and journals began in 1929 and continued throughout his career with contributions to *Architectural Record*, *Creative Art*, *Hound & Horn*, *Architectural Forum*, *Life*, *Sports Illustrated*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *Vogue*, and of course *Fortune* magazine, where he was employed for over twenty years.
- 2 Evans produced more than enough striking single 'pictures' to warrant a place in any history of art or art photography, but he showed relatively little desire to present them that way. Instead his approach was shaped by a background in literature, by early ambitions to be a writer and, soon after he found the camera, a realization that one of the central characteristics of photographic modernism was the intelligent assembly of images for the printed page. *American Photographs* and *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* have come to be seen as significant works of modernist documentary (a form of highly reflexive record-making that Evans all but invented with the sequential arrangement of *American Photographs*, perhaps the first 'difficult' photobook to emerge in the U.S. context). But recognition came at a significant delay. Having been remaindered when they were first

published these books were reviewed widely and received positively when reissued at the beginning of the 1960s. Their time had come precisely because their moment had gone, allowing them to be aligned with Evans's reputation as a modern photographic artist, distant from the cut and thrust of documentary and the compromises of working journalism.

- 3 The work produced for magazines is another matter. In being essentially ephemeral the illustrated magazine has a very different temporality and cultural significance to the book form. It is not made to last; it lives and dies, succeeds or fails, in the space of its short shelf life. This presents profound problems for understanding the history of photography, particularly documentary and photojournalism which, as the 'genres of record,' evolved and presented themselves in contexts that were essentially ephemeral. The re-presentation of documentary and photojournalistic images in monographs and museums does little to capture the contingent complexity of their initial page presentation. And only in the last decade has the difficult work of assembling a history of the illustrated magazine begun to come into focus, if somewhat less clearly than the emerging history of the photobook.

## Evans's Fortune

- 4 In the revival of interest in Evans's work in 1960s he was seen as several contradictory things at once: a detached observer of 1930s America; a committed documentarian; a pioneer of Modern art in photographic form; and a proto-Pop artist of the American vernacular. But not an editor, or a writer, or a designer and certainly not a 'working photographer,' all of which he had been in his engagement with the magazine page. The 1971 MoMA retrospective, curated by John Szarkowski, confirmed the growing resurgence of interest and secured Evans a significant reputation, introducing his photographs to a new generation, but the terms were too narrow to fully reflect Evans's concerns and achievements. The show and the accompanying book (titled simply *Walker Evans*) skirted his particular approach to the page.<sup>2</sup> The emphasis was on significant single, exhibitable photographs, not the internally organized body of work. Szarkowski had nothing particular to say about the specificity of any of Evans's books or magazine work. He all but dismissed Evans's twenty years at *Fortune* as a long autumn of comfortable compromise following a creative 'hot streak' in the 1930s born of youthful energy and artistic exploration. He assumed Evans was softened by regular employment into producing very few images of the 'fierce conviction that identifies his best work' since the 'continual vigilance' required of working for a magazine 'frustrates free expression.'<sup>3</sup> This missed the point. At *Fortune* Evans's work was not *only* about the making of photographs; it was about synthesizing the whole craft complex associated with the production and presentation of photographic work for a magazine, while testing what an independent mind could do with it. Images of 'fierce conviction' (singular, rhetorically charged, formally unified, museum friendly) are often resistant to such synthesis and it should be conceded that Evans produced comparatively few of these for *Fortune*. But the boundaries Evans was testing there were less to do with composition and picture making than those of the mainstream magazine itself. Three examples from *Fortune* will illustrate the point well enough here.
- 5 Evans's disdain for the working practices of American magazines is well documented.<sup>4</sup> It is part of his posthumous artistic identity that although the American vernacular was his

lifelong subject he saw its magazine culture as generally vulgar and regressive, too in thrall to advertising, commerce, kitsch, and the management of popular opinion. *Fortune* was founded in 1930 by Henry R. Luce who had established *Time* magazine in 1923 and went on to launch *Life* in 1936. In the immediate aftermath of the Wall Street Crash and the onset of the Depression it was an unlikely venture: a luxurious and extravagant magazine specializing in the coverage of business, science, and industry. Luce expected it to run at a loss, as a worthwhile indulgence subsidized by his other enterprises. The editorial statement in the first issue (February 1930) announced the aim to present 'clear and readable text, profusely illustrated with pictures, in a form ample and agreeable to the eye' and 'planned upon an economic scale which permits it to go toward that end beyond the technical limitations of most magazines.'<sup>5</sup> Many of *Fortune's* pages were printed in quality gravure rather than the halftone typical of most non-art publications. It also used color reproduction in great quantity. At eleven by fourteen inches (28 x 35.5 cm) it was larger than most magazines and it had more pages, printed on heavy stock. It set out to commission the best photographers, writers, artists, and illustrators, which meant looking beyond the scope of those working within journalism. Noting its blend of free marketeering and advanced artistic values, Douglas Eklund described *Fortune* as 'an experiment in the aesthetics of capital.'<sup>6</sup> But as the effects of the Depression continued to take their toll well into 1930s (there were five million unemployed in 1931) *Fortune* could not cleave easily to its brief to celebrate the bounties of capital. As Evans himself remarked, it 'didn't really know what role it should play during the depression. They didn't know what they were doing since they were founded to describe in a stimulating way American business and industry, and that was falling apart.'<sup>7</sup> And with the coming of the Second World War its position was if not contradictory then at least sensitive to the uncertainty of political and cultural attitudes of that fraught period.

- 6 As a freelance photographer Evans contributed to *Fortune* as early as 1934 (seven photographs for a piece on the Communist Party in the September issue). In 1943, after around thirteen years working without a permanent job, he joined Luce's Time Incorporated as a writer (primarily an art, film, and book reviewer for *Time*). Two years later he was offered a post at *Fortune* as a photographer and writer, and in September 1948 was named 'Special Photographic Editor,' a title and position he had carved out for himself.<sup>8</sup> It was his artistic credentials, his avowed interest in American culture, and his ability as a writer of copy that secured him a unique role. While *Fortune* was sheltered from the sharp demands of commercial viability, it in turn sheltered Evans, giving him more than usual freedom. Once established on the staff he cultivated a high degree of autonomy. He shot competent portraits of businessmen as a trade-off for picking and choosing his photographic assignments, as well as compiling features from archival images. He answered not to the art department but directly to the managing editor, securing near total control of the pages he bargained for. An editorial from May 1948 informed the readership about him:
- 7 'Walker Evans ... is a writer of delicacy and evocative power. He is more widely recognized, however, in many discerning circles as one of the most distinguished photographers in the U.S. Aesthetic officialdom has leaned strongly towards that judgment: Evans had the first one-man show of photography ever given by New York's Museum of Modern Art, had held a Guggenheim Fellowship, and has only recently exhibited at the Chicago Art Institute. The power of Evans's photography has always proceeded from an eye that is as lively, direct, responsive and acidly probing as the eye of

the great Civil War photographer Matthew Brady. Evans is not in the least interested in photographic attitudinizing, in camera schmaltz or grandiosity; he wishes through the instrumentality of photography, to make you see, with maximum directness, the great accuracy of tone and detail, the sights that have arrested him in his straight staring around the amazing crust of the visible world.’<sup>9</sup>

- 8 Despite the high regard, Evans’s work received no special billing or auteurist presentation in the magazine. This entirely suited its nature, as we shall see. Evans never used *Fortune* to simply showcase his talents as an image-maker. It was not a forum for ‘art.’ Rather he worked with and against the received conventions of the magazine page, producing features that both did and did not fit within *Fortune*’s editorial remit. With increasing frequency he wrote the texts to accompany his features.<sup>10</sup> He also determined the look of his pages, including the cropping of images, layout, graphics, and titles. He understood that photographic meaning did not begin and end with the individual photograph. It was, vitally, a matter of editing, designing, and writing. While he had pursued all these skills before, *Fortune* gave him the opportunity to do so with a steadier schedule, sufficient freedom, and a regular income. It was an enviable position that few photographers have ever achieved, particularly on American magazines.

## ‘Main Street Looking North From Courthouse Square’

- 9 ‘Main Street Looking North From Courthouse Square’ (May 1948), his first feature as Special Photographic Editor, included none of his own photography but drew instead on his archive of vintage American postcards.<sup>11</sup> He saw that the regional postcards that were typical of the early twentieth century provided an unlikely but telling measure of that era. They were predominantly color-tinted views of provincial streets, bridges, transportation, and factories – not the glorifications of leisure and tourist spots that soon came to dominate the form.
- 10 The imagery is clear, unpretentious, restrained, and quite anti-promotional, similar in many ways to Evans’s own photographic aesthetic. Even so, he knew very well they could be misread as nostalgia (an acute awareness of the possibilities of misreading is the common thread that unites all of his work for magazines). So Evans crafted a succinct page-long introduction that made deft connections between period and image, making the case that the passing of particular moments in modern history always involve the passing of their distinctive mode of self-representation:
- 11 ‘In the 1900’s, sending and saving picture postcards was a prevalent and often a deadly boring fad in a million middle-class family homes. Yet the plethora of cards printed in that period now forms a solid bank from which to draw some of the most charming and, on occasion, the most horrid mementos ever bequeathed one generation by another. At their best, the purity of the humble vintage American cards shines exceeding bright [sic] in 1948. For postcards are now at an aesthetic slump from which they may never recover. Quintessence of gimcrack, most recent postcards serve largely as gaudy boasts that such and such a person visited such and such a place, and for some reason had a fine time. Gone is all feeling for actual street, of lived architecture, or of human mien. In the early-century days color photography was of course in its infancy.’

- 12 What might at first look like a mildly sentimental feature is in fact a concise and accessible reflection on photography, history, material culture, and memory, presented in a magazine with an even shorter active life than a postcard.
- 13 The majority of Evans's *Fortune* features had a historical consciousness that was out of step with the magazine's commitment to the modern and the new. Many focused upon vestiges of the past and the imminent obsolescence of everyday things. 'Vintage Office Furniture' (August 1953) showcased nineteenth-century office fittings and equipment still to be found in businesses of long standing. 'Before they Disappear' (March 1957) was a suite of color images of vanishing railroad company insignia, standardized but still hand painted on the sides of freight cars. Even the titles of his features are indicative: 'The Small Shop,' 'One Newspaper Town,' 'Is the Market right?' 'The Wreckers,' 'These Dark Satanic Mills,' 'Downtown: A Last Look Backward,' 'The Last of Railroad Steam,' 'The Auto-Junkyard.' However it would be hasty to dismiss this work and its presence in *Fortune* as nostalgic, as a kind of sentimental looking back in the knowledge that the juggernaut of American progress could not be stopped. Certainly many business-oriented magazines were (and still are) prone to bouts of that kind of wistful hand-wringing but Evans was adamant that it was not so simple and he became increasingly explicit on the matter. In 'Collectors Items' (*Mademoiselle*, May 1963) he railed: 'Pray keep me forever separated from an atmosphere of moist elderly eyes just about to spill over at the sight of grandmother's tea set.'<sup>12</sup> And in interview he insisted: 'To be interested in what you see that is passing out of history, even if it's a trolley car you've found, that's not an act of nostalgia. You could read Proust as "nostalgia" but that's not what Proust had in mind at all.'<sup>13</sup> Evans's interest in the lingering evidence of the past was complex. The nearly, or recently forgotten could, if approached correctly, serve an allegorical meditation on the present and the nature of modernity. More to the point, in *Fortune* Evans's tempered and reflective take on modernity extended beyond the subject matter to the nature of images themselves, to the very structure of photographic representation and its capacity to transport the present into history and summon the past into the present. Looking across his output one can see clearly how Evans grasped that in modernity a period and the pictorial means by which it comes to know itself are as short-lived as each other. (In another context this was a phenomenon central to the thought of Walter Benjamin: 'Just as the entire mode of existence of human collectives changes over long historical periods so too does their mode of perception.'<sup>14</sup>) Modernity implies not just a succession of epochs but also a succession of ways those epochs understand and picture themselves. Looking at the overlooked and the throw(n)away Evans sensed that the act of re-presentation *could* produce a mode of attention that allows photography's relation to the past to be grasped dialectically. Paradoxically then, *Fortune's* focus on the new and the future was both Evans's foil and the best context for his concerns.

## 'Homes of Americans'

- 14 In the early months of 1946 the editorial board was preparing a special issue on housing. There was an acute shortage of dwellings in America, the result of a suspended building program exacerbated by the return of military personnel from overseas. There was great popular interest both in the innovative construction methods that had been developed in wartime and in new ways of living. Solving the housing problem was vital to America, prerequisite to any other kind of 'advance.' *Architectural Forum*, the sister publication of

*Fortune* was also planning a housing issue and both appeared in April 1946. Most of the articles were descriptive and informational, covering topics such as the economics of building, new innovations in construction, and new modes of interior design and home appliances. The cover design featured Buckminster Fuller's hi-tech Wichita House, a development of his modular Dymaxion House of 1944, which was receiving much publicity.

- 15 Evans's contribution 'Homes of Americans' was very different.<sup>15</sup> It covered five double spreads, comprising an introductory text, thirty-three photographs, and captions reserved for the concluding page. The layout was austere amid the magazine's color reproductions and graphic flamboyance. The typesetting was pared-down and the images black and white. None were shot especially for the feature and only seven were by Evans himself, taken much earlier in the 1930s. The picture credits were tucked away on the issue's general credits page and they were from three federal sources. But this was not an archival research exercise, since most of the prints were actually from Evans's own collection, as the brief editorial on page 2 points out.<sup>16</sup> Where the rest of the magazine put photographic illustrations to use in enthusiastic and explanatory articles, 'Homes of Americans' was much more ambiguous, even deliberately awkward.
- 16 Evans was well aware of the open meaning of these documents, and here he strategically turned the risks of misreading into the very subject of the piece. This is the introductory text:

'The following portfolio is a ranging glance at an enormous subject - American shelter. The record is written across four centuries and over the most varied landscape in the world. Wood, stone, glass and metal bespeak in their own way the entire history of the settlers of the nation and their uneasy descendants.

'The pictures are not accompanied by captions (which are all gathered on page 157). The aim is to avoid distraction from the naked, graphic facts, to have you see the sundry remarkable shapes, textures and glints of light quite as they are, without verbal comment. Few of us really take the time to see what we look at, and these thirty-three pictures, drawn from hundreds, may deliver their impact of excitement, nostalgia, humor or repugnance much more strongly if the eye is not led away to documentation in words. Besides you may enjoy guessing what parts of the country the various scenes represent.

The wildly exotic variety of American design is fully apparent. You will find intelligent modern architecture and many of the curious crusts of the past. You may detect hints of Charlie Chaplin, Ulysses S. Grant, Cotton Mather, Samuel Ward McAllister, and Huckleberry Finn. Photography, that great distorter of things as they are, has, here as elsewhere, played its particularly disreputable, charming trick ... But like the deliberate inflections of men's voices, they are tricks now and then lifted to an art. Take your time with this array. You may be in a hurry to turn to page 157 for the names of what you are seeing. On the other hand it may pay you to incline with Herman Melville to "let the ambiguous procession of events reveal their own ambiguousness."

The tone continues at the rear in the caption for the first two images:

These are a Shaker doorway in New Lebanon, New York, built in 1819 and Mrs. Cornelius Vanderbilt's New York drawing room as of 1883. That Shaker reticence should meet cupids, ormolu and brocade in the same nation, while no great surprise, is certainly a telling matter for pictorial juxtaposition. There could scarcely be a more vivid parable concerning the extreme diversity of American manners or character.'



- 17 Neither could there be a more vivid parable of the vicissitudes of the photographic document. 'Homes of Americans' inverts *Fortune's* embrace of the new and the rational not just by lingering on images of old things, but by wrong-footing easy reading and making interpretation pointedly difficult. The modernist-looking interior was actually 133 years old, predating the Baroque-looking drawing room by 64 years. The reader is deprived of a documentary standard by which to make quick sense, but is unable to suspend the documentary claim in the name of art or something else. Further on we see a field of Airstream caravans that is a temporary home for defense workers but the caption talks of the trailer's emancipatory mobility and its long-standing popularity as a mainstay of American culture. An image of a Long Island housing development of the 1930s is captioned 'A Life-time Opportunity. Steam Heat, with Gas, Electricity and Water. On Easy Terms...', mocking the real estate sales rhetoric to be found elsewhere in the magazine. The sleek functionalism of the latest high Modern home by Walter Gropius and Marcel Breuer is squashed into a grid with vernacular flat roofed wood-frame houses from the nineteenth century. Captions suggest repeatedly that the beauty of built form is rooted in pragmatism, tradition, experience, prudence, and anonymous craft, not in 'high' architecture and its star pioneers. Many of the images are left deliberately undated to suggest – in this future-oriented issue of *Fortune* – that if these dwellings still exist and are occupied they are as contemporary as anything new and have a valid future.
- 18 Conventionally, captions serve to 'anchor' the polysemy of the image while helping to imply that photographic meaning is straightforward and natural.<sup>17</sup> 'Homes of Americans' foregrounds the function of the caption by actively withholding or delaying its delivery and setting it at odds with the photograph. Word and image are deployed against convention to slow down audiences rather than hasten them into the tempo necessary to consume a photo-essay as information or entertainment. As in so much of Evans's work for the printed page 'Homes of Americans' sets out to establish a reflective pace at which it is possible to think not just about the purported subject matter, but about the conditions and limits of photography and writing. The feature was presented anonymously, with no name on its opening page, leaving it to be attributed to the magazine in the abstract. This was uncommon in the pages of *Fortune* (although Evans often reduced his credit to a minimal 'W.E.'). But given the interventionism involved here it seems entirely plausible this was done to allow it the fullest potential to quietly disrupt and subvert. The presence of a name, any name, may well have contained the deliberate awkwardness, personifying and bracketing it off as something distinct from the body of the magazine (much the way art magazines declare their 'artists' pages' in which the graphic rules and values of the host are lifted to indulge the art/artist.)
- 19 Most of Evans's features for *Fortune* were billed as 'Portfolios' but this had less to do with artistic aspiration than a desire to separate his concerns from those of photo-essay formulae being honed in the popular press, spearheaded by *Life* with its fast-paced design, narrative flow, over-emotional tone and often trite 'messages.' Henry Luce had set out to ensure *Life* was 'the best magazine for look-through purposes' while its first editor Daniel Longwell had proclaimed 'the quick nervousness of pictures is a new language.'<sup>18</sup> Evans's portfolios have no beginnings, middles, or ends and they resist speed at every turn. Each is a deliberating and monotone meditation on a small cluster of related themes. It is suggestive, inconclusive, open, and at odds with its setting. This recalcitrance was a resistance to what John Tagg has described as 'those dreams of transparency, efficiency, and accelerated exchange that marked the instrumentalization of photographic meaning,



in social administration as in commercialized communications, in the documentary archive as in the photojournalistic picture file.<sup>19</sup> In another context such refusals of clear meaning might have looked indulgent or prankish but for Evans part of making effective work for *Fortune* entailed knowing the context well enough to be able to operate a kind of micro-intervention, confounding assumptions and diverting expectations.

- 20 With his name confined to the credits page and only seven of the images being his, it is not surprising 'Homes of Americans' slips below the radar of those looking for Evans's more obviously formal or pictorial hallmarks. Moreover while the selection of the photographs was his work, the text was the outcome of conversations with his good friend and member of *Fortune's* editorial board, Wilder Hobson, who had been first assigned a piece on American housing. So we must proceed with care before we declare Evans the absent auteur here. Nevertheless, the whole disposition of the feature chimes with Evans's outlook, while the writing is very close in attitude and rhetorical flourish to his other pieces for *Fortune*. The tactic of using straight photos made complex by sequence and text was in keeping with his suspicion of anything easy while the stronger remarks bear his characteristic distrust of magazine manipulation and his preference of ambiguity. Similar sentiments can be found throughout Evans's pronouncements on his own photography and the medium in general.<sup>20</sup>

## 'Labor Anonymous'

- 21 Clearly none of the meaning of 'Homes of Americans' would survive if the images were disaggregated and re-presented in isolation. It is an entirely 'site-specific' assembly. Indeed most of the images had been used before in one context or another and Evans could pluck and re-use them precisely because they functioned loosely as archival stand-ins for (almost) unknown subjects or objects. They weren't obviously 'arty' pictures. This is a photographic tradition in which Evans is an exemplary figure, not just in his adherence to the 'straight' photo and his preference for vernacular subjects, but in his understanding that the more neutral the document appears the more dependent its meaning upon the way it is deployed. And insofar as its meaning is made through placement, sequence, and language, it is archival to its core. There could be no *definitive* place for such images. Photographs would be what you did with them (and even the museum must concede that it cannot provide the definitive meaning or last word.)
- 22 An even starker example of this kind of contingency is 'Labor Anonymous' published seven months after 'Homes of Americans' (November 1946). It is a double-spread of eleven images and text which at first glance looks like a serial typology of anonymous workers, perhaps taken surreptitiously as they leave their place of work. That is how these portraits by Evans are regularly recycled and presented in exhibitions and monographs. But in the spread itself there are many details that complicate and even contradict such a reading. The short but crucial text makes no reference to the end of a working shift while only three of the subjects are wearing clothes associated exclusively with labor.
- 23 The feature is in fact subtitled 'On a Saturday Afternoon in Downtown Detroit,' suggesting this may not be a day of work at all, even if this is one of America's foremost industrial cities. These may well be workers but they are not working here. The text occupies a space the size of one of the portraits, as if word and image were of a piece and interchangeable, but once read it is clear the purpose is to uproot that assumption. Evans

reminds the reader that there is no classifiable physiognomy on show here. Laborers cannot be stereotyped, neither in appearance, nor disposition, nor dress: 'His features tend now toward the peasant and now the patrician. His hat is sometimes a hat, and sometimes he has molded it into a sort of defiant gesture.' In other words these photographs offer no sure measure and the readers will still have all their interpretive work ahead of them. He concludes: 'When editorialists lump them as "labor" these laborers can no doubt laugh that one off.' It is an obvious point but easily forgotten: a person cannot be anonymous in and of themselves but only to, or for, another. 'Labor Anonymous' is revealed to be an ironic title, critical of the assumptions of mainstream editorialists and readers, including those of *Fortune* itself (the feature appeared in an issue dedicated to 'Labor in U.S. Industry'). Looking again at the photos we see they are not entirely serial, even though this was about as serial as Evans's work ever got (more so than his New York subway portraits). In the first frame a man in overalls seems to look directly at the photographer. The brim of his hat overshadows his eyes, giving the impression he notes the presence of the camera while keeping something of himself hidden. It stalls the ethnographic fantasy of invisibility, of observing and classifying unsuspecting specimens. Placed top left in the grid the image helps to suggest the subsequent shots should not be taken too readily 'at face value.' The final photo shows a man and a woman together as a couple in the same frame, complicating any simple distinction between labor relations and sexual relations. All this in the space of a single spread. It is a rare example of a photographer adopting the conventions of the visual typology only to undermine the instrumental authority they usually invoke. Suffice it to say, when removed from their layout and presented simply as a suite of formally innovative street portraits their meaning is doomed not just to 'revert to type,' but to turn the original intention on its head.

## 'Works for magazines'

- 24 It would be another two decades at least before this kind of attention to the discursive limits and ideological underpinnings of documentary and photojournalism would come into focus in the United States of America, and only then in the context of conceptual art. In 1946 'Labor Anonymous' parried the growing trend for voyeuristic portraits while 'Homes of Americans' offered housing to its readership 'in two inadequate descriptive systems,' to paraphrase the title of the much-celebrated conceptual documentary work by Martha Rosler from 1974–75.<sup>21</sup> And when Dan Graham produced the still endlessly celebrated photo-text 'Homes for America' in 1966 (in ignorance of Evans's precedent), its appearance as a piece of subversive print journalism was scuppered first by the artist's failure to get it published in the mainstream press and then by *Arts* magazine's replacement of his intended images with one by ... Evans.<sup>22</sup>
- 25 But Graham's magazine work survives where Evans's has not, precisely because Graham saw himself as an artist making 'Works for magazines' which permitted him to recycle and recuperate them in the post-conceptual art museum. Evans was working for a magazine with no eye on the future but a very sure eye on intelligent intervention in the moment and context of publication. Unaware of his magazine work the conceptual art generation of the 1960s and 70s inherited and largely rejected Evans as a modernist/formalist museum artist, when in fact he had been a significant precursor.

- 26 When John Szarkowski presented Evans as a modern museum artist he had the photographer's opportunistic blessing and in some senses this was inevitable. In working at *Fortune* Evans addressed himself to a specificity and timeliness of the page that the art history of photography cannot adequately accommodate. It would have been not just inappropriate but pretty much impossible for posterity to rest upon such work. Exhibiting or reprinting those features would have had 'merely' anecdotal interest. The recent interest in the photographic book marks a tentative step toward the barely charted and possibly unchartable chaos that is the history of the photographic page. So what does it mean to return to the specificity of magazine work and to reproduce it here? For Denis Hollier,
- 27 'The significance of the reprint is not the same for a book as it is for a periodical. A novel is republished because it has had some success or because the time has come to rediscover it. *Habent sua fata libelli*. With a journal, the transposition from the aorist to the imperfect alters the textual status of the object, its punctuality. Like an event condemned to linger on.'<sup>23</sup>
- 28 I cannot tell if Evans himself thought this way but given the manner in which he worked at *Fortune* it should not surprise us if he did. His eyes were not on the future but on *that* audience, for *that* feature in *that* magazine, *that* month. Plus of course posterity cannot deploy the same criteria of judgment as the present. Evans barely spoke about his magazine work, but when he did it was clear he thought highly of it. It was for him among his most significant achievements. When asked about his favorite *Fortune* features, he even opted for ones that didn't involve his own photography but allowed him to operate as an editor.<sup>24</sup> And when asked about the essentials of photography he downplayed the significance of single images in favor of the intelligence of their arrangement: 'The essence is done very quickly with a flash of the mind, and with a machine. I think too that photography is editing, editing after the taking. After knowing what to take you have to do the editing.'<sup>25</sup>
- 29 Of course, individual images are not without merit, not least many of Evans's, but however singular they may seem sooner or later they must be put together. In 1969, in what turned out to be his last significant work for the printed page, Evans was invited by Louis Kronenberger to select the section on photography for the anthology *Quality: Its Image in the Arts*.<sup>26</sup> He chose what he felt were exemplary photographs from across the history of the medium. He insisted on a simple layout, typically stark in this messy publication, with a single image on the right with a short paragraph opposite. Even here Evans considered very carefully the sequencing of these apparently unrelated photos, and he let the reader know this: 'No individual evaluation is implied in the order and manner of presentation of the photographs that follow. The picture placement has been arranged solely with regard to the visual effect of the plates in relation to one another, and to their impact collectively.' Nearing the end of a long career he was still working out the complex dialectic between the one, the many, and the word that had interested him at the outset, wanting his audience to feel their way into it but without too strident a guide.

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 NOTES

1. Alan TRACHTENBURG's essays on Evans's books are instructive. On *American Photographs* see 'A Book Nearly Anonymous' in *Reading American Photographs: Images as History, Mathew Brady to Walker Evans*, 231–85 (New York: Hill and Wang, 1989); on *Let us Now Praise Famous Men* see 'Contrapuntal Design' in *Walker Evans: Lyric Documentary*, ed. John T. HILL, 222–33 (Gottingen and London: Steidl, 2006); and on *Message from the Interior* see 'Walker Evans' *Message from the Interior – A Reading*, *October*, no. 11 (Winter 1979): 5–29.
2. John SZARKOWSKI, *Walker Evans* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1971).
3. *Ibid.*, 9–20.
4. See Lawrence BERGREEN, *James Agee: a Life* (New York: Dutton, 1984), 161.
5. See Chris MULLEN and Philip BEARD, *Fortune's America. The Visual Achievements of Fortune Magazine 1930–1965* (Norwich: University of East Anglia Library, 1985).
6. Douglas EKLUND, "'The Harassed Haven of Detachment': Walker Evans and the Fortune Portfolio," in *Walker Evans*, ed. Maria Mouris Hambourg, Jeff L. Rosenheim, Douglas Eklund, and Mia Fineman, 121 (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art/Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).
7. Evans in James R. MELLOW, *Walker Evans* (New York: Perseus Press, 1999), 308.
8. See Lesley K. BAIER, *Walker Evans at Fortune 1945–1965* (Wellesley, MA: Wellesley College, 1977).
9. 'Freewheeling Cameraman,' *Fortune*, May 1948: 32.
10. See also Lesley K. BAIER, *Walker Evans at Fortune* (note 8), 12.
11. This was the first of three portfolios Evans published on the subject: 'When "Downtown" was a Beautiful Mess,' *Fortune*, January 1962: 100–106; and 'Come on Down,' *Architectural Review*, July 1962: 96–100. See also Jeff ROSENHEIM et al., *Walker Evans and the Picture Postcard* (New York: Steidl/The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2009).
12. Walker EVANS and Malcolm BRADBURY, 'Collector's Items,' *Mademoiselle*, no. 57 (May 1963): 182.
13. Leslie KATZ, 'Interview with Walker Evans,' *Art in America* (59:2), March–April 1971: 82–89.
14. Walter BENJAMIN, 'The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility,' 2nd version (1935–1936), in *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media*, ed. Michael JENNINGS et al., 23 (Cambridge MA and London UK: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2008). The parallels between Evans and Benjamin run deep and can be best grasped by a comparative reading of Evans's 'The Reappearance of Photography' and Benjamin's 'A Little History of Photography,' both published in 1931.
15. 'Homes of Americans,' *Fortune*, no. 33, April 1946: 148–57.
16. See David CAMPANY, 'Almost the Same Thing: Some Thoughts on the Collector-Photographer,' in *Cruel and Tender: The Real in the Twentieth Century Photograph*, ed. Emma DEXTER and Thomas WESKI, 32–35 (London: Tate Publishing, 2003).
17. Roland BARTHES coined the term 'anchorage' in 'The Rhetoric of the Image' (1964) *Image-Music-Text*, ed. and trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977).
18. LUCE and LONGWELL in Loudon WAINWRIGHT's *The Great American Magazine* (New York: Knopf, 1986), 29 and 21.
19. John TAGG, 'Melancholy Realism: Walker Evans's Resistance to Meaning' (2003), in *The Disciplinary Frame: Photographic Truths and the Capture of Meaning* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 96.

20. See for example Leslie KATZ, 'Interview with Walker Evans,' *Art in America*, no. 59 (1971): 82–89.
21. I am referring to Martha ROSLER'S *The Bowery in Two Inadequate Descriptive Systems* (1974–1975), a sequence of straight shots of shop fronts in New York's Bowery district accompanied by endless euphemisms for drunkenness.
22. See David CAMPANY 'Conceptual Art History, or, a Home for *Homes For America*' in *Rewriting Conceptual Art*, ed. John BIRD and Michael NEWMAN (London: Reaktion Books, 1999).
23. Denis HOLLIER, 'The Use-Value of the Impossible' *October*, no. 60 (1992): 23.
24. See the interviews with Walker EVANS conducted by Paul CUMMINGS in October and December 1971, in *The Smithsonian Archives of American Art* (<http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-walker-evans-11721>).
25. Leslie KATZ, 'Interview with Walker Evans' (note 20), 82–89.
26. Louis KRONENBERGER, ed., *Quality: Its Image in the Arts* (New York: Atheneum, 1969).
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## ABSTRACTS

Between 1945 and 1965 Walker Evans was employed by Time Inc. to work for *Fortune*, the American business and industry magazine. He advised on its photographic direction and produced his own photo-essays, often setting his own assignments, shooting, editing, designing, and writing too. Evans's complex politics and artistic temperament were at odds with American magazine culture. Many of his photo-essays resisted *Fortune*'s preference for business, industry, and modern capitalist progress. Instead he celebrated the outmoded, the disappearing, and the overlooked. His layouts and texts often faced the viewer with the ambiguities of photographs as documents. As well as shooting his own projects he worked with archival and vernacular images such as popular postcards. This essay explores three of Evans's pieces for *Fortune*: 'Labor Anonymous' (1946), 'Main Street Looking North from Courthouse Square' (1948) and 'Homes for Americans' (1946). As Evans's 'museum' reputation grew in the 1960s and 1970s, his magazine work was forgotten or dismissed as compromised commercialism. The author revisits those pages to show just how seriously Evans took them.

## AUTHOR

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David Campany is a writer, curator, and Reader in Photography at the University of Westminster, London. His books include *Art and Photography* (Phaidon, 2003), *Photography and Cinema* (Reaktion 2008), *Jeff Wall: Picture for Women* (MIT/Afterall, 2011), and *Walker Evans: The Magazine Work* (Steidl, 2011). In 2011 he co-curated *Anonymes: l'Amérique sans nom: photographie et cinéma* at Le Bal, Paris, and *Hannah Collins: La Revelación del Tiempo* at the Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Bogotá.