

Article

The Hands of *Fortune*: Margaret Bourke-White's Magazine Photographs of Manual Work in the Early Years of the Depression

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Abstract: In 1931, *Fortune* published an article entitled 'American Workingman', a survey of labor in the midst of the worsening Depression, with an emblematic composite image of hands at work to indicate the manual character and the diverse jobs of industrial work. The picture conveys the polysemy of hands as a synecdoche of labor, and witnesses the prevalence of close-up depictions of hands at work in other *Fortune* features on specific industries, from which these fragments derived. This article explores the implications of *Fortune*'s representation of the 'hands of labor' at a time of escalating industrial conflict, defined by redundancies, strikes, and protests. If *Fortune* was a self-styled 'super-class' publication for a corporate elite, conceived for the 'heads' of industry, then to what extent do these *othered* hands operate ideologically to represent labor's compliance at a time of crisis? If abstracted hands were ubiquitous in modernist photography, then Bourke-White's images also equated a putative subgenre of Communist iconography, in which the hand, or fist, connoted proletarian solidarity and strength. Yet leftist militant agitation provoked antipathy in *Fortune*, and so I examine the representation of labor in the article and the magazine more broadly as industrial relations intensified in the 1930s. I consider further the extent these automatic hands allude to the narrative of 'technological displacement', or workerless factories, as a response to strikes.

Keywords: industry; magazine photography; documentary; modernism; protest; unemployment



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The August 1931 issue of the deluxe business magazine *Fortune* features an article profiling the 'American Workingman', opening with a visual allegory of labor in the form of photographed hands at work beneath a caption asking 'Who is He? What is He? How Does He Work and Live?' ([American Workingman 1931](#))¹. The image assembled these assorted hands from snippets of photographs by Margaret Bourke-White, the magazine's lead photographer, a specialist in industrial scenes who would soon become one of the America's most renowned photojournalists. Invoking the long-established synecdoche for workers as 'hired hands', lines from James Russell Lowell's 1843 poem 'A Glance Behind the Curtain' embellish the picture:

'No man is born into the world whose work, Is not born with him. There is always work, And tools to work withal, for those who will; And blessed are the horny hands of toil' ([American Workingman 1931](#)).

An ensuing commentary explains the varieties of tasks on display: '... but the hands of the industrial age are not always horny. They sift sand upon the molds of steel, compose the pages of newspapers, determine the revolutions of gigantic drills, ruffle the indexes of record, ensure the extreme of heat, draft, hammer, measure, drive ...', before adjusting Lowell's poem to the current economic crisis with an ominous addition:

'Nor is there always work to do ...

Nor are they always blessed...' ([American Workingman 1931](#)).

The worsening economic crisis necessitated reconsideration of the hands that worked the machines in the epic industrial vistas portrayed in *Fortune's* pages. This study examines the signification of hands in the 'American Workingman' image in relation to *Fortune's* chronicling of industrial America during the early years of the Depression. I argue that these hands were ciphers of a struggle for labor in relation to rising industrial conflict, the threat of Communist revolutionary agitation, and the dilemma of technological displacement. In contrast with previous studies, the article draws extensively from the Time Inc. Records and the Margaret Bourke-White Papers in looking closely at photographs of labor in multiple *Fortune* issues.²

In the study *Hands: Physical Labor, Class and Work*, Janet Zandy writes that 'hands are reductive signifiers and lucid maps to the geography of human complexity' that have a rich polysemy (Zandy 2004). This article examines an industrial discourse in which the figuration of hands is ubiquitous and complex—they connote work, workers, employment relations, and power. Indeed, the synecdoche is a site of contestation, and arguably 'multiaccentual', according to Valentin Voloshinov's premise that 'different classes will use one and the same language. As a result, differently oriented accents intersect in every ideological sign. Sign becomes an arena of the class struggle' (Voloshinov 1986). For example, the scientific management theorist Frederick Winslow Taylor used hands in multiple senses: there were synecdochic 'skilled hands' or 'old hands', some work was done 'by hand' rather than machinery (yet a worker could be a 'machine hand'), training workers required a 'guiding hand' to 'try their hands' at various tasks, such as becoming a 'pig-iron handler' (Taylor 1911). The hand was also a cipher of discipline: 'in case of insubordination or impudence, repeated failure to do their duty, lateness or unexcused absence, the shop disciplinarian takes the workman or bosses in hand and applies the proper remedy' (Taylor 1911). In another sense, Taylor cautioned against conceding to the 'hands of the labor agitators' (Taylor 1919). The hand could also serve as a model of collective bargaining in riposte to Taylorism, as evident in a missive from government munitions workers at Watertown Arsenal in 1913 to the Secretary of War: 'we, the undersigned, employees of the Government, representing 349 of a total of 373 hands employed in various departments hereon, respectfully petition that the Taylor System . . . be immediately discontinued', in particular because the Stop Watch 'is humiliating and savors too much of the slave driver' (Thompson 1914).

If Zandy states further that 'hands are class and cultural markers' then usage is notably prevalent in Communist writings (Zandy 2004). In the first volume of Karl Marx's *Capital*, the classic synecdochic sense is widespread—for instance, ' . . . when many hands take part simultaneously in one and the same undivided operation, such as raising a heavy weight, turning a winch, or removing an obstacle' (Marx 1887). The resultant commodities involved a 'change of hands [that] constitutes their exchange' (Marx 1887). In *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Friedrich Engels presented revolution as a change of hands: 'the whole historical movement is concentrated in the hands of the bourgeoisie; every victory so obtained is a victory for the bourgeoisie' whereas 'the revolutionary class . . . holds the future in its hands' (Marx and Engels 1848). In defining class relations, Marx wrote 'the division of labour in the workshop implies concentration of the means of production in the hands of one capitalist'. Within the working-class, Marx noted that capitalists increasingly employed unskilled 'machine hands' to replace the more costly 'handicraftsmen' (Marx 1887). In *The ABC of Communism*, Nikolai Bukharin and Yevgeni Preobrazhensky distilled class conflict into an opposition of the ownership of the means of production with the proletariat's barest human resource: 'The small group of the wealthy owns everything; the huge masses of the poor own nothing but the hands with which they work' (Bukharin and Preobrazhensky 1922). Hands defined the working-class from other strata—Antonio Gramsci distinguished the petite bourgeoisie from the proletariat as a class 'not prepared to work with their hands' (Gramsci 1971).

Gramsci's differentiation of manual and mental labor captures *Fortune's* discursive construction of itself and its audience as intellectual and therefore categorically distinct

from industrial workers through opposite métiers. *Fortune's* publisher Henry Luce, owner of Time Inc., defined the readership of this 'Ideal Super-Class Magazine' as 'the directing heads of Business' (Henry 1929c). The 'super-class' heads obviously don't do manual work, outside of signing letters and shaking hands. They appear in industry and corporation profiles at their desks or in sober headshot portraits to convey their mental capacities, with identifying captions registering their individuality, typically stacked in rectilinear layouts like the windows of a modern office block (A Panel of General Motors Executives 1930; One out of Every Five Cigarettes 1932). Conversely, workers are usually anonymous and captioned by job designation, primarily depicted performing tasks in workplace settings as a productive resource, akin to conveyor belts and crankshafts. The othering of the hands is overt in an article that Luce himself wrote for the second issue of the magazine entitled 'The Unseen Half of South Bend', following a journey in August 1929 with Bourke-White to investigate the 'industrial army' in this Indiana city as 'the perfect microcosm, the living example, the photographable average' (The Unseen Half of South Bend 1930). Luce's reference to 'the other half, the makers ... the army of South Bend' (perhaps a nod to Jacob Riis's 1890 muckraking slum chronicle *How the Other Half Lives*) distinguishes the hands from the readers, albeit qualified with the backhanded compliment that 'the South Bend privates are well paid. They labor without complaint and without hope. Were it necessary to recruit the army of South Bend from such as you and I, there simply would be no Industrial Age' (The Unseen Half of South Bend 1930).

Luce told potential advertisers that *Fortune* would reach 'the greatest concentration of wealthy and influential people' but the magazine was not simply a tribute to the rich (Henry 1929c). Having initially mooted the bald title 'Power', Luce alighted on *Fortune* because 'it concerns itself with that which conditions the fortunes of every man' (Henry 1929c). If for Luce 'business need not be autocratic. But business must certainly be aristocratic', then *Fortune's* vision of American capitalism was not mere boosterism but evinced paternalistic, almost utopian overtones, and whilst flattering the upper echelons it also appealed to their noblesse oblige (Luce 1969). Indeed, Luce presented *Fortune* as a cultivated yet pragmatic rejoinder to the vulgarity and rapacity of American capitalism, which soared in the 1920s like the skyscrapers it propagated. *Fortune* would provide expert information in erudite yet accessible prose and celebrate exemplary corporate figureheads to instill decency and sophistication amongst American business patricians. Therefore, whilst Luce conceived of *Fortune* as a forum for 'the aristocracy of our business civilization', it would cover the gamut of the industrial scene, from production of commodities on the factory floor to the mansions made from the profits, and situate them amidst improving treatises of culture, politics, and society (Henry 1929b).

Although launched in February 1930, Luce planned the first few *Fortune* issues before the Wall Street Crash, having produced a prospectus in September 1929 and a preface for advertisers, and so the magazine arrived with the optimistic Machine Age rhetoric of the Twenties at a moment when the Depression's dire effects were just beginning to register. Archibald MacLeish, who wrote 'American Workingman', later claimed that 'because of the fact that [*Fortune*] opened for business in the middle of the Depression, it was not at all a business magazine' (MacLeish 1986). Business in *Fortune* was always political, reflecting Luce's opposition, stated in a 1928 speech to corporate leaders in New York, to the 'divorcing of business and politics' in America, and advocacy of a social promise in which businessmen should 'vote for the long investment' (Luce 1969). Michael Augspurger has applied Martin Sklar's concept of 'corporate liberalism' to characterize *Fortune's* ethos, stating that it aimed 'to nurture an elite coalition of statesman industrialists and corporate professionals whose sophistication and broad-mindedness would make business not only profitable and productive but also socially responsible. *Fortune's* cultural essays worked to solidify such a class' (Augspurger 2004). There was no specific political credo under the masthead of *Fortune*. In the 1930s *Fortune* derided Soviet and Nazi dictatorships, flirted briefly with Italian fascism, and grudgingly embraced the New Deal after initial truculence—though it customarily sided with management in industrial conflicts. The

magazine turned against the bull market recklessness that contributed to the Crash and eventually rebuked Herbert Hoover's laissez-faire response to the Depression, finding in the New Deal a tolerable corollary of the American industrial epic for these hard times. It did not swing left in the 1930s despite the inclusion of several liberal and leftist journalists, including MacLeish, Dwight Macdonald, Erskine Caldwell, and James Agee, hired for writing acumen and sharpness of analysis.

In the more prosperous era before the post-Crash downturn was incontrovertible, the heads brokered cooperation from the hands through job creation and high wages or conversely relied upon labor surplus to control pay levels. The 'American Workingman' article arrived at a moment that the extent of the crisis was clearly evident but faith in economic self-righting superseded the necessity of state intervention. By 1931 the Depression had brought divestment and wage cuts as unemployment reached 15%, rising from 3.9% in 1929 towards a 1933 peak of just under 24.9%. Yet *Fortune* cleaved to a model of 'new capitalism', elaborated in 'American Workingman', whereby high wages would stimulate consumption and increase labor's stake in production to yield a more equitable and balanced market. In forsaking the naked exploitation of the 'old capitalism', chiefly the robber barons' indifference to their workers' rights and conditions, new capitalism would 'replace a capitalistic class with a capitalistic society, a society in which labor by virtue of its share in the profits of industry has a stake in the existing order. And its ultimate consequence must be the joint control of industry by workman and employer' (illustrated by a photograph from General Electric showing 'employee-consumer partners go to lunch') ([American Workingman 1931](#)). However, there was a growing concern, indicated in a section of 'American Workingman' entitled 'Hammer, Sickle, and Hand', that in a weakened American economy Communism would enjoin the hands to collectivize and strike against the heads. The article suggests that the 'super-class' should recognize the threat posed as:

'the economic duel will be fought, if it is fought at all, between a radical capitalism with its purpose to make men productive in order that they may be free, and an experimental Communism with its purpose to enforce men in order that they may be productive. And the judge of the outcome will be American labor' ([American Workingman 1931](#)).

Fortune's consistent vision of an ideal America was an efficient, profitable capitalist order, led by patricians to the benefit of all, as captured in industrialist and proponent of new capitalism Owen D. Young's response to the first issue: 'the magazine will not be the spokesman of the few lifted on the shoulders of the many, but will reflect this great cooperative effort known as business which is every day learning that its highest success can only be attained by making everybody healthy, wealthy, and wise' ([Young 1930](#)). The paradox in Young's complement and the new capitalism model itself was that cooperation necessitated hands (here amalgamated with all below the heads as the 'shoulders') who could not afford a 'super-class magazine', especially in the Depression, and so *Fortune* would unavoidably be the 'spokesman of the few' on behalf of the many. It was purposefully exclusive, and Luce boasted to potential advertisers that the magazine would price out most lower income readers—the Ideal Super-Class Magazine's price (\$10.) will be a barrier so high that only the reader both enthusiastic and well-to-do will vault it' ([Henry 1929c](#)). The projected circulation was 30,000 and by 1941 it had risen impressively to 160,000, yet it was still a select journal—in comparison, that year Luce's more famous *Life*, launched 1936, was selling 3.3 million weekly. With its generous 11.25 by 14-inch dimensions, printed on 125-pound weight paper, and its trove of high-quality journalism, artworks, and photography, the material richness of *Fortune* married with its editorial contents, complementing the assumed wealth of the readership. On these luxurious pages, scenes of industry and its captains sat alongside articles on travel, entertainment, money, the great and the good in 'Faces of the Month', overseen by the role model dynasties such as Vanderbilts, the Guggenheims, and the Rothschilds who appeared in obsequious family chronicles. These stories nestled in a menagerie of advertisements for aviation, automobiles,

hotels, and skyscraper office space that further established the magazine as the province of an elite. Therefore, the reader of *Fortune* enjoyed urbane commentary on industries such as steel, coal, timber, and paper manufacture amidst aspirational contextual features, rather than the dry assessment in prior business journals, most notably *Forbes*.

Editors Parker Lloyd-Smith and Ralph Ingersoll developed *Fortune*'s visual culture in concert with art editor T.M. Cleland, who created an allegory of fortune's wheel for the cover of the first issue, realizing Luce's aim 'to reflect Industrial Life in ink and paper and word and picture as the finest skyscraper reflects it in stone and architecture. To this end it combines resourceful journalism, brilliant writing, superlative photography, and master craftsmanship' (*Fortune—At a Glance* n.d.). As a 'log-book, the critical history, the elaborately illustrated record of Twentieth Century Industrial Civilization', *Fortune* would balance beautiful design with accurate journalism, exhibiting an upscale mode of the nascent documentary culture of the new decade (Henry 1929a). In this respect the magazine's paradigm visual medium was photography because its dual function of recording and picturing equated the informative longform prose of articles, more so than the emblematic graphic work on covers and inside illustrations. In 1937 Luce asserted that 'the photograph is the most important instrument of journalism which has been developed since the printing press', in response to *Life*'s growing influence on American public opinion (Luce 1969). If a short piece in *Life* defined the camera an 'essayist'—both 'commentator' and 'reporter'—then the term fits *Fortune*'s photography's interpretation of industry with grandeur and gravitas (albeit eliding its noise, dirt, and physical toll) (Life 1937). Unlike *Life*'s busy photographic layouts, *Fortune*'s editorial methodology for arranging photographs mapped onto the cool, calm, and collected sensibility of its imagined community of readers. Photographs sit in undemonstrative orthogonal boxes with succinct yet vaguely witty captions. In contrast with the epochal dynamism of *USSR in Construction*, the thematically analogous yet political antithetical Soviet Five-Year Plan celebrant, *Fortune* observed industry with the unruffled yet quizzical satisfaction of a business executive perambulating through the company's new factory.

The 'American Workingman' image is a strange object because it seems initially to belong to the category of photomontage, as a picture made of different photographs, but it diverges from avant-garde applications of this mode in important ways. Photomontages rarely appear in *Fortune*, and indeed the urgency and criticality associated with the technique doesn't suit the magazine's stately editorial tempo. Photomontage was in any case marginal in US print media and art practice, outside of leftist magazines such as *New Masses* and *Labor Defender*. Sally Stein's argument that a no-nonsense, pragmatic mentality delimited its application in the United States is useful for explaining the near absence of photomontages in *Fortune*: 'something about American culture put a brake on the kind of aggressive montage practice that characterized European visual culture between the wars' (Stein 1992). The 'American Workingman' image does not enact the revelatory juxtapositions evident in European and Soviet polemical photomontages, such as those by Hannah Höch or Gustav Klutis respectively, that Sergei Eisenstein defined as the dialectical 'montage of attractions' (Eisenstein 1988). Rather it depicts literal tasks in a unitary tableau of equivalent motifs of industrial work showing an array of occupations like a vitrine of wax models. In abstracting the images from the original photo-stories, this collection of hands shows discrete manual jobs in a closed relay that reduces work to mere function, in terms of both specific operations and generalized labor. The more generic term 'composite image' better captures this combination of elements into a homogenous rather than dialectical spatial arrangement.

The Time Inc archive does not contain documents pertaining to this story to reveal the creator, but either art editor Cleland or his assistant Eleanor Treacy surely made the picture. The use of Bourke-White's photographs as the source is significant—more than simply illustrating the magazine's articles, her photography established *Fortune*'s visual identity. Bourke-White was the first hired and arguably the most prestigious *Fortune* photographer. With a studio in the Chrysler building and a busy advertising practice

alongside her *Fortune* work, by the early 1930s Bourke-White was rivalled in American commercial photography only by Edward Steichen. Her phenomenal commercial success chimed with the magazine's super-class ethos, and her personal fortune is evident in the symptomatic headline 'Girl's Camera is \$25,000 Income' (a six-figure salary in today's currency) rising to double that amount by the end of 1931, even at the Depression's worst (Cox 1930). Bourke-White had started her professional career in 1927 in Cleveland, Ohio, following training at the Clarence White School in New York, by convincing a skeptical Otis Steel Mill director to commission publicity photographs, which she undertook in the intense heat of the plant, producing atmospheric pictures of steel production. The following year her photograph of a 200-ton ladle won first prize at the Cleveland Museum of Art with the title 'Romance of Steel', which accurately described her emergent aesthetic. Otis Steel produced a leather-bound volume called *The Story of Steel* featuring the photographs, which reached Luce who then telegraphed Bourke-White in May 1929 inviting her, expenses paid, to New York. The ensuing discussions with Time Inc. over the next month resulted in Bourke-White providing half of her time at \$1000 per month to act as an associate editor to *Fortune*.

In the September 1929 prospectus of *Fortune*, a reprint of 'Romance of Steel' introduced Bourke-White with the caption 'No copper smelter thus but a scene at the Otis Steel Co., Cleveland. The photographer: Margaret Bourke-White of *Fortune's* staff, now touring the U.S.', followed on the next page by a similar image celebrating how she 'imprisons the glow of molten metal' (No Copper Smelter Thus 1929). Issue 1 cemented Bourke-White's status as the magazine's preeminent photographer by featuring two articles ('Hogs' and 'Sand into Glass') with her pictures and 'Trade Routes Across the Great Lakes: A Portfolio of Iron, Steel, Coal, and Ships', a sequence of industrial vistas that was a putative *Fortune* manifesto in images (Trade Routes across the Great Lakes 1930). An opening scene of 'Heaped Ore, Ready for the Furnaces of Cleveland Steel Mills', with the smokestacks on the horizon's haze like cathedral spires seen through a mountain pass, encapsulates the industrial sublime that became the signature of the magazine. Other images included two freighters on the lakes, a patterned silhouette of cranes unloading coal, and the spouting sparks of an arc welder at Lincoln Electric Company. Taken together, the portfolio was a Grand Tour of the Great Lakes to reconfigure these coarse sites as tasteful scenes of an American epic.

Outside of labor themed articles such as 'The Unseen Half of the South Bend' and 'American Workingman', the human element of industrial work is sometimes a mere bystander to the primary focus on machines and factories, marking scale to emphasize the immensity of productive power. Workers in features on Columbia Gas and Electric and United Corporation companies, the International Paper Company in 'Paper and Power', and 'Iron Ore' are peripheral to the totemic plant, process, and product (Columbia and United 1930; Paper and Power 1930; Iron Ore: Making and Remaking the Map of Steel 1931). Yet other articles foreground labor, such as 'Sand into Glass', or present a balance of these features, as in 'Cloak and Suit', offering a multi-faceted view of the workings of industry (Sand into Glass 1930; Cloak and Suit 1930). Skilled workers perform tasks in close-ups, whereas semi-skilled jobs are viewed from a distance with a greater emphasis on the industrial setting. Close-ups of workers' hands commonly demonstrate specialized work by showing a detail of a specific job. As the great number of photos by Bourke-White featuring hands indicates this was a frequent pictorial device in *Fortune* stories, ranging from studies of heavy industry to clerical work. In the 'American Workingman' image, the archetypal hands of labor perform multiple operations, including modelling automobiles in sand, mining, and lino-typing for *New York Times*. Disembodied hands conveyed the fascination of modern work, such as the *Times* story's oblique close-up of image cropping (The Times and The Times and Their Times 1930). In 'Bottled Time' of April 1930, a close-up of a watchmaker's hands at Elgin National Watch Co, with dramatically distended fingers, signifies specialized work with the caption 'whirling drill v. human hands', in reference to a short feature on the idiosyncratic machinery of this industry, summed up in the quip that

‘the machines themselves are too human to be anything but unique in their kind’ ([Bottled Time 1930](#)). The motif of abstract hands was also a frequent feature of advertisements in *Fortune*, as in a May 1931 advert for Russell, Burdsall & Ward Bolt and Nut Company, with the caption ‘Bourke-White Photo’, crediting the hand of the famous photographer, acting as a marker of quality to sell this unexotic but useful commodity ([How a Famous Manufacturer Saved Money 1931](#)).

As the plethora of pictures in the catalogue *Speaking with Hands: Photographs from the Buhl Collection* demonstrates, hands have been something of a preoccupation for photographers since the medium’s invention ([Blessing 2004](#)). If the hand in early twentieth century industrial discourses was a polysemic synecdoche, then its extensive usage in contemporaneous photography also had multiple registers. Bourke-White’s hands were characteristic of a modernist photographic mode of semi-abstract close-ups that reflects her early training at the Clarence White School, which taught vocational photography skills for commercial and studio careers that involved experimenting with design, especially in the lectures of abstract painter Max Weber. The school was a hub of formal innovation where students such as Bourke-White, Ralph Steiner, Laura Gilpin, Paul Outerbridge Jr., and Wynn Richards developed photographic techniques for advertising such as close-ups of eggs, sugar cubes, typewriters, and hats (fittingly Gilpin described them as ‘five finger exercises’) ([Gilpin 1926](#)). Indeed, students Edith Winifred Tait and Julia Marshall both made photographic studies of hands—the latter in an advertising commission for Hershey’s. Photographic abstractions fostered novelty and curiosity to dramatize and thereby reify the commodities, as Herbert Molderings explained in defining this aspect of German industrial and advertising photographers such as Albert Renger-Patzsch and Hans Finsler (whose practices were comparable to Bourke-White’s):

‘The advertising value of such photographs consists precisely in the fact that the objects are not presented functionally and contain the promise of mysterious meaning over and above their ordinary use-value: they take on a bizarre, unexpected appearance suggesting that they live lives of their own, independent of human beings’ ([Molderings 1978](#)).

Bourke-White’s use of abstraction witnessed the nexus of commercial advertising photography and modernist photographic experimentation, coalescing on the camera’s revelatory facility to capture the newness of modernity. Fittingly, there was an exhibition entitled ‘A Showing of Hands’ at the De Young Memorial Museum in San Francisco in 1932. Curator Lloyd Rollins assembled photographs by Man Ray, Edward Weston, Ansel Adams, Dorothea Lange, and Agustin Jiminez, including images of the hands of the painters José-Clemente Orozco and Savely Sorine, the Spanish dancer L’Argentina, and the composer-pianists Sergei Rachmaninoff and Ignace Paderewski. A note in the *Berkeley Gazette* explained that ‘the showing of hands is organized primarily for the purpose of displaying these members from an aesthetic point of view but naturally readers of character will also be interested in the comparison of hands of artists, musicians, financiers, and other noted people’ ([Unique Exhibition Coming to Museum 1932](#)). Weston and Cunningham soon formed Group f/64, an exhibiting collective of exponents of photographic abstraction whose inception took place at a subsequent De Young Museum show later in 1932. Photographs of hands are equivalent fragments to other forms such as fence posts, animal skulls, vegetables, and shells, which Weston defined as those ‘interdependent, interrelated parts of the whole—which is life’ ([Weston 1992](#)). There was also a sexual innuendo in these abstractions of hands, evident in their resemblance to Surrealist photographs by Man Ray and Hans Bellmer, that draws on the genital analogy of fingers. In the French magazine *Minotaure*, hands were the subject of Surrealist literary experiments, such as George Hugnet’s 1934 poem ‘The Little Dream of the Master of Hounds, illustrated with a grid of twelve photos of a woman’s hands, repetitively exploring the hand as an erotic dream sign: ‘hands like the bodies of sleeping women, with protruding hips, haunted hands resembling the hands of the devil of hot seas, hands on the mouth, hands, hands’ ([Hugnet 1934](#)). The Winter 1935 issue included Lotte Wolff’s study ‘Les Révélations psychiques de la Main’ examining

‘Chirognomy’ as a psychological method of analyzing ‘the forms of the hand, the fingers, the mountains, the network of lines and the accidental signs’ as a means of decoding the unconscious (Wolff 1935).

If abstracted hands constituted a common motif in contemporary commercial and gallery photography, then the application of this device within leftist visual production to connote the working-class and the poor is pertinent to the ‘American Workingman’ image due to its context within a profile of industrial labor. These images present the hand as a synecdoche of labor too, but as a signifier of struggle and solidarity rather than productive processes. In Tina Modotti’s Communist allegories on Mexican revolutionary themes, marked and calloused hands were symbols of the suppression and resistance of the country’s dispossessed. Modotti’s ‘Labor’, which appeared in the United States in a profile by Carleton Beals in *Creative Art* in 1929, shows a close-up of a dark-skinned woman washing a garment against a rock, the folds on her heavily lined hands serving as an index of long-standing endurance (Beals 1929). Reviewing an exhibition in Mexico City in 1929, Gustav Ortiz Hernan wrote that Modotti’s photography ‘analyzes the pain of being human to its most simple terms’ (Ortiz Hernan 1929). These hands correspond with Marti Casanovas’s observation that Modotti’s photographs were ‘revolutionary anecdotes’ that form a ‘social, pedagogical, illustrative art’ (Casanovas 1929). Her image of a male worker’s similarly worn hands resting on a shovel handle graced the cover of *New Masses* in December 1928 with the legend ‘hands to build’, akin to objects such as a sombrero and a typewriter in Modotti’s revolutionary grammar (New Masses 1928). The photo also appeared in the German magazine *Der Arbeiter fotograf* (The Worker Photographer) in June 1930 with the caption ‘We are building a new world’ (Der Arbeiter fotograf 1930). The magazine revisited the theme in August 1931 with a picture by a photographer credited as ‘E.A. of Zurich’ entitled ‘Arbeitshände’, showing a woman’s gnarled, veinous hands on her lap to suggest long years of hardship (Der Arbeiter fotograf 1931a).

The use of hands to assert the combined strength of the organized proletariat was a frequent strategy of leftist polemical iconography—the hands uniting as one hand, as a mighty weapon in industrial bargaining. A cartoon in the socialist magazine *Solidarity* from 1917 shows workers raising their hands to form one giant fist with the slogan ‘one big union’ in reference to the Industrial Workers of the World (Solidarity 1917). The Soviet photomontage pioneer Gustav Klutsis’s 1930 ‘Let’s Fulfill the Promise of the Plan of the Great Works’ encapsulates this mode, whereby an amalgam of hands and faces of citizens coalesces into a single hand that signifies the collective force powering the USSR’s accelerated industrial revolution. In the October 1931 issue of *Der Arbeiter fotograf*, a photomontage of hands holding a camera, combined with scenes of a crowd and workers digging, had the slogan ‘Werbe-karte der Arbeiter-fotografen’ (‘Worker Photographers’ Promotional Card’), thereby defining photographic work as a form of proletarian labor. (Der Arbeiter fotograf 1931b). On the July 1931 cover of *Labor Defender*, a hand holds a pick-axe aloft in reference to Communist leader William Z. Foster’s article ‘War in the Coal Fields’, about a series of strikes in West Virginia and Ohio that paid tribute to the ‘splendid fighting ability of the coal miners’ (Labor Defender 1931). Conversely, in the March 1932 a hand holding a Luger pistol had the caption ‘the mines in Ky. [Kentucky] are controlled by Rockefeller and Morgan interests. Their gunman killed 19-year old Harry Simms’ (Boyden 1932). All these versions belong to a media ambit that was antithetic to *Fortune*’s interests and superficially alien to Bourke-White’s practice. However, the letterhead of Rebel Arts, ‘an organization of artists in all fields . . . affiliated with or sympathetic to the socialist and labor movement’, of a fist clenching pen and paintbrush against an industrial background sits above a letter sent to Bourke-White in 1932, asking her to become a member, one of many such invitations (Wilson 1932).

Indeed, the ‘American Workingman’ image arrived at a point when radical groups were becoming increasingly interested in Bourke-White’s photography, an outcome of her series of trips to the Soviet Union and subsequent publications, such as the 1931 book *Eyes on Russia*, and numerous magazine features, including a February 1931 *Fortune* story entitled

‘Soviet Panorama’ (Haran 2015). In 1931 M.F. Agha wrote deemed her work ‘equally apt to enchant the American executives and the Bolshevik officials—enthusiasts of the “industrial plan”’ (Agha 1931). Given that her photographs appeared in the leading Communist organ *USSR in Construction*, unique among Americans, Bourke-White’s affiliation had considerable appeal for leftist journals such as *New Masses* and *Labor Defender* (in 1934 the latter contacted Bourke-White with ‘an unusual request’ to lend a hand by advising how to make improvements (Small 1934). Bourke-White was sufficiently aligned with the Workers Film and Photo League (WFPL) to appear on letterheads, but did not become a ‘worker photographer’, in the sense that the ‘camera is a weapon in the class struggle’ directed to depict poverty, evictions, strikes, and demonstrations (Ward 2011). When Albert Carroll asked Bourke-White to contribute to an exhibition, alongside works by the WFPL, Berenice Abbott, Irving Browning, and Steiner (a WFPL member) accompanying a fundraising Motion Picture Ball in late 1934, he stated that ‘we find more and more that the photographer of today leans toward the social viewpoint in expression which has already brought a number of well-known photographers into our ranks as members and willing co-workers’ (Carroll 1934). This inference of Bourke-White as a ‘co-worker photographer’, a fellow traveler of the radical camera, is the most appropriate designation for her political engagements. Intriguingly, Bourke-White kept a list of her works in this exhibition, and a photograph of hands was on display. Alongside this selection of largely *Fortune*-esque images of Russian and American industry was a picture entitled ‘Musician’s Hands’ (with the note ‘Abs’ signifying ‘abstract’), which might signify creative expression as a form of work (especially in this context), but also exemplified the divergence of the ‘co-worker photographer’ Bourke-White from the militant camera workers of the WFPL.

The ‘romance of steel’ was the common denominator for the interest in Bourke-White’s photography amongst corporate and radical concerns, though her images of factories, machines, and workers were contingent on contexts of dissemination. In ‘American Workingman’, as in *Fortune* more broadly, Bourke-White’s photographs operated within a particular editorial frame that diverged categorically from *USSR in Construction* or *Labor Defender* because its remit was a magazine for the heads. Photographs of hands invoked modernist aesthetic tropes to cultivate the magazine’s currency, but *Fortune*’s frame necessarily delimited radical potential; in a slightly different way it absorbed written contributions by leftists Caldwell or Agee into a house manner through largely eschewing writer credits or by-lines. The ‘American Workingman’ image represented *Fortune*’s rhetorical mobilization of the iconography of modern labor to make a case for new capitalism. It also acted as the lead image of a portfolio of illustrations of showing American workingman in different media, rendered graphically as well as photographically in diverse settings, which combined with the text to provide ‘a sheaf of explanatory notes’ (American Workingman 1931). Alongside *Fortune* photographs by Bourke-White and William Ritasse were portraits by Gerrit A. Beneker, idealizing statuettes by Max Kalish, and a panel from Thomas Hart Benton’s ‘America Today’ mural (a gritty Bowery scene by social realist Reginald Marsh serves as a reference to the Depression). The figure of the typological American workingman that emerges from these works is incipiently white and male, appended by photographs of Black workers and some caricatural figures in Benton’s mural, though women are not included.

The article observed that, unlike other countries, ‘in America there is not only a social distinction but a racial distinction’ (American Workingman 1931). Bourke-White’s photographs of Black workers from the South Bend, Aluminum, and ‘Hogs’ stories appeared alongside images by Ritasse of United Fruit Co. in New Orleans and Chicago Packing-town in a section entitled with several racist epithets in quote marks to demonstrate the prejudices of white workers, whilst insinuating the magazine’s own coded racial values. Captions rely upon stereotypes in presenting an Aluminum employee, photographed by Bourke-White, as ‘belligerent’ due to his fixed stare; a group by Ritasse enjoys a ‘cheerful southern luncheon’ (American Workingman 1931). *Fortune*’s chronicles of the business elite presented an almost total array of white faces, with Black figures largely restricted to stories

on 'All African Copper' (September 1931), United Fruit (March 1933), the tobacco industry in 'Philip Morris and Co.' (March 1936) where they appeared solely as manual workers. Outside of manual work, Black people appear sporadically in *Fortune* as entertainers, sports stars, or as exotic Africans (a respectful August 1933 profile on Duke Ellington provided a notable exception, although it symptomatically addressed a musician outside of the industrial milieu)³.

White or Black, the 'American Workingman' was a working *man*—the article asked 'Who is he? What is he? How does He Work and Live?'. Women industrial workers are not pictured in the image and described in the text merely in reference to male counterparts. If the 'American Workingman' was essentially masculine, then the representation of female labor in *Fortune* was more complex. In June 1930, Bourke-White photographed garment workers for an article entitled 'Cloak and Suit', which noted the actions of the radicalized International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union but concluded 'not even social revolution will stamp out Milady's vanity and her deep need for novelty' (*Cloak and Suit* 1930). 'Milady' was the elegantly tailored companion to the 'Man of the World' executive in illustrations for travel, automobiles, and home furnishings. Perusing the magazine, the *Fortune* reader would find affirmation in a textual and visual discourse that presented men as besuited protagonists⁴. *Fortune's* heads were men negotiating the great American industrial scene with steely determination, and women as their accoutrements, in the form of secretaries, wives, mothers, entertainers, and, periodically, as manual workers (in 1935 a series of articles addressed 'Women in Business' but qualified that 'there is no American woman whose business would properly rank with the first or the second or even the third line of male successes') (*Women in Business* 1935).

The paradigm hand was the default, white male American workingman, represented in two photographs by Bourke-White of two South Bend workers, with the caption 'Middle-Western Towns—America's Industrial Medians . . . where manufacturing has concentrated and where, because they are the center of America's most typical industry, the automobile, most industrial research begins and ends. Here labor statistically meets its problems of wages, hazard, unemployment' (*American Workingman* 1931). Almost a Laurel and Hardy comic duo, these solid, dependable, and pointedly unthreatening models of the American workingman are a safe pair of hands for heads with furrowed brows to contemplate the section entitled 'Hammer, Sickle, and Hand' underscores the sentiment in repurposing Bourke-White's image of a glass blower from 'Sand into Glass' to state how 'the glorification of labor has become, in our day, a communist prerogative', but witnesses an older American mythology of the workingman to remind readers of long established fealty and affinity (*American Workingman* 1931). The wry tone of the article diminished the risk, as evident in the cutline to a photograph by Ritasse of a strike in New Orleans: 'The striking stevedores above were photographed by *Fortune's* photographer W. M. Ritasse on Canal Street near the wharves. In the process he narrowly escaped a beating-up at the hands of the local police, to whom a photographer is only less dangerous than a Red. If, indeed, the two things aren't the same' (*American Workingman* 1931). Beneker's portraits and Kalish's statuettes echo the proletarian aesthetic in Soviet and American communist visual production, defined by the ubiquitous figure of the industrial worker as the embodiment of the working-class. The visualization of the American workingman here represents an appropriation of radical iconography to match the article's argument that new capitalism must draw labor away from the lure of Communism.

Beneker's paintings of industrial workers illustrate the section on 'Reds . . . ', which qualifies the threat in radicalism in arguing that 'American labor has been slow to organize, organization has not progressed in the past few years, and the great labor organizations are conservative and democratic' (*American Workingman* 1931). Of these, *Fortune* favored the American Federation of Labor and in a December 1933 profile paid tribute to this powerful union bloc as 'the nation's only important body of organized labor' whose 'patron saint is not Karl Marx but Benjamin Franklin, the bourgeois craftsman' (*The American Federation of Labor* 1933). The AFL's value for *Fortune* lay in its antipathy to industrial action, skilled

membership basis ('the aristocrats of labor'), and consonance with the principle that the American workingman is 'capitalistic by nature' ([The American Federation of Labor 1933](#)). In 'American Workingman' *Fortune* downplayed current radical influences on workers in stating the minimal role of leftist political parties in the industrial scene ([American Workingman 1931](#)). MacLeish's explanation for this scenario was 'the absence of class-consciousness', because 'you can't make a man conscious of a class he refuses to know he belongs to', and so American labor did not formulate itself as the proletariat ([American Workingman 1931](#)). If Communism's inroads into labor were limited, then the article explored how radicalism might find seed in the current crisis. The section 'How to Live on \$7 a Day at 2817 $\frac{1}{2}$ Amazon Avenue, South Dearborn' explains the appeal of 'Reds' for an everyman such as 39-year old Ford drill operator Fred Gurty, as it does not take 'much imagination to think about unemployment in Detroit in 1931' ([American Workingman 1931](#)). In brief, *Fortune's* analysis of the 'American Workingman' acknowledged that the Depression might stimulate disaffection, and cautioned readers that the worker could gravitate towards militancy. The photographed hands showed labor cooperating in general, whilst not collectivizing into a fist to strike, accompanying an article that invokes the iconography of Communism to reclaim the sign of the worker, if only in the minds of the heads.

By the time 'American Workingman' was published, it was becoming clear to *Fortune* that Hoover's administration had been mistaken in downplaying the Depression, and a belated switch from laissez-faire to intervention was insufficient to salve the American economy, with the dollar down 90% from its pre-Wall Street Crash value, over 5000 banks failing, and an unemployment rate exceeding 20% at over 12 million. The new capitalism model of high wages was increasingly redundant in these circumstances. In January 1932, *Fortune* confronted the Depression directly with 'New York in the Third Winter', a piece lamenting diminished revenues for theatres, hotels, and florists, musing grimly that 'life goes on' despite the heads' reduced disposable income ([New York in the Third Winter 1932](#)). As the Depression persisted, the magazine's coverage developed a more critical edge and, as Robin Vanderlan notes, 'by 1932 *Fortune's* ambitious new journalism of exposure and interpretation had emerged in full. Departing from the standard journalism practice, urged by Hoover, of minimizing the effects of the Depression, it repeatedly exposed its severity' ([Vanderlan 2010](#)). Indeed, that year *Fortune* turned on Hoover with the sharply critical article ' "No One Has Starved" ', in which the President's infamous claim met the riposte '... which is not true' ([No One Has Starved 1932](#)). This blunt assessment of unemployment marked the magazine's recognition that the Depression was an unprecedented and sustained calamity. Surveying the national wreckage, *Fortune* now pleaded 'what do you do?', beseeching readers to empathize with the unemployed via the case of an individual carpenter ([No One Has Starved 1932](#)).

However, whilst attacking the government's negligence concerning a precarious workforce and warning that 'there is a limit beyond which hunger and misery become violent' *Fortune* was dismissive of redress through strike action ([No One Has Starved 1932](#)). Photographs accompanying the article showed the unemployed sleeping rough, and several scenes of civil unrest such as the Bonus March of impoverished war veterans to Washington DC and the Ford Motor Co. strike in Detroit, both of which were staunchly by violent suppression. The Bonus March witnessed two deaths, stirring a furious response in the radical press, such as Foster's tirade in the *Daily Worker* that 'this blood is on the hands of Hoover. It is on the hands of the capitalist class represented by Hoover' ([Foster 1932](#)). *Fortune's* representation was more measured and detached, yet its concern for the grievances of the demonstrators was offset by jokey captions to photographs that betrayed sympathy with the forces of law and order against militancy. In Cleveland, the 'unemployed mob the city hall', in McKeesport, PA 'tear bombs for unemployment' engulf a demonstration, and in Chicago 'police provide one prone answer to a riot' in the form of a clearly injured protestor presumably knocked down by assembled officers listed as a 'Civic Group on Michigan Boulevard' ([No One Has Starved 1932](#)). A scene from the Ford debacle, which saw

four strike leaders shot dead, garnered a more serious caption that nevertheless betrayed *Fortune*'s stance in apportioning the blame to the strikers when 'a jobless demonstration turned into the Depression's worst riot' due to 'mismanaged resistance' ([No One Has Starved 1932](#)). In contrast, the April 1932 issue of *Labor Defender* cover included Henry Ford in a photomontage featuring parts of the aforementioned Chicago photograph, so that he stands alongside one of the policeman above the prone protestor against a factory backdrop, with the slogan 'Ford, Murderer of Workers' ([Labor Defender 1932](#)). If *Fortune* expressed sympathy for unemployed and cash-strapped workers, then it framed militancy as a threat and sided with the heads when industrial conflict escalated, as evident in a 1933 profile of Ford Motor Company that narrated the events and concluded on the killing of a striker that '... it would appear that Mr. Ford and his works are well protected from radical agitation' ([Mr. Ford Doesn't Care 1933](#)).

If the strikes and civil unrest of the Depression met with disapproval in *Fortune*, then it is telling that a parallel narrative in the magazine explored automated production. 'No-one Has Starved' informs that 'the natural and inevitable consequence of a machine civilization is a lessened demand for human labor' ([No One Has Starved 1932](#)). *Fortune* pivoted between the necessity of automation and its human cost. In the 'American Workingman' text, MacLeish worried that 'replacement by machinery is a matter of national concern if it results in loss of employment, and [the worker's] sense of insecurity is a national weakness' ([American Workingman 1931](#)). By January 1933, after three years of the Depression and increased industrial conflict, *Fortune* warned grimly of 'The Next Labor Offensive' that would result from the amassed impact of unemployment, industrial reinvigoration, and technological displacement ([The Next Labor Offensive 1933](#)). Technological displacement was the theme of 'Obsolete Men' in the December 1932 edition, which assessed the inevitable superseding of the 'patent, automatic self-cooling mechanism of levers, joints, and complicated controls', i.e., the human worker' ([Obsolete Men 1932](#)). *Fortune* found that machines performed many jobs more efficiently and with greater capacity than humans—the hands of labor wasted time and therefore money ([Obsolete Men 1932](#)). Once the skilled hand, the manual worker was 'merely an adjunct to the tool, performing those functions of the tool which have not yet been mechanized' There were several droll subsections on 'Machines for Handling', 'Machines for Digging', 'Machines for Metal', 'Machines for Machines', 'Machines for Power', 'Machines for Food', 'Machines for Clothes', and 'Machines for the Farmer', illustrated with tractors, a dam, and an industrial bread-making machine ([Obsolete Men 1932](#)). In 'Machines for Clothes', a close-up photograph of a seamstress's hands and a large textile apparatus accompanied a text stating that 'a woman's hand can sew fifty to seventy-five stitches a minute. A sewing machine can sew 1800. And one man with textile machinery can equal the production of 45,000 men at the time of the American Revolution' ([Obsolete Men 1932](#)).

Despite Luce's personal belief in full employment and the collaborative rhetoric of new capitalism in 'American Workingman', the magazine's visual presentation of epic yet efficient American technological prowess insinuated a managerial ideal of trouble-free productivity culminating in the possibility of 'machines without men'. In the 1929 prospectus, a piece entitled 'Machines Mightier than Men', enthusing about a machine purchased by A.O. Smith Corporation to forge automobile frames for companies such as General Motors and Chrysler, had a blank space for an illustration with the caption '1599 men could not equal the efficiency of this \$5,000,000 machine' The text stated how 'the story teller has said "they lived happily ever afterward"; the socialist has said "men will have to work only three hours a day"; but the engineer has said "the work will be done automatically without any human labor whatever"'. Since the engineer speaks with the tongue of efficiency his voice has been heeded' ([Machines Mightier than Men 1929](#)). The Depression intensified this process, as evident in 'Obsolete Men', which states that 'there were 2,100,000 railroad employees in the U. S. in 1920. In July 1932, there were 1,020,000. One explanation of the 50 per cent drop is the Depression. Another is the engineer. Another

is the Depression plus the engineer. For the mother of modern invention is not necessity but hard times' ([Obsolete Men 1932](#)).

Against this theme of potential technological displacement, the 'American Working-man' image purportedly celebrates manual labor but also invites contemplation of a factory staffed by disembodied hands, like denizens of Thing from the Addams Family, toiling without complaint, an appealing scenario for some employers in these troubled times. The synecdoche fragments the working body into pure function, a disturbing scenario of mindless labor that echoes Marx's observation that modern manufacturing processes convert the worker into 'a crippled monstrosity, by forcing his detail dexterity at the expense of a world of productive capabilities and instincts ... Not only is the detail work distributed to the different individuals, but the individual himself is made the automatic motor of a fractional operation ... which makes man a mere fragment of his own body' ([Marx 1887](#)). Abstracting the hands from bodies suggests a trajectory towards fully automated production, a trouble-free system with workerless machines that cannot strike. In 1934 Ford Motor Company captured this fantasy in a film entitled *Rhapsody in Steel*, in which an animated sprite in a nocturnal plant magically causes cars to self-assemble, as a whimsical view of automobile manufacture that offers a promise of automation in an era of intense industrial conflict.

It is notable that the promise of automated labor arose in *Fortune* around times of socioeconomic crisis. After the early Depression, the most pointed example occurred after the Strike Wave of 1945–1946, which featured walkouts by seven million workers and the loss of 144 million working days. *Fortune* responded with a special issue on 'Labor in U.S. Industry' (perhaps best known for Walker Evans's tableau of Detroit workers entitled 'Labor Anonymous') that featured two articles, 'The Automatic Factory' and 'Machines without Men', outlining a perpetual motion labor-free production process. With the subtitle 'the threat-and-promise of laborless machines is closer than ever', the former explained that 'the dream of the automatic factory has haunted economic thought and H.G. Wellsian literature for many years. It has haunted labor, too, ever since labor discovered the sharp if transient pains of technological unemployment' ([The Automatic Factory 1946](#)). The following piece on 'Machines Without Men' by Canadian engineers E.W. Leaver and J.J. Brown imagined a factory 'barren of men' because 'nowhere is modern man more obsolete than on the factory production floor' ([Leaver and Brown 1946](#)). Their machines would contribute to a 'new industrial order' whereby 'the automatic factory may well loose waves of unemployment' but after this temporary dip a new generation of skilled machine operators (they were coy about the numbers required) would enjoy enriching work freed from the 'regimentation' of contemporary mass production ([Leaver and Brown 1946](#)). A reproduction of Charles Sheeler's painting 'Incantation' illustrated an overview article on 'The Labor Situation' with the more equivocal yet nonetheless revealing caption: 'Labor has always feared technology. In this richly austere industrial scene, inspired by the continuous flow plants of the oil industry, the U.S. worker is missing. Labor is disturbed by such glistening geometry; its fear that the machine will put man out of work is a short-range truth, a long-range error' ([Caption to Charles Sheeler, 'Incantation' 1946](#)).

Yet, it was hardly a paranoid concern as an industrial discourse on labor had been figuratively vanishing the worker for decades. In a rich study of Sheeler's Precisionism, Sharon Corwin has compared the negation of the artist's hand to the voiding of the worker's body in the scientific management experts Frank and Lillian Gilbreth's time and motion studies. In images of Ford's River Rouge plant, such as publicity photographs commissioned by N.W. Ayer in 1927 and the paintings 'American Landscape' (1930) and 'Classic Landscape' (1931), Sheeler presented the worker as a miniscule, often invisible component of the Machine Age. Corwin considers how the pedantic effacing of gesture in Sheeler's application of paint equated 'the visualization of efficiency in the Gilbreths' time-motion studies [that] necessitated the erasure of the body of the worker and the standardization and abstraction of the act of labor' ([Corwin 2003](#)). The refinement of manual work was the aim of Gilbreths' 'Cyclograph' photographic experiments, which recorded workers' movements on exposed

plates that registered motion from affixed lights, showing just motion traces whilst largely erasing the body. Cyclograph studies aimed to enhance productive efficiency through the eradication of excessive or ineffectual manual actions, as outlined in *Fatigue Study: The Elimination of Humanity's Greatest Unnecessary Waste* of 1916, which featured exemplary photographic close-ups of hands (Gilbreth and Gilbreth 1916). It was the scientific management expert who benefitted most, writes Elsbeth Brown, because 'the visible hand of managerial reform . . . made the hand, itself a synecdoche for the industrialized worker, increasingly invisible under scientific management' as the visual erasure of manual work coincided with the manifestation of a 'managerial revolution' (Brown 2008).

Lilian Gilbreth idealized scientific management in terms consonant to *Fortune's* new capitalism model in arguing that it 'will aid the cause of Industrial Peace. It will put the great power of knowledge into every man's hands. This it must do, as it is founded on cooperation, and this cooperation demands that all shall know and shall be taught' (Gilbreth 1914). However, it also anticipated the worker's obsolescence because machines might eventually perform the most efficient execution of these disembodied, repetitive mechanical movements. In the 'American Workingman' image, workers' bodies are reduced to functional hands, albeit within a survey of labor conceived to validate new capitalism for the heads through a myth of cooperative mutual interest. Yet, as Steve Edwards writes, the manual synecdoche represented a division of labor that disavowed the thinking worker by rendering them ' "hands" conducting work under the direction of a directing intelligence, whether of the manufacturer or the man of science. The deskilling of the worker accrued intelligence to these other men' (Edwards 2006). The hand synecdoche in the 'American Workingman' image conveys a Taylorist rhetoric of workers without heads—which Stephanie Schwartz terms a form of 'decapitation' that 'robbed' them of the 'ability to use their heads for work'—that undercuts the article's narrative of autonomy and agency in new capitalism whilst invoking full automation and therefore potential (though not necessarily desired) human obsolescence in industry (Schwartz 2020).

The Gilbreths judged the 'trained photographer' to have 'desirable qualities to become an admirable survey maker' (Gilbreth and Gilbreth 1916). Bourke-White's role at *Fortune* was an employed survey maker of sorts for this 'log-book' on American industry, though to produce an 'elaborately illustrated record' required a highly skilled and aesthetically attuned photographer to express the magazine's values with the verve of an industrial romantic. Hence, she was an asset to *Fortune*, and to advertisers and industrialists (including Ford Motor Company) who commissioned her work, whilst labor groups deemed her a boon ally and Soviet officials admired her industrial scenes. Concerning the industrial photographer's place 'between labour and capital', Allan Sekula writes:

'the photographer also has come to embody a certain professionalism. So in some senses, the photographer is obviously positioned between capital and labour, as a professional or small entrepreneur. Furthermore, the photographer mediates *between* capital and labour, acting as kind of middle-man in the unequal traffic in representations. Finally, it is the work of the industrial photographer and the advertising photographer that helps construct the phantasmagoric middle ground, the ground upon which "we're-all-in-this-thing-together-and-our-interests-are-identical". We've seen the development of this program in the writings of the Gilbreths' (Sekula 1983).

Bourke-White's position between labor and capital manifested in the usage of specific photographs. For example, Horace B. Davis's 1933 *Labor and Steel*, an instalment of a series of books that 'analyze class conflict' with a view to 'revolutionary change', featured several photographs by Bourke-White in practically a counter-argument to 'American Workingman', assuming 'the worker's viewpoint' to ascertain 'what is the trend of production in a given industry? What are the wages, hours, and conditions of employment, and how do these compare with those in other industries? What is the extent of unemployment and what are the prospects of keeping their jobs for those workers still employed?' (Davis 1933). Bourke-White's photograph of an electric furnace at Ludlum Steel in Ohio appears in a

section on ‘The Vanishing Job’, which rued the fate of workers negotiating ‘this twilight period of world capitalism’, but also illustrates *Fortune*’s ‘Restlessness in Steel’, a detailed statistical analysis of Republic Steel Corp’s troubling over-productivity for a market defined by falling demand (Davis 1933; *Restlessness in Steel* 1933). Davis, the electric furnace represented the substitution of human tasks by machinery, and he asserted that ‘new processes and appliances have been introduced; and the few workers who were still employed by the crisis found their wages cut to the bone’ (Davis 1933). As such, this Bourke-White photograph was evidence in counterposed missives from capital and labor, befitting her uniquely contradictory position in American photography as a celebratory photojournalist working in corporate publishing and advertising who simultaneously connected with radical groups enough to appear in Elizabeth Dilling’s *The Red Network* (a furious expository on a ‘Communist-Socialist world conspiracy’) as a ‘Communist-Recommended Author’, the only individual photographer listed (the WFPL featured as a group) (Dilling 1934). These contradictions do not seem to have troubled Bourke-White.

Within the determining context of *Fortune*, the ‘American Workingman’ image was an allegory of labor for the edification of the heads. Edwards has identified an emergent photographic discourse in the nineteenth century that conceived photography itself as an allegory of labor that rested on its coterminous operation of the seemingly disparate attributes of ‘document and picture’, the mechanical and the imaginative, as a perplexing matrix of manual and mental work (Edwards 2006). For *Fortune*, what kind of hand, then, was Bourke-White, the star photographer and associate editor? Her credit line was a signifier of the industrial artist’s hand in command of the mechanical camera, a ‘skilled hand’ rather than a ‘machine hand’, in demand with publishers, industrialists, curators, and radicals. *Fortune* prized her photographic craft because she infused rational, efficient productive processes with glamour, mystique, and sublimity, enlivening industry for the heads’ instruction and pleasure. However, the ‘American Workingman’ image cut up and collated the skilled photographer’s pictures of workers into disembodied hands in an automated relay, deskilling her work through crude assemblage. The ‘American Workingman’ image increased the eeriness already present in the ubiquitous photographing of the worker’s body. Sekula alighted on ‘the many recurrences of that great synecdoche for the working body, the hand, in early modernist photography’ as definitive of ‘nostalgic organicism’ by which manual parts were spectral reminders of the sensuous creativity lost to the medium’s mechanization of vision (Sekula 2014). The composite image of Bourke-White’s photographs further augmented the troubling mechanical abstraction evident already in close-ups of hands, carrying an uncanny omen of precarity, even for the heads, as the Depression took grip and the principle of new capitalism itself became obsolete in a climate of vanishing jobs. This curious picture thus figures awkwardly within *Fortune*’s suave and rational image order, warning of trouble to come like a fissure in the stream-lined surfaces of the Machine Age.

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Notes

¹ Due to prohibitive reproduction costs it had not been possible to include illustrations. For studies of Bourke-White, See (Corwin et al. 2010; Wilson 2016; Stomberg 1998).

² Excellent studies on Bourke-White include: Sharon Corwin, ‘Constructed Documentary: Margaret Bourke-White from the Steel Mill to the South’. (Corwin et al. 2010; Wilson 2016; Stomberg 1998).

- 3 'Yet Fortune's pages were white spaces created by an editorial team with no black staff (the first two African Americans to work at Time Inc, the photographer Gordon Parks and the former Amsterdam News journalist Earl Brown, both joined Life in the 1940s)'. See ([Time 1940](#)).
- 4 In market research conducted in 1931, the editors asked 'do women read Fortune?', answering 'yes, with surprising enthusiasm'. 81% of subscriber's wives read the magazine, another 7.3 enjoyed the illustrations, and only 11.3% did not read it at all. The assumption, of course, was that a subscriber was male and a woman reader was his wife ([Fortune Advertising Department Review 1931](#)).

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