GEORGE DIMOCK

There is then, in Hine's early work, an implicit counterstatement to the Progressive reformist ideology he embraced — a subtle but nonetheless distinct resistance to the tendency of reformers to make objects of their underclass 'cases.'

Alan Trachtenberg

Reform Photography as Dominant Ideology

Alan Trachtenberg and Maren Stange have presented theoretically informed, historical arguments for Lewis Hine's child-labour photographs as manifestations of 'a shared social consciousness' between the photographer and his subjects. These readings appeal greatly in that they locate in the work a self-reflexive critique of the Progressives' tendency to regard those they sought to help as inferior. Against the current critical consensus that Hine's pictures do justice to their subjects, I will argue that they depict working children and their parents as aberrant in relation to a valorized middle-class norm. The fight over child labour was not exclusively about bringing an end to an egregious aspect of capitalist exploitation. It also entailed far-reaching struggles over who children were, what their roles in the family were to be, how they were to be valued and cared for, and who had the power to regulate them. As a body of work, the child-labour photographs constitute a seminally influential instance of social documentary. My intent is not to castigate Hine for not conforming to the class consciousness of the present cultural moment. But I do wish to counter the notion that this work fulfils the contemporary critical desire for a photographic practice that bridges class conflict. The fact that Hine worked to represent and to oppose the economic exploitation of children does not support the claim that his photographic practice was exemplary with respect to his working-class subjects.

Lewis Hine photographed for the National Child Labor Committee (NCLC) between 1906 and 1918. This remains his best known and most celebrated work. Within a social history of the Progressive Reform Movement which rose to prominence in the first decade of the twentieth century, the child-labour photographs served as visual, empirical evidence of the widespread employment of children in a variety of industrial and commercial enterprises in the United States: textile mills, coal mines, glassworks, commercial agriculture and the street trades. At the same time that Hine's work helped define the values, interests and agendas of Progressive reform, it was largely determined by them. The movement comprised a flexible and changing set of alliances at the local, state and national levels, among teachers, suffragists, health-care workers, civil servants, city planners, social workers, labour leaders, journalists and reform politicians. These members of an emergent, professional-managerial class advocated a new style of reform. They sought to minister scientifically and bureaucratically to the body politic in response to the systemic ills wrought by corporate capitalism, including child labour.

Progressivism reached floodtide around 1912 before losing ground to the more entrenched forces of the dominant social order. Its failure to take deeper root can be ascribed, at least in part, to the distance between the Progressives' professional elitism and the low class status of those whose lives they sought to change. By the time of the First World War, the reformers had lost initiative in a transformed pro-business environment. Those who remained committed to the Progressive program fought to hold onto the gains of the preceding decade. While Progressive reform significantly influenced the political and social landscape of the United States at the turn of the century, its limitations were also profound. Robert Wiebe summarized the central failing of the reformers in the following terms:

They had carried an approach rather than a solution to their labours, and in the end they constructed just an approach to reform, mistaking it for a finished product.

The tendency has been to read Hine's child-labour photographs against, rather than within, the shortcomings of Progressive reform's political program and affiliations. In the following pages, I will be interpreting, in some detail, several of his photographs of children working in the textile industry with the aim of taking class more fully into account. Along the way, I will be re-reading two turn-of-the-century photographic genres, pictorialism and social documentary, as contemporary, mutually reinforcing cultural codes aligned together on the privileged side of the social divide separating an ascendant middle class from a growing and increasingly problematic, industrial proletariat.
In drawing distinctions between pictorialism and documentary photography, photographic historians have tended to ignore the extent to which Hine's early career unselfconsciously operated on both sides of the dividing line separating high art from social reform. In June 1909, Hine delivered a talk to a national conference of social workers. Entitled 'Social Photography, How the Camera May Help in the Social Uplift,' it contains, in embryonic form, all the problems, possibilities and confusions connected with his project of documenting working-class children both as a mode of artistic expression and as part of a political reform movement to abolish child labour. In the course of his presentation, Hine projected, in the form of a stereopticon slide, his photograph representing a young girl tending a row of spinning machines in the Lancaster Cotton Mills in South Carolina on November 30, 1908 (Fig. 1). Hine's presentation attempts to persuade his colleagues that this picture constitutes a complex sign in no way limited to its most obvious function as empirical evidence for the existence of child labour:

Take the photograph of a tiny spinner in a Carolina cotton-mill. As it is, it makes an appeal. Reinforce it with one of those social pen-pictures of [Victor] Hugo's in which he says, 'The ideal of oppression was realized by this dismal servitude. When they find themselves in such condition at the dawn of existence — so young, so feeble, struggling among men — what passes in these souls fresh from God?' [...] With a picture thus sympathetically interpreted, what a lever we have for the social uplift.

In aligning Carolina Spinner with Victor Hugo, Hine trades on a well-established literary tradition wherein the mill child functions as a symbol of the iniquity of industrial capitalism. On the last page of Madame Bovary, for example, Flaubert signals the devastation left in the wake of his heroine's suicide in the fate of her only child, Berthe, who is sent 'to a cotton-mill to earn a living.'

Hine's talk entertains a striking number of contradictory rationales for his photographic practice. He begins by discussing his photographs of children in the street trades as examples of 'publicity in our appeal for public sympathy.' He proceeds by endorsing photography in relation to commercial advertising as a way to promote the visibility, influence, and reputation of the social worker. He demonstrates his awareness of Carolina Spinner's semiotic status as a sign distinct from its referent when he acknowledges that the photograph 'is often

![Fig. 1. Lewis Hine: 'Carolina Spinner', 1908 (IMP/GEH 77:181:15).](image-url)
more effective than the reality would have been, because, in the picture, the non-essential and conflicting interests have been eliminated.' Hine endorses the child-labour photograph as legally compelling evidence even as he acknowledges photographic transparency as a powerful myth capable of ideological manipulation: 'Of course, you and I know that this unbounded faith in the integrity of the photograph is often rudely shaken, for, while photographs may not lie, liars may photograph.'

Hine suggests using photographs to make his audience 'so sick and tired of the whole business that when the time for action comes, child-labor pictures will be records of the past.' Here the relations between photography and social reform become incoherent at the level of both temporality and causality. If Hine means to say that child-labour photographs will prove so distressing that they will galvanize the body politic into changing the existing conditions of industrial employment and thereby render the images obsolete, he, nevertheless, articulates a much more complex position which includes a break between 'the time for action' and the time of representation, the latter seeming to both anticipate and post-date the moment of reform proper. Hine's lack of clarity may have something to do with the psychic contradictions entailed in invoking a utopian moment which constitutes both the goal and demise of Hine's child-labour project.

Hine's talk also makes grandiose claims for the efficacy of 'social photography' by way of Hugo and Genesis:

[The stand taken by Hugo is] that the great social peril is darkness and ignorance. 'What then ... is required? Light! Light in floods!' The dictum, then of the social worker is 'Let there be light;' and in this campaign for light we have for our advance agent the light writer — the photograph.

Hine concludes his remarks by advocating the use of photography in the service of 'the intelligent interpretation of the world's workers, not only for the people of today, but for future ages.' With hindsight, his remarks become a prescient anticipation of his own career which moved from a photographic practice rooted in activist reform to a later, rather unsuccessful and naive celebration of the dignity of labour within the corporate mainstream. Even here, at the start of a decade of involvement in child-labour reform, Hine quotes a passage from George Eliot in order to reconcile social realism with a formalist aesthetic by way of a mystical reverence for the commonplace:

[Therefore, let us always have men [...] who see beauty in the commonplace things, and delight in showing how kindly the light of heaven falls on them.]

Interpreting Carolina Spinner in the light of Hine's manifesto leads to a series of contradictory, seemingly incompatible readings: the child worker as...
struggle to have his pictorialist brand of photography accepted as a fine art. In this dichotomy, Hine's child-labour photographs become identified with a working-class consciousness, an attribution which belies their far more cogent alignment with an ideology of reform imposed from above. Hine's class position becomes the unifying term that allows him to appropriate the images of the working-class poor in the services of both social documentary and high art. Social documentary aims to carry '(old) information about a group of powerless people to another group addressed as socially powerful.' High art redeems a privileged elite from the materialist taint of the profit motive.

A comparison of Hine's child-labour images with pictorialist representations of children in bourgeois, domestic settings suggests a 'before and after' scenario in the liberal subject's social imaginary with regard to 'saving' the child. Implicit in the construction of Hine's child labourers as victims of the industrial-corporate Moloch is a project of social transformation which conceives of a utopian space for children in the pictorialist mode. Compare Hine's Carolina Spinner with Miss Grace (Fig. 4), a pictorialist portrait of a young girl of comparable age by Clarence White. While the former stands labouring before a phalanx of machinery which stunts her development, the latter reclines gracefully on an elegant sofa reading a book. She is safe at home, ensconced in an exquisitely appointed interior light-years away from the harsh exigencies of wage labour. Hine's composition is a matter of straight lines, the child trapped between a row of factory windows on one side and a row of spinning machines on the other. In contrast, White's picture self-consciously counterbalances the curvilinear forms of the sofa and reclining figure against the hard-edged rectangles of picture frames and Persian rug. The elegant formal patterning of the child's white dress against the plush velvet darkness of the upholstery constitutes an interplay of tonal values characteristic of Symbolist-inspired aestheticism.

The polarities generated by the juxtaposition of these two images (e.g. lower working class vs. prosperous bourgeoisie, industrial wage labour vs. domestic leisure, social documentary in the service of political reform vs. pictorialism as high culture) correspond suggestively with a turn-of-the-century,
ideological struggle over the ways children, fourteen years of age or younger, were conceptualized and represented. From a pre-nineteenth century tradition of being regarded as useful workers, children gradually became transformed, against a concerted, mostly working-class resistance, into 'priceless' beings whose value was incommensurate with the economic order. Within this framework, the Carolina spinner becomes both tragic and unseemly. Her redemption lies in Progressive reform which will remake her in the image of Miss Grace. These two photographs can be seen then to act in concert. As representations produced by the dominant culture, they construct an image of the child worker as the pathologized victim of an outmoded social and industrial order. Within the new regime, Carolina Spinner and Miss Grace represent opposite sides of the same conceptual coin, the idea that all children have as their birthright the privilege of being cherished and nurtured as economically useless but intrinsically invaluable beings.

An obvious yet telling distinction between the two girls lies in the fact that one gets named (in an extremely apt manner) while the other remains, for the most part, nameless. However immersed White’s portrait is in a formalist aesthetic, it is, nevertheless, still a portrait at least nominally concerned with the ‘personality of the subject.’ In contrast, the child who works in the Lancaster Cotton Mills of South Carolina remains anonymous except in Hine’s field note transcribed onto the back of a print in the archives of the George Eastman House. There it appears in typescript as ‘Sadie Pfeifer.’ But there also it is crossed out and accompanied by a handwritten injunction: ‘Do not use names.’ While the withholding of the child’s name may have protected her privacy, that need is telling in relation to the unproblematic circulation of ‘Miss Grace.’ The differences in identity between the two girls are structurally embedded in their relative class positions. Miss Grace is endowed with an aura of familial intimacy and psychological investment nowhere in evidence in the child-labour photographs. She is represented as a valued member of a privileged class as seen by one of her own. Sadie Pfeifer does not signify in and for herself as a subjective being but matters sociologically and typologically as a child labourer. She is defined as a victim by reformers who, while ‘concerned,’ are not personally affected by her fate. She does not merit, in other words, the psychological consideration implicit in the term ‘portrait.’

The pictorialist school of photography to which White belonged recorded the domestic settings of the bourgeois milieu for which Freud produced his
narrative of psychic life. In this sense Miss Grace has a story (even if, as in this case, it remains untold) in a way that Sadie Pfeifer does not. Carolyn Kay Steedman has pointed to the complex ways in which working-class subjectivity is largely defined by lack in relation to the emotional and material plenitude of the middle classes. Clarence White photographed a cherished member of his social circle and celebrated her as such. In photographing the working-class 'other,' Hine produced an image of a child who existed on the margins, a being as yet incoherent and unvalued except in relation to what Progressives expected her to become.

At least once in the historical record, one of Hine's child-labourers contested the narrative of Progressive reform which conscripted him. An undated newspaper clipping in the archives of the George Eastman House gives an account of how William McCue brought a lawsuit against the Russell Sage Foundation for a photograph of him made by Hine. The photograph was reproduced in a book about juvenile delinquency entitled Boyhood and Lawlessness. A New York Supreme Court awarded McCue $3500 damages on the basis of the book's presentation of him as 'the toughest kid on the street.' (At the time McCue had been an altar boy in St. Ambrose's Church and had never been arrested or charged with delinquency in any form.)

The plaintiff's suit set forth that in 1914 a photographer appeared in the 'Hell's Kitchen district where he lived and took his picture on the ground that he wanted "Boy Scout Pictures." The ruling by Justice Ford voiced outrage against those who engaged in such practices in the name of Progressive reform:

That is the great trouble with these movements. [...] These people from their height of self-conscious righteousness and superior excellence peer down on and discuss these humble beings as though they were so many cobblestones in the street, without any regard at all for their feelings or their rights in the community.

Following the war, Hine's role changed from social reformer to corporate apologist. His photographs of female textile workers taken at the Cheney Silk Mills in 1924 reveal a dramatic reversal in ideological orientation. No longer representing children in need of protective labour laws, they become flattering portraits illustrating 'favourable working conditions.' Unlike the earlier negatives made surreptitiously or under false pretences in the face of management opposition, these later, larger, 5" x 7" images are formally posed and could not have been made without the employer's cooperation. A typical example (Fig. 6) shows an attractive

Fig. 5. Lewis Hine: 'The "Toughest Kid" on the Street' ('Boyhood and Lawlessness', p. 123).
female worker to be young but clearly not under-aged. She is well-dressed and exists in harmony with her machine. Technical competence, health, prosperity and contentment are the order of the day. Hine’s portrayal of the dignity of the worker becomes indistinguishable from an apologia for the corporate status quo.

The photographs of the workers at the Cheney Silk Mills suggest that the social critique informing the earlier child-labour photographs had no independent existence outside the frame of Progressive reform. The paradigm of Hine as political and artistic dissident undermining the mainstream codes of representation simply doesn’t work. It cannot and should not be used to enlist his photographs unproblematically on the side of an alternative, working-class history of child labour. Hine’s child-labour photographs must be read carefully and cautiously ‘against the grain’ given their complicity in the construction of the working-class ‘other.’ The following discussions of particular images are not part of that much-needed reading. Rather they contribute to a story that is more easily told: of the many ways these pictures have served a middle-class audience by constructing and confirming the marginality of the working-class child throughout.

**Carolina Spinner**

Beaumont Newhall included *Carolina Spinner* in his 1949 *The History of Photography*. His accompanying text divests it of its politics by valorizing a dehistoricized individualism at the expense of the social context, newly defined as transparently self-evident and irrelevant to the true meaning of the picture:

These photographs were taken primarily as records. They are direct and simple. The presence in them of an extraordinary emotional quality raises them to works of art. Hine’s training enables him to comprehend instantly and without effort the background and its social implications; unbothered by unnecessary details, his sympathies concentrate on the individual before him; throughout his pictures this harmony is felt.

Newhall’s analysis posits the child laborer as the pretext for a circuit of meanings connecting a sensitive artist with a sensitive viewer trained in the codes of high culture. His commentary first appeared, together with a reproduction of *Carolina Spinner*, in the *Magazine of Art* a decade before its incorporation into *The History of Photography*. It prepares the ideological ground for the inclusion of Hine’s work in the modernist museum, a venue that would have been unthinkable in an earlier era.

My re-reading of this photograph seeks to hold onto the mill child as a site of class-specific, social contestation. The photograph was first reproduced in a 1909 article published in *Charities and the Commons*, a journal whose name was soon changed to *The Survey* in keeping with the changing aspirations of the social work profession. This journal constituted a principal outlet for the work Hine did under the auspices of the NCLC. Entitled ‘Child Labour in the Carolinas,’ the article was written by A. J. McKelway, a leading figure in the movement. It called attention to and denounced the exploitation of young children in the cotton mills of the New South. The halftone reproduction of *Carolina Spinner* appeared above a caption which detailed the specifics of her working existence. She had been employed for the past six months, was forty-eight inches tall, and could work legally during the summer months no matter how young she was as long as she had attended school four months out of the year and could read and write. McKelway’s text never acknowledges the photograph’s status as a contingent, mediated image. As a window on ‘the real,’ the picture has no consciously articulated aesthetics. What matters is the child as an embodiment of sociological data: her age, height, place of work, duration of labour, and juridical status. She is ‘one of many,’ a synecdoche for child-labour as social evil.

In an editorial introduction to McKelway’s article, Florence Kelley, Secretary of the National Consumers’ League, extols photographic empiricism as an antidote to the obscurantism of those who
would deny or cover up the exploitation of children in the Southern cotton mills:

In South Carolina from whatever official source we seek illumination we find only Stygian darkness. There is no state census, no department of labour statistics, no factory inspector, no truant officer, no joint legislative commission of investigation. [...]

The Department of Labour, the Department of Education, the census leave us to the ingenuity of a young photographer for current knowledge of the sad lot of the most unfortunate of our little fellow citizens — the white, English speaking, native children of the southern cotton states.

Kelley welcomes Hine’s photography as a means of gathering information whose truth-value is self-evident. She presents it as the precursor and catalyst for a more centralized, federally sponsored system of surveillance which will enlighten the nation and thereby ‘save the children’ without challenging, it should be noted, the ideology of Southern racism.33 The article shapes our reading of this photograph as an illustration of the Progressive reform agenda: working-class children of a certain age should go to school rather than work as unskilled labourers. (The fact that these children’s race goes unmarked specifies them as ‘white, English speaking, [and] native,’ to use Kelly’s terms.)34

McKelway’s article juxtaposes Carolina Spinner with another Hine photograph of a second young girl working in the same mill (Fig. 7). The article’s layout presents them as mirror images of one another thereby visually underscoring the idea that behind any given representation of the exploited mill child there stands a multitude of others subjected to the same deplorable conditions. This second Carolina Spinner was enlisted in a vigorous pro-management defense of child labour in the Southern textile industry mounted by a disaffected federal investigator by the name of Thomas Robinson Dawley. In 1912 he published *The Child That Toileth Not: The Story of a Government Investigation That Was Suppressed* in which he argues that the mills constituted the child’s best protection against the physical, moral and social degradation brought about by the decay of the Southern agrarian economy. One of Dawley’s strategies is to reproduce and re-contextualize a number of Hine photographs of mill children. *The Survey’s* caption for the second Carolina spinner details the long work day and the lack of enforcement of whatever minimal state regulations existed. Dawley re-prints Hine’s image but replaces it with a caption designed to make her out as a negligible exception:

A child spinner. Such as is represented as marching in daily procession into the mills, but I find that the employment of such a child is exceptional, and then she is only employed as a ‘learner,’ and not because of any adequate returns to the mill corporation.35

Dawley attributes the sorry condition of the mill children not to the ruinous effects of wage labour but rather to the poverty, ignorance, malnutrition, and disease endemic to a prior rural life from which the mills provide escape. His own photograph, titled *A True Product of the Cotton Mill*, constitutes a visual rebuttal to Hine’s Carolina spinners. Its caption conveys a symmetrically opposite meaning (Fig. 8):

She is a spinner at the Graniteville Mills. Note her robust form, strong limbs and bright and smiling countenance. The cotton-mill has done for her and her generation what it has done for hundreds of others from the poor farms of the sterile sections.36

To think that one has to choose between Hine and Dawley, however, or to come up with some composite, intermediary truth, either in relation to *A
True Product of the Cotton Mill or to Carolina Spinner is to become mired within the confines of a debate between Southern capitalists and Northern reformers, both of whom treat the mill children as the objects of ideological contention. Historical judgements concerning the suffering and injustices stemming from child-labour practices at the turn of the century need to be framed within a moral and epistemological framework attuned to the instrumental nature of the images deployed by both sides. Only then can the analysis attend to the silence of these children whose voices do not appear, at least directly, in the historical record. They remain, like all children, always spoken for by others. Both sides of the debate trade heavily on the ideology of the child as undeserving victim of a deplorable present and sanguine hope for a better future. Neither argument admits the possibility that the subjects of representation might speak from a different class position within the social formation.

Doffer Family

Like Carolina Spinner, Hine's child-labour photograph, Doffer Family (Fig. 9), first received wide circulation as an illustration for a *Survey* article by A. J. McKelway, this one entitled 'Child Labour in Georgia' (1910). 'Doffer' is a technical term used in the textile industry to designate the worker, most often a small child, whose job it was to replace full bobbins with empty ones on the huge spinning machines used to twist cotton fibers into thread.) A vintage print of Doffer Family in the archives of the George Eastman House includes Hine's detailed, if cryptic, field note on its verso:

A family working in the Ga. cotton mill. Mrs. A. J. Young works in mill and at home. Nell (oldest girl) alternates in mill with mother. Mammy (next girl) runs 2 sides [spinning machines]. Mary (next) runs 1½ sides. Elie (oldest boy) works regularly. Eddie (next girl) helps in mill. Sticks on bobbins. 4 smallest children not working yet. The mother said she earns $4.50 a wk. and all the children earn $4.50 a wk. Husband died and left her with 11 children. 2 of them went off and got married. The family left the farm 2 yrs. ago to work in mill. Jan. 22, 1909. L.W.H. [Emphasis in the original.]40

Hine's text, like the caption accompanying Carolina Spinner, is oppressively statistical. Field note and photograph work together to prove that child labour exists: here are the children and their mother; this is what they do, how little they make, where they come from. Just as the text presents the facts from the mother on down through her children, so Hine deploys his subjects in the visual field, arranging them in formal, frontal poses in order of their age and height. Yet only the mother (Mrs. A. J. Young) and those children who work (Nell, Mammy, Mary, Elie, Eddie) are relevant and therefore named. The four smallest remain anonymous since they do not yet work and consequently do not signify as economic statistics. This family is presented as an atomized, regulated, wage-earning unit devoid of personal interrelations. (The mother's gently monitoring and protective gestures with regard to her two youngest children mitigate somewhat the slide toward reification.)

Hine's field note, quoted above, provides the basis for the caption that accompanies the image when it appears in McKelway's 'Child Labor in Georgia,' an article that makes explicit the reform agenda of the National Child Labor Committee. McKelway specifically contests the provision in Georgia law that allows a child under twelve to work in support of a widowed mother or disabled father rather than attending school. Doffer Family both illustrates this exemption in existing child-labour legislation and constitutes an indictment against it. The article assigns fixed and clear roles to all parties involved. Parents, mill owners, state legislators, and grown-up siblings actively conspire against the interests of the children who figure only passively as the objects of concern. The 'we' whom the author continually addresses in the pamphlet constitute the producers and intended consumers of the text at hand. As
enfranchised members of the middle class entitled to effect social change, 'we' are accorded the moral prerogative to judge and act on behalf of the child worker. What does not get considered within this framework is the possibility that the family’s presence in the mills represents a rational choice admitting of no better alternative given the structural realities of their historical circumstances. While the lack of alternatives itself could be said to constitute the system of exploitation facing the family, it would be hard to argue that the NCLC offered any solutions apart from the long-term prospect of educating the next generation.

Recent labour histories of the Southern cotton mills provide complex and nuanced accounts of just how important the concept of the family was in structuring the lived experiences and world views of owners and workers alike. To fill the demand for unskilled labour brought about by the rapid mechanization of the textile industry (of which doffing was a part), Southern mill owners hired families rather than individual workers. Within this system, adults could be paid less than a living wage since their children’s income was expected to make up the difference. The construction of company villages in conjunction with the new mills allowed the corporation to preside over the well-being of poor-white, working families ‘rescued’ from backwoods poverty. Upon this materialist base grew an ethic and ideology of paternalism. But an alternative working-class understanding of family could provide, albeit within a patriarchal framework, a sense of continuity and mutual support easing the transition from rural to industrial life.

*Doffer Family,* like *Carolina Spinner,* becomes a site of contestation in Thomas Robinson Dawley’s book decrying the reform efforts of the NCLC. Dawley discusses the image but does not reproduce it. I quote at some length in order to indicate the historical specificity with which Dawley implicates Hine’s photograph in the workings of Progressive reform:

One of the stock photographs of the interests that live by these misrepresentations represents a woman and nine children, taken at Tifton, Georgia. . . . The photograph, although taken several years ago, has been published and re-published, and is still being published, and lantern slides of it are exhibited, with varying statements that diverge from the truth . . . The last time I saw the picture published, it was by that ‘Progressive,’ La Follette, in his weekly, in which he declared that the Commissioner’s Report on child labor was a ‘Black Record’. . . .

I subsequently saw the same picture exhibited by that

Fig. 9. Lewis Hine: ‘Doffer Family, Tifton, Georgia’, January, 1909 (IMP/GEH 77:181:30).
learned Doctor McKelway ... under the auspices of a suffragette organization, and he told another story about it.

The facts in this case are that the family was a tramp family or a family of semi-nomads, such as I have described elsewhere as having been quite common in the South before there were any industries that gave them employment and taught them how to work. The family lived around in the pine woods of Southern Georgia, abiding from time to time in abandoned shacks or wherever they could find shelter. The mother and father continued to bring children into the world at the rate of about one a year until they had eleven, when they found their way to the cotton-mill. There they were given a house to live in, and they were supplied with food and clothing, for they were destitute, and four of the children, ranging in years from twelve up, were given employment. Employment was offered to both the father and the mother, but they would not or could not work with any degree of efficiency. However, the improvement in this family, after their arrival at the mill and the older children went to work, was most marked. After a while they went to another mill, where the father died of tuberculosis. The mother then returning with her brood to Tifton, where the two eldest girls married, leaving the mother with her nine remaining children dependent for support on the two that were old enough to work. The manager of the cotton-mill thereupon used his influence to get the seven younger children into a Methodist orphan asylum, and he took them there himself.

In the meantime the photograph of the mother and nine children was taken by a representative of the special interests that lie by misrepresentations, and this is the photograph that is published and exhibited throughout the country before Sunday School classes and suffragette meetings, depicting the evils of child labor, when the fact is that the little children represented as working in the cotton-mill were in an orphan asylum, and never had worked a day in their lives.43

While anecdotal and uncorroborated, Dawley's counter-narrative is more sustained and complex than Hine's field note. Both, however, are equally instrumental.

Although Hine labored long and hard in the interests of mill children, it cannot be assumed that his attitude toward the mother represented in Doffer Family was empathetic or understanding. His writings often aligned parents with employers as co-conspirators against their own children whose true interests were best represented by the agents of reform. One photograph by Hine purports to show a father loafing on the front steps of a country store while his two young sons are sent to work in the mills (Fig. 10). The note on the back castigates him as a 'dependent widower' who lacks 'backbone' and whose 'sanctimonious disposition of his "love for the family" was nauseating.'44 In his article on child labour in the oyster and shrimp canneries, Hine wrote with regard to a mother's pride in her daughter's devotion to hard work: 'Can we call that motherhood? Compared with real maternity, it is a distorted perversion, a travesty.'45

In 1914, Hine wrote an article to accompany a NCLC exhibition of his posters shown at the Panama-Pacific Exposition in San Francisco. Entitled 'The High Cost of Child Labor,' it contains a diagram which illustrates a concept of social pathology labelled 'The Vicious Circle' (Fig. 11). This diagram gives visual form to the rationale informing Hine's negative attitude toward the parents of child labourers. It shows a cycle composed of 'child labor, illiteracy, industrial inefficiency, low wages, long hours, low standards of living, bad housing, poor food, unemployment, intemperance, disease, poverty, child labor.' The crucial point is that it is a closed system: 'If you put an American citizen at any point in this circle, it is likely to lead him to all the rest.' What follows from this is a remarkably explicit proclamation of social triage:

We cannot abolish poverty today; we cannot abolish intemperance today; we cannot provide all the people with decent housing conditions today; we cannot raise wages and the standard of living today. But this is my argument: child labor is the one link in this vicious circle that the American people can cut right out and thereby make the circle smaller, thereby reduce the number of contributing causes.46

What stands out in Hine's formulation is the ideological imperative of excising child labour from a working-class history formulated as a litany of social pathology openly acknowledged as existing beyond the pale of imminent reform.

Maren Stange, who discusses Doffer Family at great length, interprets Hine's field note as evidence that the photographer was sympathetically engaged in enlisting the Young family's 'enacted consent' in the picture making process.47 This image serves as a test case for her valorization of Hine's photographic practice as the articulation of a social consciousness restored and shared.48 Such a reading is influenced by a modern understanding of the exchange of gazes...
between camera and subject as an enlightened acknowledgement of intersubjectivity. The interpretive stakes are high given that the frontally posed figure staring back at the camera constitutes a dominant motif of the child-labour photographs, one that critics and historians have construed as evidence of Hine's sensitivity toward and respect for those whom he photographed.

However, I find it more plausible to interpret this motif as a sign of the photographer's class dominance vis-à-vis his subjects. Precisely because the mother and children depicted in Doffer Family are lower working-class, Hine is free to pose them as he pleases, positioning them frontally as objectifications of his political project, the fight against child labour. The family members look back at the camera because they have been told to do so. Their gazes remain unproblematic because they do not have the power to contest the authority and presuppositions of the man behind the camera.

**Doffer Boy**

As exemplified in *Doffer Boy in a Cotton Mill* (Fig. 12), child labourers in Hine's representations often stand as isolated, fragile figures, framed against a harsh, dangerous, or impersonal industrial setting. In looking out toward the middle-class spectator, addressed as an agent of social reform, the child labourer embodies the inherent inadequacy of his all-too-interruptable life. By way of contrast, in Hine's image of three students attending the Ethical Culture School (Fig. 13), where Hine once taught, the children are represented as self-sufficiently engaged within the picture frame. The photograph is one in a series representing a wide range of progressive educational activities. The students depicted do not acknowledge the camera precisely because they have better things to do. As full, inviolate subjects, they create meanings and relationships to which the photographer bears witness. As far as I have been able to determine, the motif of the isolated child or group of children standing at attention and looking out at the camera is never employed by Hine when photographing these students or their counterparts attending the Walden School.

As an image of a young, vulnerable, attractive child who confronts the viewer directly, *Doffer Boy* lends itself to a humanist reading. This interpretation sets up a circuit of empathetic engagement travelling from the boy via the camera and photographer to us, the present-day audience. Yet in a poster prepared for the NCLC (Fig. 14), Hine transposes this same figure into an image of 'human junk.' The boy is conflated metonymically with a photograph of industrial waste and presented as, quite literally, worthless. Hine's violation of the subjectivity of this child has gone largely unnoticed. Perhaps the fact that children's lives seem to be at stake has something to do with our ability to overlook the violence of the rhetoric employed. On the one hand, given this boy's status as a precious innocent, all claims of advocacy become acceptable and self-justifying. On the other, given his status as a dependent child, we
sanction Hine’s right as an authorized adult to frame him in this fashion.

Most disturbing of all, however, is a Hine photograph in the Library of Congress that completes the erasure of this doffer boy as subject by superimposing his image onto that of the young woman, cropped from a different negative, who stands directly to his left in the ‘Making Human Junk’ poster (Fig. 15).53 This composite portrait constitutes a rather crude attempt to combine visual and statistical representation in the service of a positivist social science. The female figure with whom the doffer boy is conjoined has been lifted from a Hine photograph representing six adolescent girls in a Georgia cotton mill (Fig. 16).55 In reversing and superimposing her onto Doffer Boy, Hine constructs a reified image of pathology from a photograph that, once again, Dawley interprets in opposite fashion as a record of the ravages of hook-worm, a disease endemic to her rural existence before she came to work in the mills.56 Hine’s poster and composite portrait come as something of a shock, since they force upon us the realization that the child-labour photographs are used here to devalue rather than sacralize the child worker. To represent the child labourer as ‘human junk’ cannot be reconciled with a politics or an aesthetics based on observing and preserving the integrity of the subject.

**Paternalism and the Absent Father**

In 1925, a slightly cropped version of Doffer Family was reproduced in Rexford Tugwell’s *American Economic Life* where it was captioned ‘widow and her nine children’ and served to illustrate ‘poverty self-perpetuating.’57 Tugwell pairs it with a second Hine photograph purporting to represent a ‘mother and child of the comfort group’ (Fig. 17). In this latter image, a single, charming toddler sits comfortably on his mother’s lap, enjoying her undivided and loving attention. Mother and child serve as the model of a well-regulated, economically secure, emotionally rewarding family life to which Doffer Family provides a foil.58 Somewhat surprisingly, in light of reform photography’s avowed commitment to the objective portrayal of sociological truths, the subjects represented as ‘mother and child of the comfort group,’ although never named, can be identified as the photographer’s wife and son, Sarah and Corydon Hine.59 Since Hine worked with Roy Stryker in providing the illustrations for *American Economic Life*, he presumably sanctioned its inclusion. The deployment of the photographer’s own wife and child as prototypes of the middle-class family in this context undermines the argument that Hine identified with the subjects represented in Doffer Family.

For all the oppositions put into play in this contrast between profligate, proletarian poverty and nuclear, bourgeois prosperity, Hine, as photographer and literal husband/father, assumes the paternal function in both. Stange’s interpretation of Doffer Family falls prey to this surfeit of paternity. In a telling interpretive move, she conceives of her restoration of Hine’s field note to this image as compensation for the missing husband/father whose absence renders the family so vulnerable. She does so, moreover, in precisely those terms I have been contesting. Hine’s photograph makes the family whole by replacing the dead father with ‘a social consciousness restored and shared’:

With Hine’s text and caption restored, we can realize the intersection of industry and family life that the image actually represents. The image gains, if not the absent father at least a social consciousness restored and shared; the Youngs’ composure and their smiles, signify a kind of imaginative participation in the image-making — which participation [...] reveals the workings of Hine’s photographic art. [Emphasis added.]

Stange’s commitment to ‘a shared social consciousness’ as a means of mitigating the ‘unjust and undeserved damage done to an unlucky family by a criminally irresponsible system’ may explain, at least in part, her reference to smiles, which, upon closer examination, do not exist. Only one of Hine’s subjects, the third child from the right, turns out to be actually smiling. Mrs. Young and her eight other children remain tight-lipped and enigmatic before the camera lens. Here I wish to make a case for Stange’s misreading, a combination of partial blindness and projection, as symptomatic of the critical tradition of which this paper is also a part. I surmise that the imagined yet non-existent smiles in Hine’s photograph have been summoned into being in unconscious response to the intense pleasure that I, too, along with Stange, Trachtenberg and many others, have taken in Hine’s child-labour photographs. This pleasure may be grounded in the class position of those of us who write the history of photography as heirs to the tradition of Progressive reform.

The meanings invested from 1909 to the present in Hine’s child-labour photographs can be shown to be produced discursively by complex, contingent forces. Yet a cursory survey of this eighty-year history suggests a periodized circularity. The child-labour photographs originate as adjuncts to Progressive social reform (1909–1918), are re-discovered as

Fig. 17. Lewis Hine: ‘Mother and Child of the Comfort Group’ and ‘Widow and Her Nine Children [Doffer Family]’ (‘American Economic Life and the Means of Its Improvement’, p. 35).
prototypes and precursors to Depression era photo-documentary (1930s), become canonized as formal works of art under the aegis of the Museum of Modern Art's modernist hegemony (1970s), finally to be re-enlisted by advocates of a 'new social documentary' as examples of an exemplary photographic practice capable of contesting dominant ideology (1980s). Whatever conceptual clarity such a schema may have, it hardly does justice to the complexities involved in the various shifts between the domains of the aesthetic and the social. Nor does it address the impulse toward valorization that remains constant. The pleasure we take in the work and the projections it elicits from us may be inseparable from class privilege. Paternalism runs deep. Hine's child-labor photographs may have a powerful, if unacknowledged, set of coordinates: what it means to have been sacralized children subject to the unconscious investments of our own parents; what it means to be enfranchised, adult viewers situated in imaginary relations of dominance vis-à-vis these 'victims' of industrial capitalism. Our experience of these images may include, perhaps, the fantasy that we can 'save' (or have 'saved') those children.

Notes

1. This paper has benefited greatly from the insights of Janet Wolff, Robert Weatbrook and Thomas DiFiero. I am grateful for their critical support and encouragement. The work of John Tagg and Allan Sekula informs my thinking concerning photography's relations to history and power.


6. For the most part, photo-history has generally subscribed to the history of child labour written in the narrative form of a romance. In this story, Hine's photographs illustrate a shining moment in an iniquitous, by-gone era of industrialization in which the child worker was 'saved' once and for all from the debilitating and dangerous exploitations of corporate capitalism. For the English version of this phenomenon, see Hugh Cunningham, The Children of the Poor: Representations of Childhood since the Seventeenth Century (Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1991), pp. 8–17.

7. To take but one example, in 1908 Hine published an article in The Photographic Times entitled 'Photography in the School.' Following standard photographic pedagogy, he advocates the study of Old Master paintings and reproduces his own A Tenement Madonna: A Study in Composition as an example which consciously emulates Raphael's Madonna of the Chair.


12. As Peter Seixas convincingly argues, Hine's subordinate and economically dependent position throughout his career left his photographic practice vulnerable to the ideological constraints of those who paid the bills. Hine never saw the 'historical significance of worker's control,' a position which might have afforded him some conceptual leverage with which to problematize the gap between the workers he photographed and his own professional, middle-class identifications. Peter Seixas, 'Lewis Hine: From “Social” to “Interpretive” Photography,' American Quarterly, Vol. 35, no. 3, Fall 1987, p. 393.


17. The IMP/GEH Archives contain a number of images of mothers and children from both the Ellis Island and tenement series whose titles mobilize the religious archetypes: Ellis Island Madonna (177:177:128), Modern Madonna (78:1056:4), Tenement Madonna (78:1056:32).


23. IMP/GEH 77:181:15.

24. Carolyn Kay Steedman brilliantly juxtaposes Henry Mayhew's watercress girl with Sigmund Freud's Dora within a class analysis which postulates the former's marginality as the structuring force which maintains the latter's centrality:

But there is no story for the little watercress girl. The things she spoke to Mayhew about (pieces of fur, the bunches of cress, the scrubbed floor) still startle after 130 years, not because they are strange things in themselves, but because in our conventional reading, they are not held together in figurative relationship to each other. According to some authorities, both narrative and metaphor work by bringing together things that at first seem separate and distant, but which then, moved towards each other through logical space, make a new and pertinent sense. But this shift through space depends on our ability as listeners and readers to accept the new ordering of events and entities which have been made by the plot of a story, or by the use of a metaphor. Where there is not the vision that permits the understanding of these new connections, then a story cannot be told.

25. Among the most arresting visual expressions of the intense introspection informing the pictorialist family are Gertrude Kasebier's Clarence H. White and Family (1908), and Edward Steichen's 1904 series Alfred Stieglitz and His Daughter Katherine. Along with White's portrait of his son clutching an issue of Camera Work, and Stieglitz's premonitory portrait of his daughter threatened by the figure of a little Dutch girl wielding a knife, these images are burdened with a psychological suffering that is underscored by the mucky claustrophobia of their interior settings.

26. Given that relations of power are structured along lines of gender and age as well as class, it is not surprising that the child was male or that he registered his resistance as an adult.

27. McCue's picture appears on the same page as that of a similarly framed youth labeled as 'An Embryo Gangster.' The caption appearing below both photographs reads, 'These eleven-year-old delinquents are a

28. IMP/GEH (undated newspaper clipping).

29. See Library of Congress, MCLC Microfilm, lot 7479, nos. 4966-5008. A second case in point is a series of images of textile workers Hine produced in 1933 to illustrate 'Through the Threads: An Interpretation of the Creation of Beautiful Fabrics by the Shelton Looms,' a brochure concerned with corporate promotion and public relations. (IMP/GEH Archives).


32. A. J. McKelway, 'Child Labor in the Carolinas,' Charities and the Commons, 1909, January 30.

33. The relevant passage of Kelley's introduction follows:

With a special bureau [...] created for the express purpose of collecting raw cotton upon delivery to the mill. See works by Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, yet uncorrupted by the New South's emergent industrial capitalism; 2) if remains thoroughly problematic given that all discourse is a function of segregated. African Americans were employed rarely and only in the most arduous and low-paying jobs such as the initial processing of the raw cotton upon delivery to the mill. See works by Jaccelyn Dowd Hall (et al.) and Cathy L. McHugh cited in note 42.


36. Ibid., p. 43.

37. In what ways children might be said to speak in their own voices remains thoroughly unanswerable given that all discourse is a function of (adult) language. For an extended discussion of this issue see Jacqueline Rose, The Case of Peter Pan, or, The Impossibility of Children's Fiction (Macmillan, London, 1984).

38. As Richard de Lone and Kenneth Keniston have pointed out, children have long been assigned a key role in coping with the deepest tensions of American life, including the conflict between economic and political liberalism: 'the irony of liberal reform [is that it] has always counted on children to solve in the next generation the problems their parents could not solve in their own.' Richard H. de Lone, Small Futures, Inequality and the Limits of Liberal Reform (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984).

39. As Richard de Lone and Kenneth Keniston have pointed out, children have long been assigned a key role in coping with the deepest tensions of American life, including the conflict between economic and political liberalism: 'the irony of liberal reform [is that it] has always counted on children to solve in the next generation the problems their parents could not solve in their own.' Richard H. de Lone, Small Futures, Inequality and the Limits of Liberal Reform (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984).

40. IMP/GEH 77:181:30.

41. Text and image construct a three-part argument: 1) before the advent of cotton mills and wage labour for children, this family would have been provided for in more adequate ways by a rural community as yet uncorrupted by the New South's emergent industrial capitalism; 2) if one or both of the two older children had stayed behind and worked rather than going off to start families of their own, the remaining nine children would have had a chance to go to school and thereby escape their present conditions of poverty and ignorance; 3) if adequate regulations prohibited child-labor, this widow and her family would nevertheless be provided for through the agency of ' humane and kind-hearted people' who remain otherwise unspecified. McKelway, 'Child Labor in Georgia' (NCLC Pamphlet, No. 138, July 12, 1910), p. 13.


43. Dawley, pp. 479-80.


46. She notes that Hine restores the family's proper name and, citing Foucault, posits this as a necessary first step in transforming an 'object of information' into a 'subject of communication.' Stange, pp. 93-7.

47. See endnote no. 3.

49. IMP/GEH 77:181:1.


51. Hine's photographs of students attending the Ethical Culture School and similarly progressive educational institutions were published in three issues of The Cynstafn between 1906 and 1908. See 'Learning to be Citizens: A school where boys and girls of all creeds, races and classes are given a chance to go to school and thereby escape the problems their parents could not solve in their own.' Richard H. de Lone, Small Futures, Inequality and the Limits of Liberal Reform (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984).


54. Allan Sekula has established the work of Francis Galton, English scientist and pioneer in eugenics, as the model Hine was following. See Allan Sekula, 'The Body and the Archive,' The Conquest of Meaning, pp. 367-72.

55. This representation of a group of ostensibly defective, female, adolescent mill workers was deployed in complex ways within the ideological field created by the child-labour debates. In the original photograph, the young woman with slumped shoulders and dull expression constituted the central figure in a line of five female workers. The photograph was published in 1909 as part of a child-labour reform article in The Survey entitled 'Southerners of Tomorrow' [The Survey, October 1909]. There the caption reads 'Some adolescents in a Georgia cotton mill. The faces indicate the need for medical inspection of school children, and the consequences entailed upon the health of the future, if sub-normal girls are put to work which serves only further to blunt their development.' Dawley reproduces a cropped version in which the most engaging, normal-looking woman on the far right has been eliminated (Dawley, p. 438). He specifically contests the narrative constructed by Hine's 'Making Human Junk' poster, in which this image reappears once again, this time cropped still further and flipped, so that only three figures on the left remain (in reverse order). In Hine's version, children, before they enter the Southern textile mills, are 'good material' subsequently turned into 'human junk' in a dystopic analogue to the mechanized processes of industrial production. Dawley's caption reverses this scenario. The degraded, sub-normal, defective appearance of these young women is attributable to the poverty and disease of their rural existences before they found their way to the mills.

56. Dawley recaptures the photograph 'Hook-worm suspects such as Dawley, p. 438. He specifically contests the narrative constructed by Hine's 'Making Human Junk' poster, in which this image reappears once again, this time cropped still further and flipped, so that only three figures on the left remain (in reverse order). In Hine's version, children, before they enter the Southern textile mills, are 'good material' subsequently turned into 'human junk' in a dystopic analogue to the mechanized processes of industrial production. Dawley's caption reverses this scenario. The degraded, sub-normal, defective appearance of these young women is attributable to the poverty and disease of their rural existences before they found their way to the mills.
encourage the movement of the poor farmer to the mill towns where it would be easier to treat cases of hookworm.' See Walter I. Trattner, Crusade for the Children: A History of the National Child Labor Committee and the Child Labor Reform in America (Chicago, 1970), p. 103.

57. Rexford Guy Tugwell, Thomas Munro, and Roy E. Stryker, American Economic Life and the Means of Its Improvement (Harcourt Brace and Company, New York, 1925), p. 35. Tugwell went on to become the head of Roosevelt's Farm Security Administration. He hired Stryker, who had collected the many Hine photographs used in American Economic Life, to head its photographic division. Stryker became legendary as the guiding force of social documentary photography in its heyday during the Great Depression. See Stange, p. 92.

58. Stange astutely discerns the oppositions involved between the 'self-contained indifference' of the middle-class mother and child with respect to the photographer as opposed to the 'vulnerability of the widow and her family who [. . .] are lined up as if for investigation or display.' Stange, p. 95.

59. The IMP/GEH collection includes a number of images of what looks to be the same child as appears in the 'comfort group' photograph, two of which are inscribed on the verso with the name 'Cordy.' [See IMP/GEH: 78:1057:43, 48, 91, 182, 195.] Photographic historian, Naomi Rosenblum, has confirmed the identities of mother and child as Sarah and Corydon Hine as has Kitty Hobson, Curator of the Oshkosh Public Museum, repository of Hine's personal papers [personal correspondence].

60. Stange, p. 96.