The movement to regulate child labor in the United States was one of the most successful social movements of the early twentieth century. From 1870, when the census first recorded the number of child workers in the United States, to 1941, when the Supreme Court upheld the legality of the Fair Labor Standards Act and its child labor provisions, the issue of child labor was a staple of the national political agenda. During the Progressive era child labor reform drew the attention, involvement, and activism of a range of well-known and powerful figures, including Theodore Roosevelt, Jane Addams, Albert Beveridge, and Woodrow Wilson. Yet few studies in public address have examined the rhetoric of child labor reform. Furthermore, child labor texts are rarely anthologized for easy access and study.

One possible explanation for these absences is that some of the most eloquent and enduring child labor rhetoric was visual rather than oratorical. While public address studies have tended to favor the oratorical, the child labor debate is best remembered today for the eloquent visual rhetoric of Lewis Wickes Hine. In 1908, Lewis Hine was hired as a photographic investigator for the National Child Labor Committee (NCLC), a privately funded group of activists and social work professionals who had been working to change child labor laws and practices in the United States. Between 1908 and 1918, Hine made thousands of photographs under the auspices of the NCLC. The images were displayed as slide shows, shown at exhibits on child labor, and appeared in NCLC reports and journals; Hine frequently wrote articles to accompany them. Thanks to Hine, reformers recognized the power of documenting social conditions via photography. The man who hired Hine at the NCLC, Owen Lovejoy, remarked years later in a letter to the photographer, “In my judgment the work you did under my direction for the National Child Labor Committee was more responsible than any or all other efforts to bring the facts and conditions of child employment to public attention.”

Scholars in other fields frequently describe Hine’s work in terms of communication and persuasion, while those of us who regularly employ tools for analyzing communication and persuasion have largely ignored him. Why the paradox?
Perhaps part of the answer is that our changing understandings of public address have not kept up with our methods for studying it. More than 20 years ago Stephen Lucas asked of the field,

> What if we move beyond the traditional paradigm? What if we think of public address not just as the study of historical speakers and speeches, but as the study of the full range of public, discursive rhetorical acts – historical and contemporary, oral and written, considered individually or as part of a broader campaign or movement?8

Lucas contended that public address scholarship in the 1960s and 1970s did not “die,” but “underwent a dramatic metamorphosis” fueled by what appeared to be an increasingly complex rhetorical-political world.9 Similarly, in a 1989 essay, David Zarefsky observed that one sign of “vitality” in public address was a shift in the field’s understanding of what constitutes the “address” of public address. Zarefsky declared that public address scholarship was undergoing a shift from attention to the modes of public address (e.g., oratory) to its functions: “By embracing a broader conception of public address and not reducing the term to formal oratory, our studies have enhanced the potential for understanding historical or rhetorical situations and for formulating theoretical generalizations.”10 Zarefsky’s point – that we should be more focused on what public address does than on any particular mode of that doing – was liberating, especially for scholars interested in nonoratorical modes of public address. Yet that liberation arguably came at the cost of methodological clarity. When public address was opened up to a range of previously unexplored discourses, new questions arose about methodology: How should one proceed when examining nonoratorical modes? To be more specific, what precisely would we do if we wanted to study Lewis Hine’s photographic rhetoric?

In this chapter I present a critical perspective on the study of visual modes of public address. Although the case study I develop focuses on the photography of Lewis Hine, the perspective presented here fits a range of other visual images and artifacts as well. This chapter is not a complete guide to visual methodologies, but it does offer starting points for those who wish their explorations of public address to include visual discourses.11 In what follows I present five approaches to analyzing visual images in terms of their production, composition, reproduction, circulation, and reception. Taken together, these constitute a critical perspective on the study of visual modes of public address. By “perspective,” I mean something quite literal: a way of seeing the role of visual images in public culture. This perspective assumes that visual modes of public address shape and frame our experience of public life. In embracing the constitutive role of images, it sets aside the erroneous presumption that the “best” deliberation takes place solely in the modes of talk and text.12

Furthermore, this perspective recognizes not only that public address is frequently visual, but that it always has been. Despite claims that visual modes of rhetoric are more dominant now than they were in the past, the history of American public address is very much a visual as well as a textual/oratorical history.13 Finally, the perspective I develop here assumes that to study visual modes of public address...
Cara A. Finnegan is to do interdisciplinary work; this chapter taps into more than three decades of scholarship in the field of communication and is informed by work in related fields such as art history, American studies, and literary cultural studies. Overall, I treat the visual as a potent mode of public address which should be studied in ways that recognize images’ political, cultural, and historical specificity, as well as their fluidity as circulating objects in public culture. After I present each of the five approaches, I illustrate the historical power of visual public address through a case study of a Lewis Hine child labor poster published in *Child Labor Bulletin* in 1915. In this context of reproduction, Hine’s photograph-text assemblage, titled “Making Human Junk,” served not as a stand-alone visual argument but as a summary statement punctuating broader arguments about child labor, national health, and the value of children and childhood. My analysis not only models the perspective I describe below, it also illustrates the important role of visual rhetorics of child labor reform during the Progressive era.

**Critical Approaches to Visualizing Public Address**

Students of public address typically come to the study of visual rhetoric through a more general interest in rhetoric; engaged by visual artifacts, they wonder precisely how to proceed. As with all research, one’s approach should follow from one’s critical questions. Depending on those questions, one or more of the following approaches may be most appropriate. In studying *production* the critic examines not only the technical aspects of image-making but also the generic, institutional, and authorial factors that influence the creation of images. In studying *composition*, the critic attends to the visual features of the image itself, as well as any historical referents or commonplaces they activate. The study of *reproduction* invites the critic to examine the specific “textual events” in which images appear. The study of *circulation* asks the critic to study how the image moves in and through various contexts of public culture. Finally, the critic studying *reception* attempts to gauge audiences’ responses to images. The five approaches are not mutually exclusive, nor must a single case study include all approaches or work in a linear fashion through them. Instead, they are presented here to offer the critic a variety of approaches for answering particular questions about the roles images play in public culture.

**Production**

When we attend to production we examine “where images come from and why they appear in the spaces where we find them.” Four elements of production are important starting points for examining visual images: the technical, the generic, the authorial/creative, and the institutional. While few would argue that technology alone should determine any potential reading of an image, Gillian Rose suggests it may be useful to know some technical information: “visual technologies do matter to how an image looks and therefore to what it might do and what might
be done to it.” For example, whether an image is a photograph or an oil painting matters to our interpretation of it, though to what degree it matters may be debatable in any given case. In the case of historical photography, we would want to know how photographs were typically produced in a given period, what kind of camera was used, or what affiliated technologies were or were not available (e.g., flash photography, color film). Knowing this information may help the critic mount a more informed interpretation of the image’s history, composition, or reception.

Just as public address scholars turn to genre to understand oratorical texts, the visual critic may also find it useful to consider genre. Is the image an example of documentary? Editorial cartoon? Advertising? Religious iconography? Understanding something about the genre in which an image participates not only gives the critic access to norms of its production, but may also provide additional insight into the norms of its composition. For example, Barbie Zelizer’s studies of historical and contemporary news photography rely heavily on Zelizer’s knowledge of the norms of the photojournalism genre.

Public address scholars frequently are interested in the creator of public discourse; we want to know how speakers come to make their speeches, what constraints they faced, what their purposes might have been. We may be interested in their rhetorical training, how they drafted and revised their work, or with whom they collaborated. Similarly, attention to the creator of images may reveal important contextual information as well as potential motives of the creator. Knowing that 1930s documentary photographer Dorothea Lange was trained as a portrait photographer, for example, helps critics of her images better understand how her portraits pay visual witness to individual experience.

Institutions affect image production as well. Studies of image production frequently involve “detailed analyses of particular industries which produce visual images.” How one analyzes institutions will vary by case, but attention to institutions typically involves studying the economics of production, the ideological aspects of an institution’s goals or ideals, and institutional forces that enable or constrain the production of particular kinds of images. For example, both Diane S. Hope and Nancy Martha West have explored how the Eastman Kodak company sold the family romance of photography to Americans in order to sell their products. Information about production frequently is found in archives, where the researcher may locate materials related to the individuals or institutions that produced the images. The critic may wish to access these to locate information about the elements of production outlined above, particularly those of institutions and creators.

Composition

Compositional analysis involves the description and interpretation of the visual grammar of images. Just as the close reader of texts benefits from having at her command a lexicon for interpretation (e.g., familiarity with tropes, figures, and argument strategies mobilized in the text or recognition of allusions and references therein), so too the visual critic needs specific analytical tools. Such tools enable the critic to get at
both content and form, which work together to construct potential meanings in a work. The compositional approach invites the critic to focus on a number of features of a visual image, including its content, color, light, and spatial organization.

The content of an image is what the image shows or depicts. Even if the image is representational (that is, it offers realistic-looking figures), the image’s content may not always be obvious. Social, cultural, and historical knowledge often comes into play: “some images picture particular religious, historical, mythological, moral or literary themes or events” which will require additional research in order to be fully understood. Critics may recognize in the content of an image particular topoi, or commonplace themes. Richard Lanham defines visual commonplaces as “large libraries of images and icons.” They are the stock images of public culture: familiar to audiences, culturally ubiquitous, readily available, and recurrent across space and time. Some visual topoi become so culturally powerful that they consolidate into more dominant rhetorical forms; we term these icons or visual ideographs. But other visual topoi may not be so easily recognizable to us today. For example, in his visual history of the American ideals of freedom and liberty, David Hackett Fischer describes the “liberty pole”; literally a tall pole with a cap on top, the liberty pole came to symbolize freedom and liberty for many American colonists. Although we might not know of the liberty pole today, representations of it circulated widely during the Revolutionary period and would have had symbolic resonance for audiences. Because visual topoi are culture-bound and tied to the doxa of communities, they are sometimes difficult to recognize, especially for those unfamiliar with visual history. Fortunately, there are numerous reference works that researchers may use to familiarize themselves with such visual topoi. In the Western context, the Encyclopedia of Comparative Iconography is a useful two-volume work that indexes common mythological, literary, and religious themes in the history of Western art. Scholars working in the US context may wish to keep handy one or two introductory texts on American art.

Analyzing image content may involve exploring how the gaze is activated. All images activate a field of looking, whether between the image and the viewer or within the image itself. Sylvan Barnet suggests that critics should ask, “What is the relation of the viewer’s (and artist’s) gaze to the gaze of the figure(s)? … Does this Other return the viewer’s gaze, thereby asserting his or her identity and power, or does the subject look elsewhere, unaware of the voyeur viewer-painter?” Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen note that images in which the gaze is directed at the viewer of the image create “a visual form of direct address. It acknowledges the viewers explicitly, addressing them with a visual ‘you.’ ” Kress and van Leeuwen call these images “demand” images because they demand “that the viewer enter into some kind of imaginary relation with him or her.” A classic example of the “demand” image is the Uncle Sam recruiting poster, “I Want YOU.” Critics may also examine the “organization of looks” in an image: Who looks at whom, and how does that direct the viewer’s attention? Who avoids the gaze or looks away? How does the grammar of the gaze construct a relationship between the image and the viewer?
Attention to composition involves studying formal characteristics of images as well as their content. One should attend to color, light, and spatial organization. Color differentiates elements in an image, stresses certain elements over others, creates a sense of harmony or discord, and expands or contracts the impression of space, among other functions. Color is also culturally expressive, such as the traditional blue “conventionally used for the cloak of the Virgin Mary” or gold frequently used to signify wealth. Color itself may be broken down into three components: hue (the actual color, i.e., whether something is yellow or red); saturation (the purity of a given color); and value (the color’s relative lightness or darkness). Kress and van Leeuwen suggest that color influences our sense of the realism of images; for example, an image of a beach scene with bright, highly saturated blue water may create the impression of a rich fantasy world or dreamy paradise.

Critics will also want to account for light in an image. Light may be used to emphasize certain parts of the image, deemphasize others, construct an emotional atmosphere, imply relationships, produce shadows, and the like. In short, light can bring elements of a picture together or produce marked contrasts. The source of light is also relevant; for example, photographs made indoors with a flash might have harsh, artificial-looking light that creates distinct areas of visual contrast within the frame.

The critic engaging spatial organization explores how objects are positioned in relation to one another, how lines and shapes intersect to suggest what is more or less salient within the frame, and how the image activates the geometry of perspective to create a sense of distance/closeness, logic/distortion, or balance/imbalance. Spatial analysis should consider not only how objects in the image relate to one another in the bounded space of the image, but also how the image is positioned to be experienced by a viewer. Viewers participate in what art historian Michael Ann Holly calls an image’s “logic of figuration,” the way the picture presents itself to be viewed: “We stand where the works tell us to stand and we see what they choose to reveal.” In examining the image’s logic of figuration, the critic should consider not only the ways that gazes or glances are activated in the image (described above), but also the angles at which the viewer encounters the image. Kress and van Leeuwen contend that horizontal angles activate various senses of involvement between the viewer and the subject of the image, while vertical angles suggest power differences. Finally, the critic may wish to consider the size or scale of the image: How large or small is it? What might its relative magnitude convey about its subject?

Compositional analysis initially functions descriptively as the critic catalogues elements of form and content. But description should give way to a more sophisticated interpretation which emerges from the critic’s understanding of how form and content work together to construct particular visual logics. An excellent example of compositional analysis that makes such interpretive moves is Davi Johnson’s analysis of news photographs made in Birmingham, Alabama, during Martin Luther King, Jr.’s 1963 civil rights campaign. Johnson shows how space, line, light, and perspective work together in photographs by Charles Moore to “visually identify the state with uncivilized violence.”
Reproduction

While attention to production helps the critic understand technical, generic, authorial, and institutional origins of images, and attention to composition gives a critic access to images’ form and content, reproduction is interested in what images do in the specific contexts in which they appear. David Zarefsky observes that the rhetorical historian views human conduct from the “perspective of how messages are created and used by people to influence and relate to one another.” Such a perspective entails viewing “history as a series of rhetorical problems, situations that call for public persuasion to advance a cause or overcome an impasse. The focus of the study would be on how, and how well, people invented and deployed messages in response to the situation.”47 Following Zarefsky, we might say that critics investigating reproduction are interested in how visual images participate in messages created to address rhetorical problems. Traditional approaches to criticism encourage attention to the contexts that frame and are framed by rhetorical discourse.48 Similarly, a study of image reproduction should account for images in the context of their participation in a “textual event”; it should study the local context of that textual event; and it should attend to the visual culture in which the image participates.

The notion of “textual event” emphasizes two aspects of the public appearance of images: their participation in contexts that include other images as well as written texts, headlines, or captions, and their eventfulness as particular moments of discourse occurring in space and time. A textual event might be a gallery or museum exhibit, a parade, a magazine article, or even (as I note below) a factory floor. Using photography as her example, M. K. Johnson explains, “a photograph as it appears in a gallery would be one textual event; the same photograph appearing in conjunction with a newspaper review of the gallery show would be another textual event.”49

The critic examining the image as part of a specific textual event thus asks questions such as: How does the image work within this particular piece of rhetoric? How does it interact with other features of that rhetoric, e.g., other images, texts, or spaces? In analyzing the Farm Security Administration (FSA) photographs produced by the US government in the 1930s, I examined how the photographs were used in magazine stories about rural poverty. In my study of specific textual events, I not only engaged the images themselves, but also explored their placement on the page, their relationship to the articles they were used to illustrate, their relationship to other images in the articles, and their relationship to captions and headlines.50

In addition to studying the textual event of reproduction, the critic will also want to look at the local context in which the textual event appears. With the FSA photographs, I studied non-FSA content in the magazines and considered its relationship to the FSA photographs and stories. In addition, studying local context sometimes entails introducing questions of production such as: Why did this magazine publish this story? What were the institutional goals of this outlet? How were stories selected or rejected? Who selected the photographs and decided on the final product? A critic engaging other contexts of reproduction would ask related questions. A study of images displayed in a museum exhibit, for example, might investigate
the history of the museum, discover who made decisions about exhibits, and locate archival materials related to how the exhibit was assembled.

Finally, the critic studying reproduction will want to understand the social, historical, political, and institutional forces involved in the case being analyzed. In addition to the typical things one would consider – the rhetorical situation that produced the need for the discourse, the competing persuasive forces at play, and the rhetor’s position in the context of the rhetorical situation and problem – the critic of visual discourse will also want to explore the visual culture of the period being studied. If culture may be defined as what Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright term “the shared practices of a group, community, or society, through which meaning is made out of the visual, aural, and textual world of representations” – that is, as a contingent “social practice” – then visual culture involves “those aspects of culture that are manifested in visual form.” However, there is no monolithic, empirically identifiable visual culture “out there” waiting to be discovered. Our knowledge of visual culture must be pieced together intertextually from fragments we discover and engage. In investigating visual culture, the critic will want to ask questions such as: Is the image in question unusual for its time, or ubiquitous? Where would audiences likely have encountered such an image? What other kinds of images circulated during this era? What visual practices or ways of seeing were available to viewers during the period? As we shall see below, attention to visual culture also directs us outward from the image and its local context toward broader issues of circulation and reception.

Attention to reproduction may allow the critic to situate the image within a highly specific context. An excellent analysis of this kind is James Kimble and Lester Olson’s examination of J. Howard Miller’s famous “Rosie the Riveter” print. Kimble and Olson mobilize numerous archival sources to show that Miller’s iconic image is widely misunderstood to have been created to recruit women into the war effort. However, it first appeared as a “shop poster” hung on the factory floor to communicate to women workers in Westinghouse plants. Using archival research to uncover “the poster’s time- and place-bound meanings within Westinghouse’s organizational culture” – that is, the relationship of its production to its reproduction – Kimble and Olson skillfully read the poster in the context of worker practices and alongside other posters produced in a series designed to bolster worker motivation to produce.

Circulation

If the study of composition and reproduction helps us discover the specificity of images’ rhetorical work, the study of circulation helps us discover their fluidity. Scholars theorizing circulation reject definitions that characterize circulation as simply the passive transmission of ideas, information, or images. Rather, circulation does important cultural work, including creating interpretive communities and constituting publics. Michael Warner argues that circulation is in fact what constructs publics: “a public is the social space created by the reflexive circulation of discourse.”
Robert Hariman and John Lucaites concur that “images and their circulation are important means for the formation of public opinion and public agency.” Because circulation is a key feature of visual culture, the critic of visual modes of public address may be interested in examining how and where images move.

Circulation is difficult to study because it involves movement of discourse. Thus it may be most useful for the critic to begin by tracking multiple instances of reproduction. By accumulating a collection of these, the critic may develop a sense of the image’s circulation. Depending upon the critic’s interests, it may be enough simply to note the fact of circulation; for example, an account of circulation may be made in order to enable the critic to say something about audiences’ potential exposure to an image. Yet merely accounting for the fact of circulation may not be enough; the critic may wish to make circulation itself a subject of study. For example, Lester Olson tracked the circulation of a popular Revolutionary-era image of a segmented snake known as “JOIN, or DIE,” originally produced by Benjamin Franklin. By examining contexts of print culture through which the image circulated in the American colonies and Europe, Olson showed how the available meanings of this iconic image changed as it circulated. The segmented snake that initially connoted the British colonists’ solidarity in face of threats from France later came to stand for colonial unity against the British. Olson was able to track circulation so closely because he spent considerable time and energy doing archival research. In the case of well-known bodies of images, secondary source material in the form of encyclopedia articles, annotated bibliographies, or other reference works may also help the critic track circulation.

Scholars who explore circulation frequently encounter appropriations of the image they are tracking. Sturken and Cartwright define appropriation as “the act of borrowing, stealing, or taking over others’ meanings to one’s own ends.” Often, though not always, appropriation is “one of the primary forms of oppositional production and reading.” The study of appropriation not only involves attention to circulation but may also provide access to response and reception. Hariman and Lucaites demonstrate the utility of attention to appropriation in their book, No Caption Needed, which examines eight iconic photographs and dozens of related appropriations.

The study of circulation cautions us against reifying any one interpretation of an image or its accompanying textual event. While the critic may activate an interpretation of an image in one context, it is not necessarily the case that all elements of that interpretation will make sense when the image circulates in other contexts. By combining attention to circulation with the study of reproduction, the critic is able to explore both the specificity and fluidity of visual images.

Reception

Finally, the rhetorical critic may be interested in exploring avenues for assessing audiences’ responses to a work. Like all forms of rhetorical discourse, visual images have effects on audiences. Yet just because an image has the potential to produce
certain effects does not mean that it did, in fact, produce such effects. If we want to be able to say something substantive about actual audience responses, we need to construct a robust study of reception.

Why might a critic study response? First, the critic may want concrete evidence for claims about the impact of a work. In addition, the critic may wish to “check” his or her interpretation of the work against how audiences may have received it; Leah Ceccarelli explains that the critic might follow up “a close reading of the primary text” with “a close intertextual reading of responses … to see whether the rhetorical strategies worked in the way” the critic believes.59 In addition, studying reception enables the critic to locate other potential interpretations that might have been missed, because one working at a distance from the time period will never have full access to the historical contingencies of any given moment. Finally, the critic may be as interested in the reception of a work as in the work itself. That is, a critic may study reception to increase our understanding of available or prevalent viewing practices in a particular time and place.

Rhetorical scholars typically study response empirically, intertextually, or using some combination of these. In empirical studies of reception, the critic uses secondary or primary source material to assemble evidence as to audiences’ reception of a work. Such evidence might include texts that comment on the work such as histories, personal narratives, newspaper or magazine articles, letters to the editor, critical reviews, or material located in letters or diaries. The study of an image’s circulation and/or appropriation, as noted above, may also suggest something about how audiences received a work. Those studying contemporary discourse may even ask viewers what they think. For example, in their study of National Geographic, Catherine Lutz and Jane Collins interviewed a sample of readers about their experiences with the magazine and asked them to interpret individual photographs. Obviously such an approach is not available when examining visual rhetoric of past periods, but it may be helpful in the analysis of contemporary texts.60

In addition to collecting empirical evidence of response, the critic may also wish to analyze what Ceccarelli calls “intertextual material produced in response to a primary text.”61 Here the critic examines the residue of audience response to discover how audiences interpret or remake the work for their own rhetorical purposes. A good example of how one might use intertextual analysis is my study of how readers of McClure’s magazine responded to a photograph of Abraham Lincoln published for the first time in 1895, 30 years after his assassination. By analyzing a group of letters to the editor, I discovered that late nineteenth-century viewers read the photograph as proof that Lincoln was the first “true” American. For elites anxious about the shifting nature of American identity at the turn of the twentieth century, framing Lincoln in this way was rhetorically useful.62

The five approaches discussed above offer tools that enable critics to answer a range of questions about visual modes of public address. Below I offer a case study that mobilizes some of these tools to study a Lewis Hine poster called “Making
Human Junk” (Fig. 10.1). While I will not explore this child labor image utilizing all five approaches, I will illustrate how some of the approaches may be combined in a single case study. Attending to elements of composition, production, and a single reproduction of the Hine image, I show that although “Making Human Junk” appears initially to be a self-contained argument about the evils of child labor, it really functions more expansively as a summative statement on the relationship between child labor and the health of the nation.
“Making Human Junk”: Visualizing Child Labor and National Health

Let us begin with composition. The poster, reproduced in the pages of the journal Child Labor Bulletin, is longer than it is wide, its light-colored background contrasting with the title at the top in strong, black, capital letters: “MAKING HUMAN JUNK.” A series of large photographs and small photographic cutouts of children fill the rest of the space. The verticality of the poster encourages the viewer to read the images and text (both hand-lettered and typographic) from top to bottom; they work together to create a narrative emphasizing three stages in the making of “human junk.” In the first stage, children are “good material,” smiling in a photograph reminiscent of a class picture. But, as Hine’s hand-lettered sign announces, “small boys and girls” are “wanted.” Children who start out as “good material” are then subjected to what Hine calls “THE PROCESS.”

Hine visualizes what happens to the children by positioning photographic cutouts as if they are entering and departing a photographic image of a factory; curvy, hand-drawn lines suggest their movement into and out of the building. Like the raw material the factory transforms into products, the children are also subjected to the factory process. What exactly happens to them inside is unclear (Hine does not give us visual access to the interior), but the outcome of the process is visualized in the third and final element of the story, “THE PRODUCT.” Here, we see what the factory turns out: unsmiling, worn children whose gazes make a demand on the viewer. Gone are the smiles from the group of girls above; gone too are the “HIGH WAGES” that used to characterize factory work. These have given way to the stooped shoulders, blank stares, “NO FUTURE” and “LOW WAGES” that are the result of the child’s participation in industrial labor. Combining large photographs, smaller photographic cutouts, directional lines, and short bursts of text, Hine suggests that the children themselves are products of industrialization. The rhetorical question posed on the bottom of the poster, “Shall industry be allowed to put this cost on society?,” punctuates the direct visual address of the children in the photographs.

Hine’s image appears to communicate a relatively straightforward claim: Child labor turns out “junk” in the form of damaged children. As a result, it suggests, industry should be pressured to change its ways or society will suffer. But specific evidence for the claim of damage is lacking. What, for example, constitutes the poster’s evidence that the children depicted have been turned into “junk”? Are we to read it in their faces, body language, clothing? How are we to tell visually what makes the children at the top of the poster “good material” and those at the bottom of the poster “junk”? What happens to the children inside the factory? What exactly is the “process” by which “good material” is turned into “junk”? The poster does not visualize these things.

In order to situate Hine’s visual text in ways that help us understand how its claims about child labor function, we may want to ask questions that connect Hine’s image to other images, to his photographic practices, and to Progressive-era rhetorics of
child labor more generally. When it was reproduced, did the image appear alone or did it appear alongside other images about child labor? Is this image representative of Hine’s work, or distinct? Does the claim that child labor turns children into “junk” constitute an original contribution to the child labor debate, or does it echo or reflect prevailing public sentiment? And so on. Exploring these questions below, I argue that when we study “Making Human Junk” in at least one of its contexts of reproduction, we see that the poster’s lack of specificity is precisely what gives it its particular rhetorical force. “Making Human Junk” functions not as an isolated visual argument, but as a summative statement for broader arguments about child labor. It summarized the anti-child labor position in ways that connected it to broader arguments linking the health of the child to the health of the nation.

“Making Human Junk” was produced sometime in 1914 or early 1915. It was one of several posters Hine created during this period, images he idiosyncratically called “time exposures,” which have been described as “a series of picture-text assemblages about child labor issues, presented in diptych and triptych form.” A diptych is a work that consists of two same-sized, separate panels or images hinged or hung together to be viewed as a single message or work of art; a triptych would be three of these. While some who have studied the time exposures suggest they were meant to function as “stand-alone texts,” evidence of their reproduction in multiple contexts suggests otherwise. Hine frequently presented them in twos and threes alongside other time exposures, which suggests they were designed to work with other materials.

Hine’s corpus of child labor photographs served as raw material for the time exposures. The posters thus recycled images Hine made years earlier; many of these same images had been widely reproduced and circulated in other contexts, such as NCLC reports and social welfare magazines. The time exposures departed from the work that Hine had created in the past. In his initial child labor images, Hine worked like a visual sociologist, meticulously documenting his photographs with the names of his subjects, detailed captions, and extensive notes – information which frequently found its way into stories he produced for magazines. Noting that Hine wrote captions “like an investigative reporter,” Daile Kaplan observes that Hine “was not simply an ‘illustration’ photographer who provided photographs to editors and writers to be used as they wished; he was an active participant in shaping the format in which his photographs were reproduced.” But “Making Human Junk” does not offer this kind of specificity. The charges Hine activates in the poster are general ones; he does not identify specific children, nor does he name a specific factory. Instead, he comments on a broad level about the impact of child labor practices on society. This lack of specificity, combined with the time exposures’ display in pairs or groups, suggests that they served a rhetorical function different from Hine’s other child labor work.

If the time exposures were not created to function as single, isolated instances of visual argument, then it makes sense to perform a critical reading of “Making Human Junk” in the contexts of its reproduction. Below I explore the reproduction of “Making Human Junk” in the February 1915 issue of Child Labor Bulletin, the journal of the National Child Labor Committee. When Hine’s poster is examined
in this context, we can see how it fit into a series of images and texts designed to educate the public about the multiple dangers of child labor.

The February 1915 issue of Child Labor Bulletin contained a reproduction of an exhibit handbook made by Lewis Hine called “The High Cost of Child Labor.”71 The handbook was produced as a companion to a “new twenty-five panel exhibit” set to open at the Panama-Pacific International Exposition (World’s Fair) of San Francisco in late February. The handbook, according to the editor’s note in Child Labor Bulletin, was designed to “[amplify] the statements of the panels” and would not only be available for purchase at the World’s Fair, but also available to the journal’s readers at ten cents a copy.72

The reprint of the exhibit handbook consists of 25 pages inserted into the end of the issue. It is divided into four sections presented in a problem–solution structure: “The Cost to the Child”; “The Cost to Industry”; “The Cost to Society”; and “What Are We Going To Do About It?” Each section utilizes both pictures and text. Nine of Hine’s time exposures are reproduced, along with one additional photograph and a chart. In each of the handbook’s sections, Hine offers statistical evidence to support his claims and cites sources extensively. For example, part one, which examines the cost of child labor to children, is divided into four separate sections: physical effects; accidents; juvenile crime; and loss of education.73 Throughout the handbook, Hine includes references to sources such as the Federal Bureau of Labor, state legislative initiatives, the NCLC itself, and newspapers from around the country. Part two is similarly structured.

“Making Human Junk” appears in a section called “The Cost to Society,” immediately following ten pages of visual and textual evidence offering much more specificity about the ills of child labor than we found in the poster itself. Estimating that child labor places a cost on society upwards of 20 to 25 million dollars a year, Hine reproduces “Making Human Junk” and writes,

Not only the child, but the parent, the humane employer, and society in general pay tribute to the child employer. He injures all of us because by forcing down wages he ruins the health and souls of future generations, and thus he weakens the nation. The cost to the child and the cost to industry become a cost to society.74

Encountering “Making Human Junk” in the context of Hine’s discussion of the relationship between the health of the child and the health of the nation, the viewer is given the ultimate reason to care about child labor: Healthy children equal a healthy society. Having encountered the handbook’s earlier discussion of costs to children and industry, the viewer of “Making Human Junk” in this context would know what happens inside the factory to turn children into human junk; the reader would be able to fill in the evidence missing from the poster itself. Furthermore, because “Making Human Junk” and the text that accompanies it broaden the discussion to include not just children and industry but all of society, the audience for the handbook is prepared for the long list of solutions offered in the final section of the handbook, “What Are We Going To Do About It?”75 When read in the
context of claims about the social costs of child labor, “Making Human Junk” serves a summative function, punctuating the earlier discussion of the problem and preparing the way for the call to action.76

My compositional analysis revealed a tension – the poster’s lack of specificity – that was further explored by examining elements of production and reproduction. Situating Hine’s time exposure in the contexts of Hine’s photographic practices and the image’s reproduction as part of a particular textual event – the exhibit handbook published in Child Labor Bulletin – helped me to link Hine’s poster to the period’s discourses about child labor. But broader elements of context are worth considering here as well: How was Hine’s rhetoric similar to or different from other rhetoric in the child labor debate? How did Hine’s work fit in with other visual discourse about child labor? About childhood in general? There is much that could be said on these points, but at minimum, I note that Hine’s arguments about the costs of child labor to society were deeply intertwined with other discourses about the same topic. Child labor discourse – even arguments in support of child labor – heavily utilized rhetorics of health.77 Furthermore, all sides of the child labor debate emphasized that children were precious products that needed to “turn out” well or risk the physical and moral degeneracy of the nation. In a 1911 speech called “The Conservation of Childhood,” for example, Theodore Roosevelt offered what might be considered a verbal analogue to Hine’s “Making Human Junk”:

Remember, that the human being is the most important of all products to turn out. …

If you do not have the right kind of citizens in the future, you cannot make any use of the natural resources … the greatest duty of this generation is to see to it that the next generation is of the proper kind to continue the work of this nation.78

For Roosevelt, as for Hine, children were products, natural resources that needed to be protected and kept healthy. The trope of child health, upon which Hine, Roosevelt, and others drew, emerged after a profound shift in cultural understandings of children and childhood in the late nineteenth century. Viviana Zelizer has chronicled this shift, terming it the “sacralization of childhood.” She notes that during this period an image of the ideal child emerged which held children to be precious and priceless products, valuable more for sentimental reasons than for economic ones.79 Visual culture of the period also emphasized the “sacred child” as a prominent visual topos.80 In mobilizing arguments against child labor, “Making Human Junk” visualized the widely circulated belief that children were precious commodities who could be corrupted by a system that did not protect their moral and physical health.

When child labor reformers such as Owen Lovejoy praised Lewis Hine for his “efforts to bring the facts and conditions of child employment to public attention,” they were doing so for a variety of reasons. Hine not only chronicled visually the conditions facing child workers in the United States, he also mobilized his photographs into multimodal texts that creatively summarized the problems of child labor and articulated the national values that should guide the debate. No single case study can hope to express the diversity and significance of Hine’s work, of course.
But this brief study of Hine has served as an illustration of the rhetorical significance of visual modes of public address during Progressive-era child labor debates.

Conclusion

At the outset of this chapter, I set forth a perspective on the study of visual modes of public address grounded in several assumptions: that visual modes of public address shape our experience of public life, that they have just as much capacity to be deliberative as talk and text, and that they are just as much a part of our rhetorical histories as oral and written modes. Decades of increased study of visual culture, combined with increased openness to nonoratorical modes, have put public address scholars in a place where we may begin with such assumptions rather than spend time proving them. This is a very good thing. However, a few tasks remain if the study of visual modes of public address is to mature as it should. One of those tasks, which I have performed in this chapter, is to clarify the variety of potential approaches to the study of visual modes. While no single study needs to employ all of them, taken together the approaches I have outlined here encourage us to take up images in ways that recognize both their specificity as rhetorical documents and their fluidity as circulating artifacts in public culture.

Another important task, one I have modeled here by exploring Lewis Hine’s work, is that of recovering visual histories of American public address. Rhetorics of our past were not just read and heard, they were also seen; they deserve to be recovered and seen again. While a few public address scholars have concentrated their work on visual history, countless artifacts are yet to be explored and countless dissertations, articles, and books are yet to be written. We miss much if we neglect the vital work of recovery.

Finally, when we “visualize” public address we come to understand rhetorical history itself differently. Regardless of whether they study images or not, scholars of public address should be as interested in what people view and depict as they are in what they read, write, and speak. Why? Because visual culture participates in rhetorical culture. For example, knowing how ideas such as liberty and freedom were communicated visually throughout American history may enliven and enrich our readings of how oratorical texts mobilized these same ideas.81 Thus, when we embrace visual modes of public address, we not only validate the role of visuality in public culture, we also open up new avenues for understanding how all modes of rhetoric frame, shape, and frequently challenge our ways of seeing.

Notes


On the history of the NCLC see Trattner, *Crusade*.


For an exploration of the history of visual rhetoric in the discipline of communication, see Lester C. Olson, Cara A. Finnegan, and Diane S. Hope, “Visual Rhetoric in Communication: Continuing Questions and Contemporary Issues,” in *Visual Rhetoric*.


Rose, Visual Methodologies, 17.


A good source for preliminary information on an artist is Oxford Art Online, a database that gathers together full-text reference works, including The Oxford Companion to Western Art, The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Art Terms, and The Encyclopedia of Aesthetics.


Richard Lanham defines commonplace as “a general argument, observation or description a speaker could memorize for use on any number of possible occasions.” See Lanham, A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 169.


Kress and van Leeuwen, *Reading Images*, 122.


Rose, *Visual Methodologies*, 39. Value is typically expressed on a continuum from “low” to “high,” “low” being the color’s form closest to black, “high” being its form closest to white; see also Barnet, *Short Guide*, 67.


Kress and van Leeuwen, *Reading Images*, 140–146.


Studying Visual Modes of Public Address

64 Some scholars have explored parts of this image in terms of circulation and reception. George Dimock has examined the circulation of specific photographs from “Making Human Junk” and showed not only how Hine himself mobilized those images in other contexts, but also how opponents of child labor reform mobilized them. See Dimock, “Children of the Mills.”
65 The term “time exposure” is unique to Hine, and seems to suggest his interest in visualizing a process as opposed to the typical frozen moment in time usually captured by a photograph. See Daile Kaplan, ed., *Photo Story: Selected Letters and Photographs of Lewis W. Hine* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992), xxviii.
67 Though he acknowledges that Hine’s time exposures frequently appeared alongside magazine articles or with exhibit materials, Iseman describes them as “stand-alone units” and “complete self-contained communication” (“Showing,” 190).
68 For evidence that time exposures were displayed as diptychs or triptychs, Kaplan reproduces an image made at the child labor exhibit at the San Francisco World’s Fair in 1915; it appears between pages 26 and 27 in Kaplan, *Photo Story*.
72 “Notes: San Francisco Exhibit,” *Child Labor Bulletin* 3.4 (1915): 7. The price of the exhibit handbook is advertised at the back of the issue, on 47.
74 Hine, “The High Cost,” 34.
76 One could also begin to track the circulation of “Making Human Junk” during this period by exploring its reproduction in the San Francisco World’s Fair exhibit from which the handbook text and images are drawn. In doing so, the critic could explore the time exposure’s role in the complete exhibit on child labor, as well as the context of its reproduction and staging amid the spectacles and entertainments of the fair itself.


Fischer, *Liberty and Freedom*. 

81