The look on the girl's face is difficult to know (fig. 1). She stares at us as if the directness of her gaze would reveal all there is to see, but the longer we look, the less we feel certain of. Drawn down the middle, her pretty face is shaded on the left and lit on the right, the light side brought out by the stiff braided ribboned tail of hair that hangs to one side in the brightness ... the pursed lips, the dirty paired frills on the front of her pinstriped dress, the missing button between those frills ... the buttonhole winking as her eyes do not.

The hands, both dirty, the left one resting on the coarse stone ledge of the window—fingers extended, the forearm lit to a porcelain smoothness—the right one bent so that middle and index fingers and thumb gather in an escutcheon shape, as if the girl were holding some knob-topped cane, the filigree of an invisible lineage. No cane but a long row of bobbins supports her, keeping her aright, folded in the narrow flow of a day's work.

Lewis Hine, a socialist working for the National Child Labor Committee, made the photograph in December 1908. That year Hine's acquaintance and friend, the tireless socialist writer John Spargo, wrote that "the liberation of the soul" is the highest aim of socialism. "To free the wage-worker from economic exploitation is indeed the primary object, the immediate aim, of socialism," Spargo said, "but it is not the sole object. It is not the end, but the means to an end that is higher, the liberation of the soul." This was *The Spiritual Significance of Modern Socialism*, the title of Spargo's book. Hine probably heard Spargo's lectures on the topic in the winter of 1907/8 at Cooper Union in New York. He knew Spargo's detailed and passionate condemnation of child labor practices, *The Bitter Cry of the Children*, published in 1906. It seems he portrays the little North Carolina spinner in a moment of spiritual awakening.
But still she is difficult to know. What quickens the girl to her vulnerable alertness? Something beyond or before what she represents, some sense that she is *in time*, or out of time. What is the nature of this time? The long row of bobbins shows the repetitive labor she is accustomed to—the factory time that governs her days. She handles this “side” of bobbins, as the rows were called, repairing broken threads up and down the line of whirring spools. Sherwood Anderson, in his later book about the mills, *Beyond Desire* (1932), described what such work was like:

Thousands of separate threads came down from up above somewhere to be wound, each thread on its own bobbin, and if it broke the bobbin stopped. You could tell how many had stopped at one time just by looking. The bobbin stood still. It was waiting for you to come quickly and tie the broken thread in again. There might be four bobbins stopped at one end of your side, and at the same time, at the other end, a long walk, there might be three more stopped.

When a bobbin was full, a doffer boy would take it, load it into a cart with other full bobbins, and replace the full one with an empty bobbin. He would take his loaded cart of full bobbins to the loom room. Being a spinner, like the little girl, or a doffer, as many young boys were, was not complicated work. There was a reason why children got these jobs—someone needed to supervise the spinning bobbins, and someone needed to “doff” them to the next stage of the process. Children were the definition of cheap labor, and their employment could readily be cast as a form of social uplift. Around Whitnel, North Carolina, where Hine’s spinner girl stands, previous generations lived and worked on mountain farms, struggling in dire poverty and squalor: “At the mills, children over 12 years old, after they learn their job, can make more than men can make on farms,” ran a testimonial distributed around the western North Carolina town of Clyde in 1907. Even the sallow appearances of the spinners and doffers, mill apologists claimed, owed more to their lives before the mill than in it, where medical care, daily bread, and a living wage were newly the norm for these poor folk.

But the job was hard, requiring long hours of repetitive action and the pure boredom of standing around day after day. Hugo Münsterberg, a Harvard psychologist of those years, noted that some workers enjoyed repetitious tasks while others loathed them, depending on temperament. A person comforted by routine, for example, “will experience the repetition itself with true satisfaction.” But Hine’s girl does not seem to be one of these people. Hine makes the infinity of her labor...
stretch to the vanishing point. The uniformity of the perspective is her unchanging mental world. Chained to the traces like Buck, the dog hero of Jack London’s novel *The Call of the Wild* (1903), she sleds in a mill of fluff, a heroine who would be at home in a naturalist novel, mired in the long avenues marked No Way Out. Her blur is the lost focus of boredom and weariness, a panorama in which every scene is the same, forever.

All the moments drown into one another, an empty sea of time. “Yesterday or last year were the same as a thousand years—or a minute,” London wrote in his short story of child labor, “The Apostate,” published in 1908. “Nothing ever happened. There were no events to mark the march of time. Time did not march. It stood always still. It was only the whirling machines that moved, and they moved nowhere—in spite of the fact that they moved faster.” Likewise, in his account of his visit to the United States, *The Future in America* (1906), London’s fellow socialist H. G. Wells quotes Spargo’s *Bitter Cry of the Children*: “for ten or eleven hours a day children of ten and eleven stoop over the chute and pick out the slate and other impurities from the coal as it moves past them.” An illustration shows the chute-children bent like penitents at a confession. Instead of being pelted with stones, their punishment—the true measure of horror—is to look at rocks (fig. 2). The coal coming down the chutes is like the river Wells describes gathering to fall at Niagara—“a limitless ocean pouring down a sloping world,” a sign of America both majestic and terrifying, “so broad an infinitude of splash and hurry.”

The Niagara of endless work—the horizontal fall of the bobbin row—the cascade of labor, pitching forth and over in a strict level, ruled and regulated in a mind-numbing noise, a crescendo that makes the cotton thread like the plucked strings of a grotesque elongated harp—this is the stripped mental world where the punishment seems to be that the child will see and hear, even asleep, the sounding picture of what America is. Says one of Anderson’s mill girls, her eyes closed at night, “I got thread in my brain.”

But this naturalist detailing is only a baseline in Hine’s photograph. It is not the kind of time he most wants to show. Factory time is the machinery that gets the photograph into operation—the power of thrumming naturalist storytelling (victimized worker, nefarious machinery, endless hours, pointless labor)—but all of this is only a grease works allowing a more important time to emerge as a puff of inexplicable steam. Who knows but that the catatonic dreariness, the loud noise of the spindles, is even a requirement for the school-less child to be sufficiently
instructed in weariness, sufficiently lost or disoriented, to allow some other and more mystical time to flitter into the scene.

That other time is a pause. The girl stops her work. The kindly stranger with a camera walking into the mill and taking her photograph is an extraction from her day, a ceremonial ceasefire. What happens is not just a rest, or a break. It is something made by the photograph, made, too, by the photographer and the little girl as well. Neither of them knows what it will look like, but the time they conspire to create together is a *moment*—just the moment of the photograph itself, what it will be *then*. It has no backstory and no predetermined look. It may need to be sprung from the routinized time of the mill, where the hours are quantified, theorized, overseen—as if only in a place where time is so thick, so ceremonially extolled, might this more elusive form of time, almost imperceptible on its wings, appear.

That moment is not guaranteed to emerge. It is not synonymous with the click of the camera button. A photograph Hine took on the same occasion of the
Fig. 3
same little girl in the same place (fig. 3)—note the same chipped white paint on the windowsill behind her—is too frozen to emit the vibrating poise of the front-facing image. Likewise, still another photograph he took on this occasion, this one a group picture of child workers in which she appears as the first girl on the left in the front row (fig. 4), may contain a pathos of its own—it may mark time clearly enough—but it too lacks the elusive and unintentional feeling, the feeling one cannot plan for, wherein some weird temporal sensation makes itself felt.

Cinderella is a by-word for this other time, this timeless time—the attenuated moment—that makes itself felt in Hine’s Whitnel photograph. Felix Adler, the educational theorist and the rector of the Ethical Culture School in New York, where Hine taught from 1901 to 1907, wrote that the two white doves alighting on Cinderella’s shoulders are “the loveliest picture to be found in all fairy lore.” The value
of fairy tales, Adler went on, “is that they are instantaneous photographs, which, reproduce, as it were, in a single flash of light, some one aspect of human nature.”

Hine, who took up photography at the Ethical Culture School, learned that lesson well. His Whitnel spinner, not to mention other young girls he photographed toiling at their machines in the Carolinas in 1908 (fig. 5), steps out of folklore. We can all but imagine the evil stepmother and stepsisters lurking in the wings, or out having fun, while the drudge in her dirty dress labors the day long, her case all the more piteous for how beautiful she is. The photograph becomes a supercondensed story, “a single flash of light,” the fairy tale crystallized to a moral truth, the unfairness of being cooped up, deprived of even the doves that would alight on one’s shoulders.

The instant of the Whitnel spinner photograph is “Once upon a time,” but it is also outside of time. The moment unfolds to tell a story, a fable, though it is not clear what the moral is. The long row of bobbins, yes, is some nightmare version of the enchanted avenues down which a dreaming princess might stroll. In Hine’s picture there is an overabundance of pumpkins and not enough carriages. Everything is constantly turning back to, and never changing back from, the pure drudgery of slops and mops that beautiful slippers were supposed to redeem. If a strong feeling is identifiable in the photograph of the Whitnel spinner, it belongs to the emotion-world of these fables, where right is right and wrong is wrong, but the look on the girl’s face is again so difficult to know. To fix her as sad, as in a pitiful state, as Hine’s humanist admirers have long done with so many of his pictures, is to arrest the photograph’s exquisitely fluid invention of momentariness.

That moment is nameless, like the little girl. Hine did not bother to record what her name was. This is not to say that her name is not now known. In 2008 a man named Joe Manning—not long after starting a passionate quest to learn the identities of the children in Hine’s photographs—discovered that the Whitnel spinner was named Cora Lee Griffin, that she was born on July 12, 1896, and that the 1920 census lists her still as a spinner at the mill and married with two children. She died on June 3, 1985, age eighty-eight, survived by “two sons, three daughters, eight grandchildren, eight great-grandchildren, one brother and one sister.” Manning’s research is extraordinary, his motivations earnest. He has now discovered the identities and life stories of many of Hine’s subjects, using pragmatic deduction and simple methods such as asking newspaper editors in the towns in which Hine photographed to post the pictures he made there. That is how he found out
who Cora Lee Griffin was. Manning’s way of repatriating Hine’s photographs with
descendants who often had no idea that their grandmother or grandfather or other
relative had been photographed at so young an age has made him a humble guest
of honor at family reunions where the Hine photograph he has solved has become
nearly a sacred icon. As well it might. As well it should.

But Manning’s methods and focused passion seem at odds with Hine’s way of
working. Sometimes in his captions Hine names the child correctly, other times he
gets the name wrong, and still other times (as at Whitnel) he gets no name at all.
But often something that cannot be identified hovers at the scene of these photo-
graphs. Looking at them is like going into a field to search for coins with a metal
detector only after carefully disabling the metal detector beforehand—removing
the batteries or bashing the metal-finding disc against a rock. Anything so that

![Image of a child in a factory setting]

Fig. 5
Sadie Pfeifer, 48 inches high, has
worked half a year. One of the
many small children at work in
Lancaster Cotton Mills. Nov. 30,
1908. Lancaster, South Carolina.
November 30, 1908.
Fig. 6
Edvard Munch, Puberty, 1894.
Oil on canvas, 149 × 112 cm.
the device won’t work. The aim is to make one’s ignorance like that of the person within the moment herself. The Whitnel spinner may or may not read—socialists such as Spargo and Hine himself focused on rates of literacy and illiteracy among child workers—but what is clear is that, within the photograph, she cannot decipher the moment in any way. Wide-eyed, she is blind to how she appears, the knob-headed cane I’ve imagined that she holds a figure for that blindness, that feeling of feeling-of-one’s-way. Fingers on the coarse ledge—that is the look of a moment when beheld from within (by her and by Hine, who sees more than she does but also feels his way). The wide eyes betoken their mutual burst of not-seeing. The eyes are merely the starting point for all that they, at this moment, can never know: the future Manning has discovered for her, the husband, the children, the old age, the lineage of descendants who will recollect her. That dizzying array of times is not absent in the photograph—implicit futurities are part of what makes a photograph such as this so eerie, even terrifying—but, again, she cannot know any of this. Blind, feeling her way, holding her cane (even that is not there), she and the man taking her picture do not know each other and will never encounter each other again.

Somewhere out there one of Munch’s puberty-stricken vampires is the Whitnel spinner’s cousin (fig. 6). The likeness does not concern puberty and adolescence but a kind of staring vulnerability. Each girl is given an existential awareness: being alive, being in time, emotions changeable in the moment. Fredric Jameson, writing of the sense of time in realist literature, describes “a temporality specific to affect . . . in which each infinitesimal moment differentiates itself from the last by a modification of tone and an increase or diminution of intensity.” Different from the old emotional registers, where sadness to anger to joy might all be portrayed on a fixed chart, affect flows on “a sliding scale of the incremental,” changing even as we look. Like the dark wing of gauzy shadow behind her, moods pass across Munch’s girl in temporary patterns.

The nameless affect of the Whitnel spinner is likewise no readily identifiable emotion. Hine’s admirers and detractors miss this mutability when they assume that his pictures portray legible feelings. Instead, without knowing it, but somehow responding to it as the deepest impulse of his work, Hine intuited the momentariness of affect as an important part of what, for him, it was to be human. He may have created the basis for every UNICEF poster child a fatigued liberal has seen in the last forty years, but that does not mean that his own photographs are anywhere
near as clear. The humanists are not wrong in their estimation of Hine's goal. But they miss what the human was for him.

“I have come to think that the true history of life is but a history of moments,” wrote Sherwood Anderson in his memoir *A Story Teller's Story* (1924). “It is only at rare moments that we live.” The great literary critic Alfred Kazin elaborates: “Anderson did not merely live for the special ‘moments’ in experience; he wrote, by his own testimony, by sudden realizations, by the kind of apprehension of a mood, a place, a character, that brought everything to a moment’s special illumination and stopped short there, content with the fumbling ecstasy it brought.”

Fumbling ecstasy is a good term for Hine's special illuminations, too. The epiphanies in Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919) take place at crossroads to nowhere, and whatever's the weather at that second is the emotional meteorology of the indelible event that happens there. A boy and a girl have their first sexual experience: “He took hold of her hand that was also rough and thought it delightfully small. . . . They crossed a bridge that ran over a tiny stream and passed another vacant lot in which corn grew.” A little man haunted by his past, picking crumbs off the floor, is revealed in a moment to be doing an infinite penance in the private religion of his pain for a crime he did not commit: “In the dense blotch of light beneath the table, the kneeling figure looked like a priest engaged in some service of his church.” Coaching baseball, a frenetic man with an evangelical sense of purpose screams instructions to his players from the first-base box: “‘Now! Now! Now! Now! Now!’ . . . ‘Watch me! Watch me! Watch my fingers! Watch my hands! Watch my feet! Watch my eyes! Let’s work together here! Watch me! In me you see all the movements of the game! Work with me! Work with me! Watch me! Watch me! Watch me!’”

Kazin calls Anderson's focus on the moment a “left-handed mysticism.” Anderson was “groping for the unnamed and realized ecstasy immanent in human relations, that seemed the sudden revelation of the lives Americans led in secret.” Kazin goes on, using words so good for Hine's mystic photographs:

A certain sleepy inarticulation, a habit of staring at faces in wondering silence, a way of groping for words and people indistinguishably, also crept into his work; and what one felt in it was not only the haunting tenderness with which he came to his characters, but also the measureless distances that lay between these characters themselves. They spoke out of the depths, but in a sense they
did not speak at all; they addressed themselves, they addressed the world around them, and the echoes of their perpetual confession were like sound-waves visible in the air.

The Whitnel spinner is the subject of the photographer’s wondering stare and silence. Uncertainty, tentativeness, fumbling ecstasy—these are the touchstones for an encounter between photographer and subject, two strangers, that will elicit a confession, some soulful revelation “out of the depths,” a momentary connection, you could call it, that is yet wordless, a confession made possible only by the haunting tenderness with which Hine approached the task. The moment that appears is so vivid it colonizes the long row of machinery, the weary length of industrial time, until the grand perspective itself becomes the infinite elongation of a mystical moment such as Anderson and his kindred spirit Hine envisioned it. “Life was a dream to him,” Kazin writes of Anderson, “and he and his characters seemed always to be walking along its corridors.”

It is all made possible by Hine’s lack of training. The social workers knew what they were talking about when they initially told him he could not visit the mills and factories to photograph child laborers because he was not sufficiently trained in social work. If there is one thing Hine's photographs are remarkable for, it is the unschooled way he came into a town he did not know, into a factory he did not know, and photographed people he did not know, all with the knowledge that he would be leaving quickly, that he would never see any or almost any of these places ever again. But the brevity of all this was essential—any tarrying or delaying or dutiful consideration, beyond what the exigencies of the situation required, would dispel the urgency of his pictures.

Diligence was disastrous. Knowing the backstory of the mills—how they had begun emerging in the South around 1880, part of a progressive new economy offering regular employment to the region’s poor whites—had no place when one’s business was the momentary encounter itself. The successive waves of mill historiography—praise for the new southern entrepreneurs, condemnation of the same men, then fine-grained exploration of mill workers’ lives—alike pass across Hine’s photographs with a kind of irrelevance. Likewise knowing something about the complex racial displacements in the new mill economy is beside the point. If southern apologists such as the National Child Labor Committee’s own Alexander McElway excoriated the mills for dehumanizing white children—“the depreciation
of our racial stock has already begun,” he put it in 1907—and if the Indiana senator Albert Beveridge, in his three-day oration against child labor on the Senate floor in 1907, emphasized bitterly that the victims of the nation’s current labor laws were “white children, 6 and 7 years of age,” this was no business of Hine’s.

He could not afford to show something so cumbersome as ideas, his own or anyone else’s, not if his touch was to be light and true to the moment. His photographs trail a vast sociological story, yes, one that licenses people understandably to this day to misread his pictures as documents, but the real import of their “once upon a time” is the dream that theirs is no time, another time, a flicker of affect, reams of social history and attitude condensed to the flare of a fable, a dream, a moment so true it could scarcely be real. “Now! Now! Now! Now!” yells Sherwood Anderson’s baseball coach at the game, and no one, not even his own players, understands his strange urgency.

Hine sought the moment—this is the hardest part to articulate—even if he intended to do otherwise. Having such a sovereign power in his work, the moment drowned out anything resembling an opinion or “statement” (at least in the most successful photographs)—even the statements that conscientious Hine himself intended to make. The very act of making the photograph—burdened with different expectations concerning labor history, race relations, public policy—somehow vanquished these topical attitudes and exhortations. As a result, each truly momentary picture became not so much a statement of the times as a curious departure from them. Quickness was all.

This was true north and south. Hine might have wondered anywhere about how briefly he was around his subjects, about the effect of that brevity on his pictures. Consider his photograph of Addie Card, taken in August 1910 in North Pownal, Vermont, along the Vermont-Massachusetts border, not far from Williamstown, Massachusetts, and Bennington, Vermont (fig. 7).

The girl stands with her right arm slack, hanging straight down. The one pocket of her stained smock slouches to the left. The fuzzy white threads from the spools stick to her front like she’s walked through a spiderweb. Her left arm, resting on the row of spindles, strangely diminishes, as if stunted, a twig-arm, hand cupped, fingers extended, whereas the fingers of the hanging right arm curl. Each arm of this eventually long-lived girl—Joe Manning has found that she lived to be ninety-four—matches the thinness of the cylindrical bobbins ranged behind her. Not for nothing Hine’s critics’ sense of the plaintive emotional appeal of kids
like this one. The spindly legs, the pocket sewn onto her right hip like a kangaroo’s pouch reattached by an incompetent surgeon—she is a virgin of asymmetry, her crippled thinness swelling to a plaintive demand on the viewer. Pretty gaze as burnished as the shining spindles, she is a machine of sentiment, whirring with emotional intensity, a saint in chains, a girl visionary.

We get the picture. But what of the moment she and Hine confronted each other? How does the photograph unmoor their encounter from ordinary time, and from resolutions of sentimental meaning and social purpose? A New England contrast brings out the feeling of Hine’s momentary muse. About a hundred miles from North Pownal is Cornish, New Hampshire, where Hine’s contemporary, the well-known artist and illustrator Maxfield Parrish, lived with his wife and children at their custom-built estate house, The Oaks. Around 1905 a teenage girl named Susan Lewin came to work as a nanny there. Born in 1889, Lewin had attended nearby Quechee High School until the age of fourteen, when she became a wage earner to support her family. Not long after she began working at The Oaks, Parrish asked Lewin to pose for the photographs on which he based his paintings. Soon, it is not clear when, they became lovers, and they would remain close until Parrish’s death some six decades later.

Their relationship—and Parrish’s art—is a dream of stopped time. Looking at his paintings starting in 1905 is to see Lewin appear again and again, a constant muse, in this guise and that, as girl, as boy, as magician, as clown, in Jello ads and Renaissance gardens, on book covers and chocolate boxes. Sometimes Lewin appears multiple times in the same painting, as in Parrish’s 1909 picture of the Pied Piper, commissioned by the Palace Hotel in San Francisco, where she seems to be all or almost all the children following the man. She is always there, so it seems, and she is often curiously static, conveying a strange effect—I don’t know how else to describe it—of prolonged frozenness. Consider one of Parrish’s photographic studies (fig. 8) that serves as a contrast to Hine’s melting New England muse, Addie.

In the photograph Lewin is overstill, if there is such a thing. She holds her pose in a way that goes curiously beyond the requirements of a photographic source or study aid. Her absolute likeness to the way she appears in the painting based on the photograph provides a clue to her static state (fig. 9). It is as if Parrish wanted to create the sense that finished paintings such as this one were built up, not from photographs, but from careful drawings of his model—drawings that would have required that model, naturally, to hold her pose for a long time. But in reality all
that long-held stillness was condensed to a moment—just the click of the camera button—in which Lewin had only to impersonate a model posing for an artist over a period of hours.

The static-granite of these eternal poses is a lovers’ vow. They are a pact between artist and model, which like the oath of lovers requires a solemn fidelity and a breathless sense that it will outlive time, outlive death. The curiously enamelled duration is cold and chillingly statuary, at least as scary as the nook-nosed frazzle-haired clowns and eye-spy goblins that Lewin also posed for. Parrish’s art may wish to extract a promise from us that we good-naturedly accept its plain oddities, treating them as a fey winsomeness of some inscrutably original kind, but it is difficult to get beyond their lacquered dreams of immortality, their lovers’ concords as of paralyzing poisons. The princess is imprisoned in the castle, not because she is waiting for her prince to come but rather just because he is there.

Just in those same years that Lewin was starting out as Parrish’s muse, a hundred miles down the road Addie appeared before Hine. The difference is that Addie, another New England working girl, is not meant to last. Hine knew her for a few minutes instead of sixty years. In Hine’s photograph there is no blood oath
of perpetuity, and this momentariness changes everything. It is not just that Addie is not as statue-like. She too, after all, strikes a pose. And it is not as though she cannot be appropriated to fit anyone’s ready definition of an image frozen for all time. Hine’s camera doubles her stillness into the in memoriam of what’s become her postage-stamp likeness, her calcified portrayal of “work” in such a way that in the frigid genealogy of these things Addie has become a presteroidal Rosie the Riveter, sleeves ever at the roll. The difference instead is the humility of a feeling Hine and Addie might have shared—I doubt they could articulate it—that theirs is a moment that does not last, cannot last, that is so far outside thinking of perpetuity that the two of them hardly deign to consider the eternity that waxed Parrish to his cold ecstasies. There is a thought of promotion, of calling attention to wrong, yes, but beyond that immediate documentary use there is a feeling of inconsequence, of falling away, of subsiding, of drawing down into the bedraggled spindrift of some immense futurity before which the photograph bows with a sense of its own unimportance. If there is kindness and tenderness here, as there is in Parrish’s photographs of Lewin, it is of a different type: the sense that we two are together just for this moment, and that the fairy tale of our humanity consists in the mutual recognition not of our lives but of this momentariness we share. That is what remains as Hine walks away.

Could there be love in these moments? The socialist attitude to love—love floating around like the fluff in the mills—was the air Hine and other reformers breathed. “Debs has given love for love,” John Spargo told audiences in 1908, stumping for the socialist presidential candidate Eugene Debs. “How much the outpourings of his love upon the hearts of his comrades has meant to the socialist movement will never be measured.” That love comes from deep down: “Debs draws love from a million hearts as a well draws from showers and springs; and like a well he gives it back to all who thirst for love as they cross the desert of life.” And love is a reason to endorse: “Our love for Eugene V. Debs, the greatest lover of us all, entered into our choice of him as the bearer of our standard, the scarlet banner of the sacred cause, the symbol of a world-brotherhood to be.” A month after Debs lost the election, Hine loved the Whitnel spinner girl, as he would love Addie Card.

Beware, though. Not all socialist love was like Debs’s. “I once knew a revolutionist who thought he loved Humanity but for whom Humanity was merely a club with which to break the shins of the people he hated,” wrote the progressive econo-
mist Walter Weyl, whose most important book, *The New Democracy*, was published in 1912. “Really he was in love with hate and not with any cause.” In 1906 H. G. Wells envisioned a time fifty years in the future, when the tenderhearted citizens of a newborn world could recall the selfishness of the early twentieth century with serene remove: “In the old days love was a cruel proprietary thing.”

Hine was not in love with hate, but what kind of love is present in his photographs? Consider one he took in Rochester, New York, in February 1910, the same year he photographed Addie Card. It shows a ten-year-old newsboy named Marshall Knox selling copies of the February 12, 1910, issue of the *Saturday Evening Post*, the one for Valentine’s Day, featuring J. C. Leyendecker’s cover illustration (fig. 10).

Leyendecker’s postman, more visible in a detail of Hine’s photograph, sets out to deliver love (fig. 11). Although no inclement weather impedes his way, he is bent down, not just by the sheer volume of Valentine’s Day cards overflowing his mailbag, but by a soused Cupid riding him like a horse, bow extended back...
as if to beat him over the head, fat feet clamped to the mailman's head, using his ears as stirrups. It is not rain or snow or dead of night that burdens the mailman but the sheer volume of insincere and obligatory protestations of love that his duty requires him to carry. And so he slogs on, downhearted, not in love with love, through the invisible atmosphere that gives so many of Leyendecker's figures their sluggish velocity: the portly men mowing their lawns, the chiseled football players struggling to cross the goal line.

But in Rochester there was another kind of love than the commercial kind. The city's most well-known pastor was Walter Rauschenbusch, who had achieved national recognition in 1907 for his widely read book *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, published that year, inspired by his previous experience as pastor of a church in Hell's Kitchen.

In *Christianity and the Social Crisis* Rauschenbusch spelled out the problem of love in commercial America. “Christianity bases all human relations on love, which is the equalizing and society-making impulse,” he wrote. “But in urging the social duty of love, Christianity encounters the natural selfishness of human nature.” More direly, it encounters modern commercial society, where the ethos is about self-preservation and vanquishing competitors. “The social value of business,” Rauschenbusch notes with scorn, “is reserved for ornamental purposes in after-dinner speeches. There all professions claim to exist for the good of society.” But in America now “the law of the cross is superseded by the law of tooth and nail.”

Rauschenbusch might have been suspicious of Hine’s photograph of Marshall Knox. It looks like just another boy trying to get ahead. Hawking copies of the Saturday Evening Post, Knox already appears on the path to being his own man. His splendid autonomy and kempt appearance (the hat with ear flaps, the neat and warm collared jacket) show that he is ready for the demands of business. Sure, it’s not easy. You’ve got to start somewhere, and if the road is not necessarily glittering with promise at least the snow has been plowed. The rest is up to you.

But Hine brought a sense of love to his work equal to that of the Rochester pastor—equal but different. Hine’s love was not Christian; it was instead a devotion to a moment without higher significance, whose beauty was its way of expading as it elapsed. Hine’s mission, unlike Rauschenbusch’s, was only to the ephemerality of the encounter. Knox is not a native awaiting conversion, struck down in his daily round, but rather Hine’s collaborator in the look of the street that day, the numbingly periodical nature of time, the fast and slick pages not only
of the Post but also of the blank-sheeted road, graded and paved, that's the big emptiness a person walks in. And in that void what connects us can only be felt in passing. An intuitive feeling for brevity makes the deepest pathos of Hine's pictures.

The power of this man with the camera must have been awesome, even terrifying. Hine's failed pictures, his duds, give a sense of how fearsome this power could be. In June 1911 he photographed two “dinner-toters” outside the Riverside Cotton Mills in Danville, Virginia (fig. 12). The girls with their baskets bring lunch to brothers or fathers in the mills—Hine considered dinner toting a form of child labor and photographed the girls accordingly. And he gets most of the picture right.

The two girls, front and center in direct relation to the photographer; the funnel of space, here on the street instead of between the sides inside a mill, but still forceful, dizzying—the iron grid of the fence closing off one side, the street flaring in a dirty blur on the other. Meanwhile, the background characters strike their

Fig. 12
A couple of dinner-toters at Riverside Cotton Mills, Danville, Va. Myriads of these little ones carry dinners to the mill workers. The Supt. of Schools and teachers in Danville said that many children toted dinners and did nothing else not even attending school. Danville, Virginia. June 1911.
notes, the woman crossing the street, the white-shirted man carrying a basket along
the sidewalk, the arm of another man carrying a basket a little closer to us. The
man whose face we can see is black, deputized like the little girls to carry lunches.

The photograph gets the jagged gleam of day. One of the dinner-toters wears a
big straw hat, the other holds that enormous umbrella, gripping it high on the fish-
hook handle because otherwise her thin arm could not support it. The telephone
pole leans one way, the umbrella the other, the two little girls tilt left and right, a
contrapuntal array held in suspension, a fragility of forces whose leitmotif is the
left foot of the barefoot girl, slightly lifted off the ground, the gap between that
foot and its shadow calibrating the picture's overall balance of weights: the laden
baskets, the little girls, the iron fence latticed into a heavy thinness, the umbrella
canopy on its stalk—the feeling of air trapped in its dome—the sky between the
umbrella and the girls' heads, the sidewalk between the girls' shins and below the
hanging baskets: levity and weight, the skewed equilibrium of a moment.

But the little girls' faces are obscure. They recede into a murk in which their
features subside, grainy, the taller girl's teeth a bright gray. The woven harlequin
pattern of the nearer lunch basket is good and clear, like the tips of the taller girl's
shoes and the fine highlights on the big toenails of her companion, but that far
basket is as smudged as their faces. Perhaps the daylight and the local shadow of
the umbrella proved too difficult for Hine to reconcile. Whatever the reason for the
picture's failure, the feeling it gives is of Hine's power—a power of holding (or not
holding) a person-in-time in his hands. Then and there in that moment it will be
decided if they exist for all time or do not.

Imagine that you are a child bringing lunch to your father on that day in
Danville, Virginia, in June 1911—that you are one of these nameless dinner-toters
on that afternoon. The chances are almost astronomically against any record being
preserved of you on that day, or on almost any day. There is only one person in
the entire United States who is going around to the mills to photograph children
such as you. He operates by no predictable system, and indeed he is obscure—you
do not know of him any more than anyone else does except for a handful of
socialist reformers.

But you are in luck. In fact, your luck is extraordinary. Because on this day
of all days, when you have been asked to take lunch to the mills—who knows but
that you do not do this all the time—the very man, the only man, who could take
your picture and make it stick for all time is in town. And not only that, but he has
stopped in front of you and your friend and asked to take your picture. The stage is set for an event that is improbable to say the least. You are about to be immortalized, not just in the simple sense in which someone, anyone, might take your picture. And not just in the more complex sense in which Hine, via his special gift, might intuit you as a fellow-being-in-time, barefoot a-skate in the gritty ambit of life's ceaselessly forgotten moments. But in the most extravagant sense—because Hine's intuition of time is one in which, all in a moment, only in a moment, he might invent a person's soul.

Not that you do not have a soul already. Or that people have not told you that you have one. Your religious life is independent of what happens before the man with the camera. If anything, this incident on the street is a carefree escape from the daily round not only of work but of piety itself. The practice of your faith and the security of your soul, who knows, might even beggar this event, making it barely register in the tolling of your days. It is you who are rich and he who is poor.

But he brings with him something that you do not have. The moment that you consent to—the image he will make—might set loose something so volatile you scarcely knew it was a part of you. Indeed, it was not, until he came along. Whatever it is, it may contradict your whole life. The rituals that you have been told daily build your soul now vanish, spread to the winds as inconsequential, replaced by a sensation like a breeze passing across your face.

For Hine, who we are is our momentariness, alight in the scatter of our circumstances. That sensation, peaceful and disturbing, is not a bourgeois mysticism. Allan Sekula was right when he said that Hine's work is different from the paens to indefinable feeling found in those years in Alfred Stieglitz's Camera Work. Something else appears in the moment. Sifted through the mesh of that scarcely recognized gradation of time is a feeling so fine that not all the deep trawling of moral explanation and pious beauty could ever lift it to the surface. The photographer throws away the hourglass and contents himself with a few grains of sand. Seeking the way life is tossed and forgotten, he looks for the precious grit of what will never be seen again. So at Danville the one little girl might have said to the other: here is this man to give each one of us, you and me, a soul. Here is the soulmaker.

But he misses the photograph. He does not get it right. He has not been making photographs for that long, after all, and in any case the two of you beneath the umbrella are a difficult technical challenge. The result is that the photograph does not immortalize you and your friend but instead gets your two faces just on
the other side of having been ensouled. From behind blurs the apparitional girls peer in as at foggy windows, always—and this is the terror of it—within an eyelash of having been created. This is no romantic struggle of nonfinito, Michelangelo's writhing slaves still in combat with the marble block, but rather the wan-ness of waifs consigned to a lasting unrealization. The barefoot girl's left foot crosses over from the lifeless zone, fully realized, a first step of creation, but her face has yet to shed the mucus of photographic process, the embryonic sac of chemicals and light that will deliver her and her friend into being. Like a botched operation—it was no one's fault—the miracle does not happen. The girls remain nearly as faceless as the black man trudging up the sidewalk behind them, asleep and not awakened.

Denied their souls, they are denied a future. The two dinner-toters pause in the long funneled space of the road and sidewalk, a vista that feels temporal as well as spatial, as if the road implies a long futurity. The future was the mystic tense of socialist thought in those years, more so than even the present, and Hine understood that futurities are a part of any moment. In The Future in America, his socialist travel book of 1906, H. G. Wells wrote of a “forecast,” a “horoscope” for the nation's 1,700,000 child workers. At Danville the little girls' faces do not completely come into view, but the abortion does not prevent us from seeing the nearly full development of their skeletal structure, the armature of bridge and hut, chimney and sky, the entablature of blood vessels and intricate muscles that was to have been the future that these girls unborn will never see.

But when the Soulmaker on his rounds did his work well, the clarity of the faces activates the vista. Soul and future then emerge eerily together. In a photograph Hine took in Kosciusko, Mississippi, in November 1913, three young mill workers stare back at the photographer (fig. 13). Stopped, arrayed before him, black stockings rooting them to the ground, they have come from down the road where the mill is. That road behind them is their past. But in a curious way the road also seems like their future. Pluming away from them, the path marks their life as it has been but also as it will be.

If that is so, the visionary futures differ for the three girls. The central girl, lifting her left hand to her face in a pose of pretty poverty like a Bouguereau peasant, is framed against the workers’ house behind her. The same is true of the girl on the left, the one in the smudged gray smock, hands behind her back, sister-like to the central girl, the two of them framed by that same house. Their future—if you like—is foretold in this domestic relation to one of the row of workers’ houses, mill
properties, that potentially mark a beleaguered and perpetually weathered stasis in this one spot. This is of course to say nothing of who these girls actually were—at this point not even Joe Manning knows the answer—but rather how the photographer, using his Wells-like horoscope, imagines them to be.

Then there is the girl on the right. Her relation to the road is different. Unframed by the near house, she appears against the more mirage-like structures in the distance. Set off from the other girls by a wider space, more relaxed than they are with her hipshot pose and slight lean to the right, she smiles charismatically at the photographer, her hair loose around her ears and forehead, her relation to the moment of being photographed less guarded and structured than that of the two other girls. Against the road, as tall as the trees blurring the sky above her, she appears as the person the photograph most “creates,” which is to say, most conjures in the moment, as if her substance were as apparitional as the nowhere she has
emerges from and that, just as surely, she will forever disappear into. The terror of the soulmaker is all here, because his gift of bestowing a life upon this girl is the same as his power to make her vanish. She is sped into oblivion at the moment she is created.

When Hine puts the children on roads and alongside railroad tracks, the futurity-effect is almost too vivid, too obvious (fig. 14). His photograph of John Roberts, taken in Dillon, South Carolina, in December 1908, places the little boy before a zooming pair of rail lines. Roberts occupies the vanishing point, as if the uncertain look on his face were a pondering of his prospects, and not just the circumstance of being photographed by this decent stranger. These are the grooves of his fated tracks, laid down, who knows, long before he was born. Hine called
it “the Road They will Travel” in one of the posters he made for the National
Child Labor Committee in 1913, a road more serpentine than Roberts’s, but no
less finite in its outcome. The ailments and other misfortunes awaiting the child
worker—accidents, illiteracy, moral dangers, premature old age, and early death,
says the poster—might as well be Roberts’s hard-scrabble environment. The rails
stretch back so far and zoom forward, too, controlling all routes. Like the folded
wings of a great industrial bird fanning its steel skeleton, resting in its power to
traverse space, the rails clutch the boy Ganymede-like in the flat omniscience that
structures all fates, laying out the quickened velocity of his whole life. Here maybe
the socialist message becomes almost too formal, too clear.

But when the background blurs more ambiguously, the effect is unknowable.
Hine’s picture of Eugene Bell, taken in Gastonia, North Carolina, in November
1908, shows the boy stiffly posing, his fingers nervously twiddling in batwing
shapes, the right hand maybe holding a cigarette (fig. 15). Back behind him the
wooden worker housing and young trees blur hauntingly. Yes, this is where he lives.
Yes, he is going to work. So much is information. But Hine’s focus on Bell makes
the background dissolve to an evocative mist he can hardly have minded as a mys-
terious effect in pictures of this kind.

It is a question of thick and thin. Bell is so vividly present that his thin waif’s
body becomes thick. His lips are thick and everything else about him is substantial,
even the most delicate detail—the buttons on his coat, the wrinkles in his pants,
the sliver of shadow beneath his collar, the dark ovals of his cuffs. Meanwhile the
background thins out, draining like smoke from a genie’s bottle. The slender leafless
tree behind him is the boy in effigy. The other trees sprout in vagueness—echoes or
premonitions of his person. The tree and shack to the left, closer to him, are some
intermediate zone of thickness—substantial like the boy but softer, the shack’s roof
lacking the depth of his chapeau.

Bell and the thin world around him are both slightly off-kilter. His face,
shoulders, and torso square up to the photographer, but his feet point to the right.
He twists slightly. His shoulders are uneven, sloping at the horizon. The world
around him seems to shift accordingly. Together, the boy and the place conspire to
shove the photograph’s symmetry around, as if the plan to center Bell—to put him
halfway between the shack and the slender tree, centered ceremonially as a typical
case of child labor—should have shifted by its own energy, becoming something
stranger and more “off” in the actual execution. The result is that his future—all
Fig. 15
Eugene Bell, House 48 Loray Mill. Said he was 12 years old.
Gastonia, North Carolina.
November 1908.
Fig. 16
Sadie Kelly, 11 years old, Picks shrimp for the Peerless Oyster Co. March 1911.
the wan world of the smoky distance—becomes a seismic intrigue spread to the
place where he stands: the chattering flutter of leaves in the foreground, the belts of
grainy flatness in the midground, seem to move around him in a kind of autumn
lava of becoming. What will become of this boy? The photograph is an unnerving
horoscope.

Hine’s temporal power is alarming. His photograph of the eleven-year-old
shrimp-picker Sadie Kelly, taken in March 1911, shows Kelly on her way to work
in Port St. Louis, Mississippi (fig. 16). Face composed, head shaved (lice, most
likely), she transits, legs bent, poised on the edge of the road, shrimp can and
basket in hand, coat folded over her right forearm, on the go. That momentariness
imparts a fleeting quality to the background, the raised shack of vertical boards
behind her, the spectral trees. The scrub grass and sticks and small plants behind
her start to blur as our eye moves up the hill. The log behind Sadie Kelly’s right
shoulder is hardly more than an amorphous shape, like it has been soaked in water
long enough to make it pulp. The horizon line and the trees, the stained wash of
the shack, make the picture look like a Photo-Secessionist masterpiece, a trium-
phant clouding of squalor into pretty effects, save for the little girl’s face, which
grounds it all as her environment.

That environment is not so much a place as a time, a voyage like her own.
Temporary structures and urgent routines combine in rhythms daily and lifelong.
Slow rot and speed seem so woven together in this photograph that it is anyone’s
guess how the one might be separated from the other. The girl has places to go,
but she moves through a world that seems to have slumbered to the state of an
almost comatose dereliction of duty. Instead of the bracing quick zip of socialist
propaganda, wherein the roads might bend or they might be straight but the end
of the line always looms, the photograph implores us with a more mysterious sense
of fate. Almost weightlessly poised on the dirt, Sadie Kelly feels part of a world
reduced to the speed of organic decay and generation, as if Hine’s task were truly
(no time-lapse photography allowed) to watch the grass grow. Like a Bruegel vil-
lager on some inscrutable allegorical round, Sadie Kelly is the mistress of a time
so warped that we do not so much see her future in that pervasive haze as behold
an existential nomadism—the end of time—in the apocalyptic bleakness through
which she walks.

In Hine’s intuitive temporal imagination, the little girl is the heroine of a
future Armageddon in which no one else has survived. In Wells’s In the Days of the
Comet (1906), a meteor approaches the earth, casting an expansive green-white pall that makes night into eerie day. Destruction seems imminent. But the Change turns out to be utopian—the blast releases chemicals that spread an opiate kindness and generous love among the populace, creating some incalculable effect of endless tolerance and benignity upon their reborn minds, so that all over the world the lion lays down with the lamb. But Hine’s apocalyptic scene is no utopia. Scrounging amid the pots and baskets, feral in her hairless way, Sadie Kelly gives the effect of a marooned survivor surprised, like some exotic derelict, as she sets forth from her cave on a daily round of scavenging.

That apocalyptic future is however not any real future, sociologically imagined, but the moment of the photograph as Hine imagines it. The future in this picture is the moment it is made. Sadie Kelly walks through the landscape of her own death. The funereal orchestration beggars the sense in which any photograph, in its generic congress with mortality, might do the same thing. The elaborate drumbeat of decay is the hollow tapping of this photograph’s heart. What makes this a killer picture is that it is, in Diane Arbus’s phrase, “a disaster in slow motion.”

Wells, in keeping with socialist faith, calls the hours after the comet has struck “The Awakening.” But Hine’s awakening is of another kind.