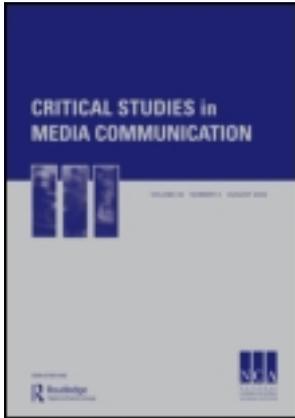


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Metaphorical Invention in Early Photojournalism: *New York Times* Coverage of the 1876 Brooklyn Theater Fire and the 1911 Shirtwaist Factory Fire

Robin E. Jensen, Erin F. Doss & Rebecca Ivic

Rorty (1989) argued that integrating unique metaphors into public discourse during moments of social instability functions to catalyze new moral norms and community identities. By analyzing New York Times coverage of two historical incidents of tragedy (i.e., the 1876 Brooklyn Theater fire and the 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire), we assess Rorty's position in light of this coverage and the legal aftermath of each tragedy (e.g., the Brooklyn fire was associated with few changes in policy while the Shirtwaist Factory fire has been celebrated for catalyzing important changes in fire safety code and state labor laws). That these two events transpired before and after the emergence of photojournalism in daily newspapers also allows us to consider the role that "phototexts" may play in creating opportunities for metaphorical invention. Overall, we argue that two phototext-driven metaphors—equating factory workers with products and industry with a deathtrap—illuminated a powerful vocabulary of justice in the coverage of the Shirtwaist Factory fire that was not evident in the Brooklyn fire. We conclude the essay by laying out broader methodological implications for scholars of rhetorical and metaphorical criticism and considering the power of the phototext to further reform discourse.

Keywords: Phototext; Imagetext; Metaphor; New York Times; Photojournalism

Robin E. Jensen (PhD, University of Illinois) is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Communication at Purdue University. Erin F. Doss (MA, Purdue University) and Rebecca Ivic (MA, Purdue University) are doctoral students in the Department of Communication at Purdue University. An earlier version of this essay was presented at the 2010 Rhetoric Society of America conference in Minneapolis. Email: rejensen@purdue.edu

The role that news coverage plays in catalyzing social change has long been of interest to scholars of communication (Bennett & Lawrence, 2006; McLead, Scheufele, & Moy, 1998; McLuhan, 1964). Rorty (1989) offered potential insight into this conversation by arguing that social change occurs in conjunction with the use of innovative metaphors to describe experiences and relationships. According to Rorty, these metaphors are most likely to take root and “change what we want to do and what we think we are” when they are used in the midst of societal instability and turmoil (p. 20; see also Jasinski, 2001, p. xvi). Rorty’s claim presents a helpful lens for assessing how language choices in news coverage may play a role in altering expectations about social responsibility and governmental policy.

In this essay, we build on Rorty’s theory of metaphor and social change to analyze U.S. newspaper coverage of two fatal tragedies during the rise of photojournalism. More specifically, we analyze the *New York Times* coverage in the year following the 1876 Brooklyn Theater fire—which killed 297 people and was associated with few changes in policy—and the 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire—which killed 146 people and has been celebrated for catalyzing the “Golden Era of Remedial Factory Legislation” (Behrens, 1983, p. 361; McEvoy, 1995; Pence et al., 2003; Stein, 2001). The emergence of photojournalism in U.S. daily newspapers between these two widely publicized events allows us to consider if and how the “phototext” (i.e., a composite photographic image working with text to communicate a message) contributes to metaphorical invention and helps to foster social change. In this case, coverage of the Brooklyn fire included one basic illustration (and no photographs) and thus contrasted dramatically with coverage of the Shirtwaist Factory fire, which featured 17 photographs of victims’ bodies and the fire-ravaged factory rooms.

Overall, we demonstrate that phototexts cultivate productive metaphorical (and thus rhetorical) invention; and we argue that metaphorical invention helped to illuminate a powerful vocabulary of justice in the *Times* coverage of the factory fire that was not evident in coverage of the theater fire. We lay out our argument by first building on Rorty’s (1989) theory of metaphor and social change to account for visual communication and the emergence of photojournalism during the Progressive Era. Next we provide an overview of the methodological choices guiding our analysis before then assessing the literal and metaphorical coverage of each tragedy. We conclude the essay by extending our findings to speak to issues of methodology and rhetorical criticism, as well as to the study of metaphor and social change.

The Rise of Photojournalism: An Opportunity for Metaphorical Invention

Rorty’s (1989) theory of social change revolves around the introduction of new metaphors during points of societal instability. More than simple embellishments or stylistic appeals, metaphors take shape when multiple thoughts (i.e., tenor and vehicle) are referenced with one word or phrase “whose meaning is a resultant of their interaction” (Richards, 1936, p. 95; see also Osborn & Ehninger, 1962). Rorty agreed with Lakoff and Johnson (1980) who argued that metaphors mirror human thought processes and thus shape perception of reality. Rorty, however, took this idea

further and framed human history as a succession of metaphors functioning as tools for solving emerging societal problems. According to Rorty, existing metaphors are constantly dying off into the realm of the literal as they are no longer able to provide historically situated subjects with a vocabulary that addresses their current situation. As literal language, “dead” metaphors serve only as the “platform and foil for new metaphors” (p. 16). In this light, Rorty maintained that societal progress occurs when instability inspires the circulation of new metaphors that then function as as-yet-untranslatable tools for alleviating that instability. These new metaphors emerge and are circulated throughout public discourse in response to “the contingencies of some historical situation, some particular need which a given community happens to have at a given time” (p. 37). And because metaphors are “the base of rhetorical invention in general,” the generation of metaphors is, in turn, the generation of a new rhetoric (Ivie, 1987, p. 166). Therefore, when new metaphors emerge from literal language and are featured in media such as daily newspapers, readers garner innovative rhetorical lenses for assessing their surroundings and their relationships with self and others.

Although Rorty (1989) did not theorize about the role that images play in metaphorical invention, other scholars have written about the relationship between metaphors and images. Hulme (1924) incorporated a visual element into his description of metaphor as interpretive lens, arguing that metaphor forces one to see an idea rather than to consider it only in abstract form. Ivie (1987) offered a corresponding read of metaphor by describing metaphors as “generating images” that repeatedly make appearances in public discourse (p. 167). These perspectives differ from that of scholars such as Kaplan (1990) who separated the analysis of visual metaphors from that of textual metaphors. Kaplan, building from the work of Morgan and Welton (1986), Fiske (1982), and Dyer (1982), argued that visual metaphors differ enough from “language-based metaphors” that they require unique theory (p. 41). However, if “language-based” metaphors involve the visualization of ideas, as scholars such as Hulme (1924) and Ivie (1987) suggested, then visual and textual metaphors are inherently intertwined and impossible to disentangle, theoretically or otherwise. And if all metaphors have a visual element, those metaphors that are communicated via “imagetext”—“composite, synthetic works (or concepts) that combine image and text” (Mitchell, 1994, p. 89)—may be especially likely to help audiences visualize comparisons between ideas and accept alternative metaphorical relationships. Mitchell argued that the idea of “*purely* visual and verbal media, pictures without words and words without pictures” is a myth (p. 95), but he also differentiated between “composite imagetexts,” which explicitly couple text and images that communicate messages synthetically, and “unmixed forms,” which do not explicitly couple text and images (p. 95). Particularly in the case of the former, an analysis of text or image alone would not capture the synthetic meaning of the two as a whole.

In this study, we focus on a specific type of composite imagetext, what we call the “phototext” (i.e., a specific subset of the imagetext in which a photographic image works with text to communicate an amalgamated message), as well as the

phototext-driven metaphor (i.e., a composite work of photographic image and text that communicates multiple thoughts via tenor and vehicle). During the Progressive Era, the phototext not only became increasingly common in the U.S. media due to changes in technology and the corresponding emergence of photojournalism, it was part of a cultural shift powered by documentary photography (Szto, 2008). Throughout the nineteenth century, wood-engraved graphics and illustrations were rarely featured in newspapers, heavily narrated by accompanying articles, and largely focused on artistry rather than realism. By 1900, however, advances such as half-tone reproduction helped to make photographs a dominant vehicle for reporting in a number of media, including daily newspapers (Barnhurst & Nerone, 2001; Keller, 2002). Twentieth-century journalists featured photographs in their articles to help readers feel as if they had witnessed the events discussed therein. Unlike the artistic illustrations featured in earlier news publications, readers were likely to imbue photographs with “special credibility” because of their supposedly analogical relationship with empirical reality (Barthes, 1977, p. 21). The resulting phototexts functioned to illuminate individual hardships and social tensions that may have otherwise been overlooked (Lucaites & Hariman, 2001).

Journalists’ emergent ability to reproduce phototexts efficiently in the early 1900s facilitated progressive activism and reform. So-called muckraking journalists such as Jacob Riis peppered their writings with photographic portrayals of urban poverty and inhumane working conditions. And documentary photographers such as Lewis Hine produced materials favoring immigration reform and child labor laws. The phototexts in these works often communicated metaphorically. For instance, in *How the other half lives* (1890) (an exposé on New York City tenements), Riis included a now renowned half-tone image entitled “Upstairs in Blindman’s Alley” featuring a group of three blind adults huddled around a fireplace in a dark attic. Even if the individuals in the photograph had not been blind, the room appeared dark enough that they would have had trouble seeing each other or their cramped, dilapidated living space. In this respect, it may have seemed poignant to readers that they themselves had a clear look into this private moment. Riis paired this photograph with text that emphasized a metaphor in which darkness (the vehicle) stood in for poverty and disability (the tenor). He described the scene as “sunless and joyless” until “pay-day” when “once a year sunlight shines into the lives of its forlorn crew” (p. 7). That the metaphor of darkness was communicated via a composite of photography (which depended on the contrast between light and dark) and text added a layer of symbolism to the message that would not have been evident in text alone. In addition, the half-tone reproduction in the phototext resulted from new technology, a fact that customized the metaphor to the technological and industrialized exigencies of the moment.

As we demonstrate in the following analysis, some phototexts featured in early twentieth-century daily newspapers functioned as sources for and transmitters of alternative metaphors. When these metaphors emerged during moments of societal instability, they contributed rhetorical force to what Rorty (1989) would call an

emerging “vocabulary of justice” that helped reshape ideas about social responsibility and inspire political change (p. xiv).

Method

Data collection for this study occurred in two phases. In the first phase, we gathered all *New York Times* articles discussing two tragedies, the 1876 Brooklyn Theater fire and the 1911 Shirtwaist Factory fire, from the two days after each tragedy transpired. This initial stage of data collection resulted in 43 total articles. For the theater fire, the *Times* published 26 articles in the two days following the fire (December 6 and 7). These articles included no photographs and one basic illustration. For the factory fire, the *Times* published 17 articles on the two days following the fire (March 26 and 27). These articles featured 17 photographs and no illustrations.

We focused on *New York Times* coverage because, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the *Times* catered to social and political decision makers and played a central role in elite and mainstream framing of local and national controversies (Soderlund, 2002). We limited our initial phase of sampling to the two days following each tragedy because we reasoned that the closer the coverage was to the tragedies themselves, the more that coverage would have emerged from an environment of instability. In this respect, metaphors evident in this coverage would likely have played a role in setting the agenda for articles that were published later. We selected coverage surrounding these specific fires for several reasons. First, both fires transpired in urban, New York communities, and both fires might have been prevented if owners and managers had taken fairly simple preventative measures (Gerhard, 1896; Stein, 2001). Thus, the fires had points of comparison that allowed us to build our findings in light of their commonalities. Second, the fires transpired before and after the introduction of photographs into daily newspapers, which allowed us to explicate how phototexts may have altered the coverage. Third, while the theater fire was associated with minimal policy change, the factory fire has been framed as a catalyst for important changes in state fire codes and labor laws (Behrens, 1983; McEvoy, 1995; Pence et al., 2003; Stein, 2001). Although a number of variables contributed to these differing outcomes, we analyze the *Times* coverage following these fires to discuss the potential influence that photojournalism may have played in instantiating alternative metaphorical lenses following the 1911 fire.

We analyzed each article from this phase of data collection first for literal versus metaphorical coverage. Although a number of scholars have argued that language in general has a fundamentally metaphorical structure (Lakoff, 1993; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Richards, 1936), Rorty (1989) argued that language becomes increasingly literal when it involves symbols that society “can handle by [its] old theories about what people will say under various conditions” (p. 17). According to Booth (1978), classical rhetoricians tended to argue that metaphors which have developed a literal association with their referents over time are no longer metaphors at all. Similarly, Osborn and Ehninger (1962) claimed that with continued use metaphors begin to stand for “the subjects to which they are applied” (p. 230). Thus, we began our

analysis by first becoming familiar with the historical moments in which the coverage initially appeared, as well as with beliefs at the time about journalism, photography, and reform. Then, we drew from that contextual knowledge to identify coverage as literal. More specifically, we coded coverage as literal when we could not differentiate a tenor from a vehicle, and when the coverage seemed to provide information or describe a situation in a straightforward manner (e.g., coverage stating that the fire went on for 20 minutes).

We identified coverage as metaphorical when we could differentiate a tenor from a vehicle, and the coverage depended on figurative language (e.g., coverage stating that the fire's flames danced to the music of bodies dropping to the pavement). Then, we differentiated text-driven metaphors (i.e., communicated via text alone) from phototext-driven metaphors (i.e., communicated via a composite of photographic image and text in which image and text referred to, related to, and/or depended upon one another to create meaning). One example of a phototext-driven metaphor in coverage of the factory fire featured a photograph of a woman's body being carried in an unsentimental, pragmatic way from the scene and described in an adjacent column as "freight" ("Quick Grand Jury fire investigation," 1911, p. 5). The synthesis of photograph and text communicated the message that the body (tenor) was freight (vehicle) and that it was handled as such directly after the fire (a message imbued with far more meaning and emotional weight than a simple text-based statement about bodies as freight).

The specific metaphorical themes that are highlighted in our analysis of the articles were derived via constant-comparison techniques (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). We combed each article for specific metaphors using open and then axial coding procedures, noting whether metaphors were text- or phototext-driven, and then we reported on the themes that emerged as the most frequent and vivid in the coverage of each fire. Once we identified the central metaphorical themes, we engaged in the second phase of data collection to discover whether those metaphors were also evident in coverage about the fires that came later. More specifically, we identified all *Times* articles related to each fire for the year following the initial tragedies to discover if the early metaphors had influenced (and thus were evident in) articles that came later (as Rorty's (1989) theory of metaphor and social change would suggest). This phase of data collection resulted in 86 total articles. Thirty articles discussed the theater fire, none of which featured illustrations or photographs. Fifty-six articles discussed the factory fire, none of which featured illustrations or photographs.

Coverage of the Brooklyn Theater Fire

On the evening of December 5, 1876, the 1,000 seats of New York's Brooklyn Theater were filled with individuals waiting to see the popular play *The Two Orphans*. Before the night was through, 297 audience members, actors, and theater employees had perished in a fire that could have been easily prevented or controlled (Gerhard, 1896). The fire started when a kerosene lamp ignited scenery positioned backstage. Soon, flames were visible to players and the audience alike, and there was no water bucket

or working hose to keep them from spreading. Individuals in the “family circle” level of the balcony had only one staircase from which to exit the building, leaving them trapped in the midst of deadly smoke and panicked companions. The theater as a whole had no fire escapes and only five exits. In the end, at least a third of the victims were burned beyond recognition before the fire department could arrive, while others were crushed under the collapsed building, killed from smoke inhalation, or trampled to death. In the fire’s aftermath, officials deemed the theater’s structure safer than most public buildings and not in violation of existing codes. Albany’s legislature subsequently initiated minimal changes to the building code for theaters but failed to instigate laws requiring fire escapes, sprinkler systems, or alarms. To date, the Brooklyn Theater fire and its media coverage has received little scholarly attention although it led to the third highest number of fatalities by fire in a public assembly building in U.S. history (Henderson, 2004).

Literal Coverage

Much of the *Times* coverage immediately following the theater fire involved literal language devoted to describing the scene before, during, and after the fire occurred. A number of articles emphasized the history of the building itself, providing an overview of its ownership, the plays that had been featured there, and the players illuminated on its stage. An article entitled “A history of the theater” (1876) described the building’s architecture, noting that “the theatre was a handsome structure, and the interior was supplied with all the modern requirements of a first-class play-house. The stage was ample, and the auditorium, which was tastefully decorated, had a seating capacity of about one thousand eight hundred” (p. 5). This account and others like it featured descriptive statements about the building and the items lost in the fire (e.g., cash, clothing, jewelry, property; “Miss Ida Vernon’s Loss,” 1876, p. 5). For example, one article focused on the stage manager, who lived at the theater, and quoted him saying that he lost, “all my furniture, and nearly all my clothing were consumed, with all my personal effects” (“Stage manager Thorpe’s story,” 1876, p. 2). In this respect, articles seemed to focus more on *what* had been lost than on *who* had been lost or *why* the fire had happened at all. Such appeals would have been familiar to audiences who had become used to the consumer-oriented framing of daily news articles (Barnhurst & Nerone, 2001). In these cases, existing theoretical tools would have functioned adequately to help readers “handle” articles’ content (Rorty, 1989, p. 17), encouraging them to concentrate on replacing material goods rather than on changing harmful policies and practices.

Although the articles covering the theater fire preceded the rise of the photograph in daily journalism, one article did include a simple drawing of the theater’s floor plan. Entitled “Ground Plan of the Theatre,” the illustration identified each of the theatre’s rooms and sections, as well as the streets surrounding the building and an adjacent vacant lot and hotel building (“The story of the fire,” 1876, p. 1). The capitalized letters displayed on each section of the floor plan corresponded with letters on a bordering key located underneath the illustration. The letters facilitated

readers' literal understanding of where the fire burned (rather than who or why it burned). Readers could analyze the scene of the reported event in its most basic form, one that focused on the physical (yet abstract) elements of the fire's location without embellishment or discursive liberty.

Fire is Entertainment: A Dead Metaphor

While much *Times* coverage of the theater fire featured literal, unembellished language, one metaphor was evident in a number of articles. A text-driven entertainment metaphor framed the fire and its aftermath (tenor) as amusement (vehicle), something that individuals could gain entrance to at a price and that would divert them from their day-to-day concerns. Much coverage revolved around the juxtaposition between the night's featured play and the recreation of witnessing the fire. Journalists threaded an ongoing comparison by highlighting how the fire's action and the play's scenery coexisted during and after the fire. For instance, much was made of the fact that "the actors and actresses escaped in their stage costumes" ("Loss of Life—five persons missing," 1876, p. 5). One actress "wore the ragged raiment of the poor blind girl in the play" ("Miss Kate Claxton's account of the fire," 1876, p. 5). Correspondingly, articles emphasized how "exciting" the fire was, explaining how at different points in the fire's aftermath "the excitement grew more intense" ("The Brooklyn calamity," 1876, p. 1), thus creating a narrative arch likely to keep readers engrossed in the unfolding drama. Even a trip to the morgue took on the air of a leisure activity as journalists noted that one needed to wait in line and obtain a valid pass to gain entrance ("A crowd about the ruins," 1876, p. 2).

As in most literally-oriented discussions of the fire, discussions that furthered the entertainment metaphor also emphasized scene. But the scene in these cases was framed as a "spectacle," something to watch as outside of the ordinary but not necessarily something to consider seriously ("Exhuming the bodies," 1876, p. 1). When the theater's roof fell in, one article noted that "bright sparks" much like fireworks lit up the sky ("A theater burned," 1876, p. 5). Another article transitioned from the scene of the fire to the scene of a lost actor's home—"a delightful summer residence at Larchmont, on the New Haven Road, where he was wont [sic] to entertain his numerous friends" ("How Murdoch and Burroughs burned," 1876, p. 2). Descriptions of lavish, startling, or otherwise out-of-the-ordinary scenes aimed to tantalize readers rather than to shed new light on their sense of community or justice.

Therefore, regardless of the entertainment metaphor's prevalence in this coverage, such references did not function in traditionally metaphorical ways. With continued use, the tenor and the vehicle become indistinguishable and no longer offer a fresh perspective (Osborn & Ehninger, 1962). In this case, given the theater's long-standing association with entertainment, as well as newspapers' traditional role as entertaining media, references to the excitement of the evening's deadly entertainment functioned as "dying" metaphors making their way toward "literalness" (Rorty, 1989, p. 16). They neither forced readers to think about the situation in atypical ways nor encouraged them to fight for social change. Given this reading of the coverage

concerning the theater fire, one could almost have anticipated that the fire would be followed by little reform.

Later Coverage

The 30 *Times* articles about the fire in the year following the tragedy (appearing after the initial 26 articles) consisted almost exclusively of literal descriptions of funeral arrangements, the funeral procession, and testimony from the coroner's inquest. A representative fragment of later *Times* coverage explained, "In addition to the public funeral a considerable number of dead were buried privately yesterday by their friends and relatives, while those of the identified whose relatives were absent or too poor to bury them were allotted separate graves, and interred at the city's expense" ("The Brooklyn disaster," 1876, p. 1). Financing (related to the funerals, fire clean up, a relief fund for victims' families) was the theme framing the majority of articles. Few interpretive flourishes found their way into this coverage, and few articles mentioned efforts to change policy. In fact, repeated emphasis was placed on the argument that reform efforts to prevent fires in the future would be futile. For example, Reverend Henry Ward Beecher was quoted at a memorial service for the victims saying "that while reform in building laws was undoubtedly necessary, they might as well expect to stop a herd of wild buffaloes by reading the ten commandments to them as to obviate all panics by simply requiring broader halls and passage-ways" ("The Brooklyn calamity impressive memorial services," 1876, p. 1). Similarly, the President of Brooklyn's Fire Commission claimed that he "did not think the whole audience would have got out of the gallery if there had been fifty exits in it" ("The Brooklyn disaster: The coroner's inquest," 1876, p. 2). He and many other witnesses and architectural experts argued that the theater itself was built reasonably well and thus had been safe. The articles implied that loss of life was due primarily to inevitable mass panic and thus could not be remedied in the future via legislative reform. In this respect, Rorty's (1989) theory seemed to find support in this coverage, specifically his argument that literal language, applied during moments of social instability, does not facilitate social change.

And although the initial coverage's penchant for literal language survived in later coverage, the entertainment metaphor largely did not, mostly because the immediate spectacle of the fire did not last beyond the victims' funerals and the metaphor itself functioned primarily in the realm of the literal. Earlier coverage continued to use phrases such as "wildcat excitement" to describe public sentiment about the fire ("The Brooklyn calamity: The extent of the disaster underestimated," 1876, p. 1), and to note that "the populace gave every evidence of the most absorbing interest in what was taking place" ("The Brooklyn disaster: One hundred victims buried," 1876, p. 1). But just days later, journalists noted that the excitement (and thus, it can be assumed, the relevancy of the entertainment metaphor) no longer applied because "the excited crowds which hovered around the scene of the ruins from Wednesday up to Saturday last, have, however, disappeared, and the streets in the vicinity are now open to the general public" ("The Brooklyn calamity: The measures of relief," 1876, p. 8).

The show, at this point, was over, and the “dead” entertainment metaphor had neither survived in the coverage nor provided readers with an alternative vocabulary to support reform in the future (Rorty, 1989, p. 16).

Coverage of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire

On March 25, 1911, 35 years after the Brooklyn Theater fire took the lives of almost 300 people, 146 workers died in the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire. Just as factory employees were collecting their pay and preparing to go home, an oil-soaked rag caught fire and flames spread rapidly through the eighth, ninth, and tenth floors of the Asch building where employees toiled. The majority of the workers were immigrant women who soon discovered that doors they might have used for escape were locked (a measure the owners took to control stealing), the single fire escape was impassable, the elevators were filled to capacity, and the flames were upon them.¹ Workers on the tenth floor fled to the roof and were transported via ladder to a neighboring building, but many workers on the other floors were not so lucky. Some jumped to their deaths, while others burned or died from smoke inhalation (Enstad, 1999; Stein, 2001).

Factory Workers are Products

Times coverage of the factory fire featured a number of phototexts that invoked metaphors positioning workers and their bodies (tenor) as consumer goods (vehicle). Rather than describing the situation using literal, unembellished language, journalists paired photographic images of the fire with text to highlight a metaphor that progressive-era reformers were beginning to use in other media such as books and magazines (see Hine, 1915). The specific metaphor equating workers with products, may, in a logical sense, seem to encourage readers to objectify workers. However, phototext-driven metaphors repeatedly functioned to provide a perspective by incongruity inviting readers to consider the inhumanity of positioning humans as products (Burke, 1969). Photographs and text worked together to highlight this juxtaposition and inspire discussion about the need for reform. For example, articles demonstrated that the production of shirtwaists depended upon the production of what Foucault (1977) famously described as organized, disciplined, working bodies. Textual descriptions about how workers entered the Asch building in the morning, signed in, and began to work, were coupled with photographs featuring the burned workrooms littered with enough rubble to fill a much larger space. These phototexts emphasized employees’ cramped, inhumane working conditions and highlighted the fact that the fire did not discriminate between workers and shirtwaists. Day after day, the articles explained, employees sat elbow to elbow over sewing machines as cloth—some of it drenched with oil—piled up at their feet. The owners often kept doors locked to prevent tardiness, stealing, and “the tired girl operators” from slipping “into the halls in working hours and there snatch[ing] a moment’s respite from the drudgery of running a sewing machine” (“Locked in factory,” 1911, p. 1). Workers

were managed like products, facing “constant supervision, the pressure of supervisors, the elimination of anything that might disturb or distract” (Foucault, 1977, p. 150).

In this framing where employees were disciplined into productive bodies, coverage implied that workers’ bodies would inevitably be used up, just as any consumer product is eventually consumed. This transition from bodies as productive humans to consumed products was communicated, in one instance, in a phototext captioned, “Hole in side walk made by a falling body” (“Fire traps there are here,” 1911, p. 1). The photograph featured policemen, rescue workers, and officials staring down—as if in prayer—toward the sidewalk at a deep coffin-like hole, which probably still contained the body of the worker who fell there. Terrified workers like this one had realized “it was jump or be burned,” but that either way they were facing what Cox (1982) would call an irreparable choice. Not long after the fire began, bodies (i.e., products or, at this point, waste) started coming down “end over end” and breaking “into a thousand pieces” (“One-hundred forty-one men and girls die,” 1911, p. 1). In these cases, journalists were already describing factory employees as objects before they hit the ground. Photographs of bodies sprawled on the sidewalk accompanied explanations about how “life was extinct in the bodies on the pavement” (“One-hundred forty-one men and girls die,” 1911, p. 1). One image featured two firemen carrying a limp, lifeless body away from the street while a stoic policeman looked on. The caption read, “Fireman carrying the body of a woman who jumped from the ninth floor” (“Death list shows few identified,” 1911, p. 4). The woman’s hand was dragging on the ground, and the firemen look as if they might be hauling a sack of potatoes.

The process of organizing the bodies for identification was featured in a phototext entitled, “Police numbering the bodies in the street” (“Quick Grand Jury fire investigation,” 1911, p. 5; see Figure 1). Therein, bodies were shown being processed by policemen either for the morgue or for the hospital. One policeman leaned over a body while scribbling notes as another looked to a senior policeman, perhaps for



Figure 1. Policemen systematically identify, organize, and ultimately process dead bodies for their removal from the sidewalk adjacent to the Asch Building.

instructions about what to do with the bodies piled beneath him. At the bottom of the photograph, a handwritten label in a white box explained, "Police trying to identify victims" ("Death list shows few identified," 1911, p. 5). However, the accompanying article likened workers' bodies to "freight" and described how each one was tagged and boxed for removal from the busy sidewalks (p. 5). The sheer quantity of bodies demanded that the policemen form an assembly line to remove them from life on the bustling street.

Industry is a Deathtrap

Beyond portraying workers as products, the *Times* also featured phototext-driven metaphors equating industry (tenor) with a deathtrap (vehicle). Coverage implied that workers were destined to die in the Asch building because the promise of factory work as economically viable was deceptive and the experience of such work was one of a slow death with no hope for survival. Considering this metaphor in a rational sense may lead one to the conclusion that the tragedy was inevitable. However, because the metaphor was communicated via phototext, readers were encouraged to equate the factory with a deathtrap while also reading/seeing that this trap was the result of capitalist greed and could have been otherwise if supported by the proper legislation. The composite of photographs and text both highlighted the deathtrap metaphor and critiqued the factors that helped it to emerge.

For example, the *Times* repeatedly covered the fire in ways that equated the factory itself with a trick or ruse. Photographs of the building juxtaposed its seemingly impenetrable exterior and the weakness of its interior. One article featured a series of photographs labeled "Scenes during and after the Washington Place fire" ("Fire traps there are here," 1911, p. 1). The central, and largest, photograph was of one corner of the Asch building. The camera had been positioned below the building and angled upward to display the impressive height of the structure. The photograph displayed fire marshals blasting the building with water. Very little damage was observable from the outside of the building. In fact, if it was not for the surrounding chaos, an observer might not know that a fire had occurred there. One could reasonably enter the building, even after the fire had transpired, without a sense of the potential dangers lurking within. Surrounding this central photograph were shots of the post-fire interior. The strength and organization of the building's exterior contrasted drastically with the disarray evident inside. In a photograph featuring the "9th floor freight elevator doors where many lost their lives when [the] elevator stopped," firemen were shown attempting to clear the room of debris ("Fire traps there are here," 1911, p. 1). Everything inside the room had been burned and the walls and ceiling were bare and blackened. It was clear from this image that no one who was in this room during the fire survived. No matter how strong or safe the building might have seemed to employees when they entered, the structure offered them no protection when a fire inevitably broke loose. The "flimsy material used in the factory," "pitiably inadequate" fire escape, and "crowded workrooms in such a condition that a slight outbreak of fire can convert them into furnaces"

(“One-hundred forty-one men and girls die,” 1911, p. 1; “The Washington Place fire,” 1911, p. 10), put workers in a consistently dangerous position.

According to the *Times*, however, endangering workers was not necessarily an inevitable element of production, a point they communicated by placing blame on factory bosses for setting the stage for the fire. Many articles argued that bosses were aware of the dangerous conditions, but they perpetuated them to secure a profit. In this framing, the bosses were engaged in luring workers into the factory in order to capitalize on their drudgery. At times, coverage portrayed this trapping as quite literal. Bosses locked the doors of the factory during the day, and many felt that their doing so “had an economic basis and it was to the advantage of the employer in more ways than one” (“Doors were locked,” 1911, p. 3). A photograph of one of these locked (and apparently gated) doors was labeled, “The gate that was locked to prevent theft of merchandise and which caused many deaths” (“Fire traps there are here,” 1911, p. 1; see Figure 2).

Articles noted that piles of bodies were found just inside this door after the fire, and survivors remembered that employees had flocked to the door to escape via the stairs and then, finding the door locked, were trapped by the flames. In this way, *Times* coverage implied that these victims of the industrial deathtrap never had a chance at survival given the circumstances in which they found themselves. But, although the workers’ actions once they found themselves in the building did not really matter as they had already been ensnared, the factory bosses and policy makers’ actions did matter because they might have taken steps (and may take steps in the future) to secure a safe working environment.

Later Coverage

One of the most noticeable aspects of the later coverage concerning the fire was that it contained no photographs or illustrations. Thus, any metaphors it included were text-driven and therefore inherently different from the phototext-driven metaphors

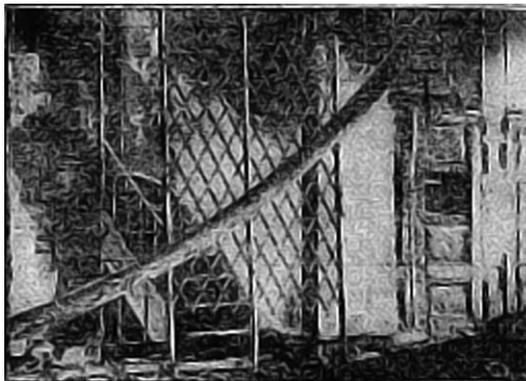


Figure 2. A photograph of the Asch Buildings’ ninth-floor stairway after the fire, blocked off by a locked gate to keep workers from leaving the factory without having their bags searched for stolen goods.

in earlier coverage. Nevertheless, later coverage did include frequent nods to the earlier metaphorical themes and explicitly positioned them as exigencies for reform. The metaphor equating workers with products was evident in descriptions of workers as “cheap,” juxtaposed with the ironic statement that “property is so sacred” and the observation that one of the factory owners wore a large diamond to hearings about the fire (“Supt. Miller home,” 1911, p. 3; “Mass meeting calls for new fire laws,” 1911, p. 3; “Triangle waist men put on trial,” 1911, p. 16). An article on how Germans responded to news of the fire explained that “life in the United States is held far more cheaply than in Europe with its older civilization” (“German view harsh on New York fire,” 1911, p. C4). Later articles used the workers/products metaphor to continue highlighting the inhumanity of work in the factory and create an opportunity for journalists to make calls for “the administration of justice and the attainment of equity” through reform (“Topics of the times,” 1911, p. 12).

Even more than the workers/products metaphor, later coverage relied on text-driven appeals to the industry-is-a-deathtrap metaphor and linked those appeals to the need for reform. Toward the end of the year, most articles about the fire referred to the Asch building as a “trap” (e.g., “Factory firetraps found by hundreds,” 1911, p. 22; “Fatal lock let in Triangle fire case,” 1911, p. 8). In one article, a representative of an on-going committee on fire protection equated the modern factory with a torture chamber that one might enter with hope and then never leave, explaining, “The old inquisition had its rack and its thumbscrews and its instruments of torture with iron teeth,’ and, in the present day, “the thumbscrews [are] the high-powered and swift machinery close to which we must work, and the rack is here in the firetrap structures that will destroy us the minute they catch on fire” (“Mass meeting calls for new fire laws,” 1911, p. 3). The remainder of the article was devoted to planning for legislative change. In other articles, frequent mention was made of the so-called life nets used by rescue workers that did not successfully absorb the impact of those jumping from the Asch building. When asked about them, one witness was said to have scoffed, “Life nets? What good were life nets—the little ones went through life nets, pavement, and all” (“Forgot fire hose in factory panic,” 1911, p. 3). From this perspective, even the name of tools designed to protect workers were discursive traps, ultimately concealing the reality that jumping from the top floors of a burning factory would end in cement (rather than in life or a net). All such metaphorical appeals were followed by what Rorty (1989) would deem a vocabulary of justice including recommendations for reform, requests for new fire codes, proclamations about workers’ right “to health and sunshine,” and vows “to make sure such terrors never occur again” (“Mass meeting calls for new fire laws,” 1911, p. 3; “Plans to relieve congestion menace,” 1911, p. XX16).

Although there were no phototexts in the 56 articles on the fire in the year after the tragedy, there were several discussions in this later coverage that shed light on the phototext’s persuasive and metaphorical power. In the most extended of these discussions, the *Times* covered a charge by the Fire Marshal that a photograph featured in an earlier article may have been staged. The earlier article captioned a photograph of a closed gate in front of a staircase with the phrase, “The gate that was

locked to prevent theft of merchandise, and which caused many deaths,” thereby implying that this specific stairway had been gated off at the time of the fire (“Fire traps there are here,” 1911, p. 1; see Figure 2). However, in the later article, the Fire Marshal argued, “That picture is a plain fraud, and under the circumstances of the state of public feeling, a cruel fraud.” He continued: “What was done was that a door used for the freight elevators on the tenth floor was carted to the ninth floor, stood up against a doorway, and then photographed.” Like the Fire Marshal, the Battalion Chief agreed that “the photograph you hand me is a fake. It couldn’t have been taken on the ninth floor. No such doorway was there” (“Forgot fire hose in factory panic,” 1911, p. 3). Both men argued that the composite of photograph and text was harmful because it led readers to believe (and see) that the factory bosses had used gates to trap employees on the ninth floor, the floor with the fewest survivors. The combination of photograph and text offered readers a metaphorical statement equating the factory with a deathtrap, a statement so powerful that individuals felt compelled to reject the phototext (and the exigency of reform) by reminding readers that, as Finnegan (2008) put it, “liars may photograph” (p. 94). Ultimately, however, the charge against this particular phototext did not seem to slow down appeals for reform, and it reiterated the metaphorical power of the phototext in coverage of the factory fire in particular and in coverage of change and instability in general.

Discussion

By exploring *Times* coverage following the 1897 Brooklyn Theater fire and the 1911 Shirtwaist Factory fire, we aimed to analyze the role that metaphor plays in social change and the role that phototexts play in metaphorical invention. We focused on coverage of these specific events because they encompassed and catalyzed times of instability when Rorty (1989) argued that metaphors are most likely to take root and inspire social change; and because they transpired before and after the rise of photojournalism and therefore functioned to help us expand Rorty’s theory of metaphor and social change to encompass visual communication. If history is shaped and created by a series of metaphors, as Rorty maintained, and metaphorical communication depends upon the visualization of tenor as vehicle (Hulme, 1924), reform always revolves around visual communication. Therefore, composite phototexts, by pairing photographic realism and text and communicating via their interaction, are especially fruitful sources for conveying reform-oriented metaphors. In the case of the factory fire coverage, the phototext-driven metaphors at work—workers are products and industry is a deathtrap—did not obviously speak to societal change (and it could be argued that they actually featured the logic of objectification and determinism). But because these metaphors were communicated by text *and* photograph, and because the interaction of the two reified the experience of working (and dying) in a factory, they functioned as exigencies for furthering a vocabulary of justice. Even when the phototexts themselves were not reprinted in later coverage but communicated via text alone, the stage had been set by early phototext-driven metaphors to speak to new understandings of and actions toward justice.

In terms of methodology, these findings demonstrate that separating images and text in the name of rhetorical analysis is to neglect powerful sources of metaphorical invention. Critics who consider the often subtle, intricate nature of the synthesis of text and images in messages will offer increasingly comprehensive accounts of discursive invention via metaphor. Phototext-driven metaphors are, in some cases, more difficult to decipher than their text-driven counterparts because identifying clear tenors and vehicles is not as simple as locating them in the text (although this may be a helpful starting point). Critics must analyze how the photograph speaks with the text, perhaps highlighting a sense of captured realism or, as in the case of *Times* coverage of the factory fire, juxtaposing realism with text that offers a critique of the situation in question. Then, once they have a sense of the interrelationship among photograph, text, and historical moment, critics have created a foundation for deciphering if and how a phototext is metaphorical. At this point, terms such as tenor and vehicle may not be the most useful tools for delineating the parts or sub-sections of a metaphor communicated via phototext. Future research offering theoretical tools that build from and/or offer supplements to landmark metaphorical work by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), Richards (1936), and Rorty (1989) is an important next step in understanding if, how, and why phototextual metaphors work. But, regardless of the theoretical tools in use, the most important aspect of an analysis of phototext-driven metaphors is constant, on-going attention to the synthesis of photograph and text, and how they create meaning in a specific historical moment. Today, arguments challenging photographic (and thus, in some cases, metaphoric) veracity are ubiquitous, but even in the early twentieth century such claims emerged as responses to the power of the phototext to influence human behavior. For if the phototext did not function persuasively, claims about its validity would have little import. Finnegan (2001) wrote about historical cases in which such claims have thwarted progressive causes, and future research must continue to focus on the ways that phototexts can and have influenced behavior and social reform.

Speaking to the broader connection between metaphors and social reform, the present analysis ultimately found that phototext-driven metaphors in particular functioned as sources of rhetorical invention, as well as exigencies for discourse about reform. Given that the publication of phototexts has worked in favor of change-agents in the past, efforts to keep some photographs out of the media are especially disconcerting. For instance, consider the 1991 ban that kept the U.S. media from publishing photographs of flag-draped coffins holding the bodies of soldiers being returned from abroad (Tyson, 2009). Although this policy was officially enacted to protect the privacy of soldiers and their families, it also functioned to keep the war's human losses—and accompanying commentary—out of public vision. This controversial policy and others like it may be driven by an implicit understanding among those in power that phototextual communication offer journalists (and audiences) more opportunities for oppositional framing and resistance. Phototexts may set audiences on the path toward metaphorical reasoning by helping them to picture specific situations they might otherwise consider only in the abstract. Although it might seem that photographic evidence would encourage readers to think literally

rather than metaphorically, the present analysis suggests that phototexts can just as easily set the foundation for the metaphorical invention of which Rorty (1989) wrote and to which societal transformation is often linked.

Note

- [1] Factory owners testified that the factory doors were not locked during the fire, and ultimately the owners were found not guilty of manslaughter. However, several fire survivors testified that the doors were locked and that they had been locked both earlier that day and in the past. In addition, many workers died while attempting to exit through the doors, a point which demonstrates that the doors would not open, whether or not they were locked (Stein, 2001).

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