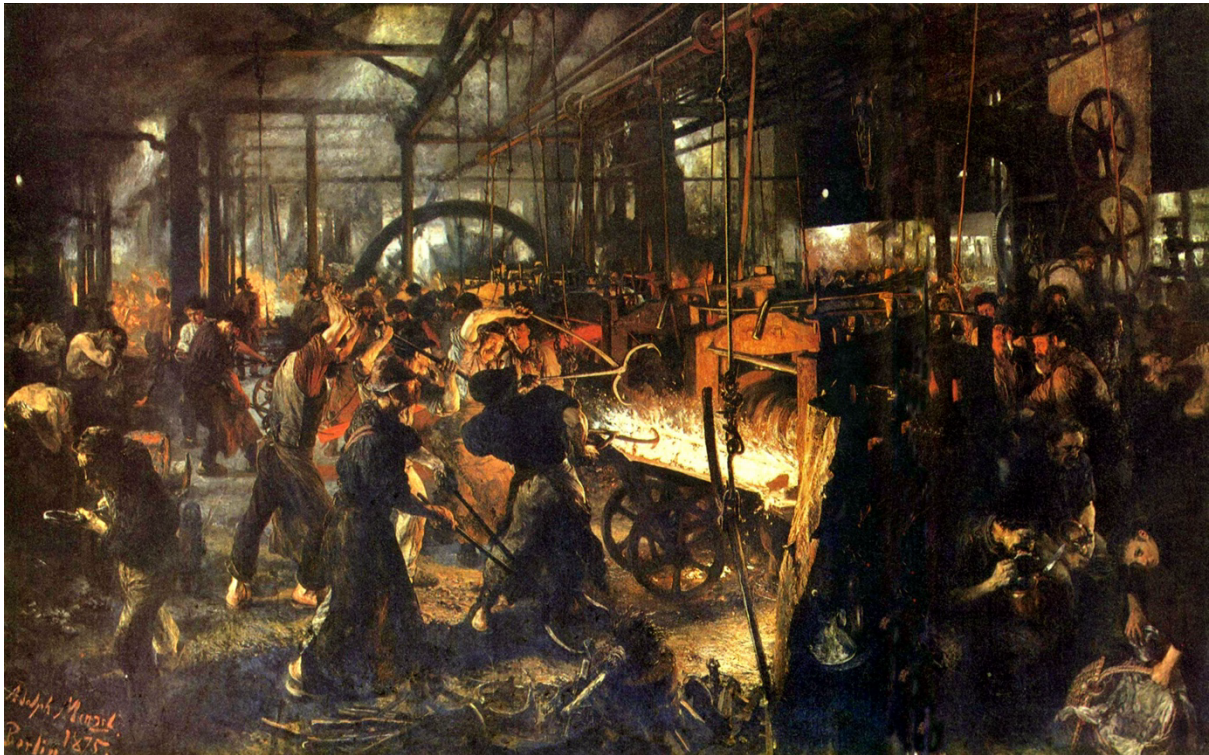


Editorial: Labour in the Long Nineteenth Century

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UPON FIRST GLANCE, Adolph von Menzel's *Das Eisenwalzwerk* (1872-5) – the cover image for this special issue, literally translated as *iron-roll-work/factory*, or more traditionally, 'Iron Rolling Mill' – upholds traditional understandings of 'labour' in the long nineteenth century. Factory work, industry, and the hard, muscular labour of toiling men: none of these immediately offer a particularly novel angle on the role, or implications, of labour in this period.

However, viewed from other angles, *Das Eisenwalzwerk's* underlying structures, or grammars, of nineteenth-century labour invite themselves to be unpicked. The process of combustion, trading units of energy between labourer, material, and heat, promises the realisation of future value: in the bottom right of the painting, workers eat, refuelling their bodies within the factory's economy of energy transfer. Of course,

the viewer – or reader of this editorial – also labours through the work of interpretation, and the effort required to imagine the somatic and sensory experience that Menzel constructs. We might also reflect on the physical work of viewing this in a gallery, of the physical and economic labour involved in traveling to the venue, paying for a ticket, and being required to stand for periods of time in front of the work to see it up close. We must also consider the labour of the artist: Malika Maskarinec, for example, compellingly argues for *Das Eisenwalzwerk* as a seemingly ‘improbable’ allegory for the process of painting itself, noting that painting and steelmaking both require technological prostheses to manipulate chemicals, heat, and material to produce something of novel craftsmanship.¹ The nineteenth century was inherently creative in both the factory and art studio – as well as all the spaces in between – and this process of creation, whether industrial, artistic, or intellectually imaginative, thus invites a broad conceptual approach to the labour(s) inherent therein.

Aside from its pedagogical purpose, my choice of image for ‘Labour in the Long Nineteenth Century’ underlines that to visualise labour is to only ever capture a fleeting moment of exchange, one which both belongs to a very specific moment – here, a system of shift work, a fleeting moment of bodies in motion, interacting with factory mechanisms as industrial prostheses of capitalist activity – but which also partakes in the nineteenth century’s systems of value transfer. To use Timothy Morton’s term, the *hyperobjectivity* of nineteenth-century labour points us towards its organisational role in global, and conceptual, systems of social organisation in this increasingly connected period.² The work of human minds and muscles – in the telegraph cage, the turnip field, the factory, the public square, the banking system, the nursery, the kitchen, in government, in schools, in the laboratory, at the writing desk, in workhouses, hospitals, and on the streets – contributes towards a porous whole, a future dependent on the

¹ Malika Maskarinec, ‘Allegory and Analogy in Menzel’s *The Iron Rolling Mill*’, *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 84.1 (2021), 58–77 (p. 59).

² Timothy Morton, ‘Victorian Hyperobjects’, *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, 36 (2014), 489–500.

labours of a nineteenth-century 'now' that may benefit a speculative, and speculated, 'tomorrow'.³

And now that we have arrived at one of the 'tomorrows' imagined by Menzel's factory workers, we find that labour is still, of course, at the forefront of some of the greatest anxieties of our age. In a hyper-connected world, is labour still 'labour' if it does not benefit another – and is it even possible to undertake labour if it only benefits ourselves? Must there be some kind of sacrifice, an abnegation of the self, in order that the products and processes of labour might be imbued with moral value? Must we still 'earn' rest as a reward for 'working hard'? And what does it mean to undertake labour of any kind in an era of climate crisis, when its systems of consumption are underpinning the most urgent of ecological and social breakdowns? As Cal Sutherland notes in the first article of this issue, 'Humans created global warming in the sphere of labour, and will equally halt or undo it in that sphere': perhaps, then, to theorise upon labour is fundamentally a practice of ecological speculation, one which both upholds and problematises the 'tomorrow' underwritten by the labours of today.

In inviting papers on the theme of 'labour', this issue has actively encouraged re-definitions of how, and where, we might locate labour practices: this is part of a general movement, particularly in ecocritical and postcolonial fields, to try and claim space for those who have paid for our 'today' with their specific forms of enforced labour.⁴ Cara New Daggett argues that the waste products of labour are generated 'at the intersection of race, gender, class, virtue, pollution, and ecological violence': and whilst this was not actively given as a provocation in this Issue's Call for Submissions, it is telling that all six of the articles interrogate many of these aspects in new and creative

³ For more on nineteenth-century speculation, particularly in relation to capital, see Anna Kornbluh, *Realizing Capital: Financial and Psychic Economies in Victorian Form* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013).

⁴ See Kathryn Yusoff, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018); Allen MacDuffie, *Victorian Literature, Energy, and the Ecological Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Karl Ittman, *Work, Gender and Family in Victorian England* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995).

ways, revealing an broad interdisciplinary sensitivity to the winning and losing groups within formal and informal labour economies.⁵

In our first article, Cal Sutherland argues for a new model of considering the relationship between land, labour, and property in Wordsworth's *Guide to the Lakes*, arguing that interpretations of the *Guide* using this relational model stem from Wordsworth's grounding within seventeenth-century philosophy: Sutherland draws upon Wordsworth's Lockean and English republican inheritances to trace Wordsworth's arbitration of labour and property accumulation, arguing that 'specific property forms, in this understanding of the *Guide*, constrain one to virtuous or unvirtuous relations with the land'. As Sutherland compellingly demonstrates, Wordsworth's conceptualisation of the relationship between property, labour, and nature resonates with contemporary ecological debates, particularly those pertaining to the politics of rewilding and the accumulative acquisition of rural property via private investment firms.

We then turn to Calyx Palmer's research, which interrogates the impact of gender on the experience of enslaved women in Saint-Domingue with a particular emphasis on 'sexualisation and sexual violence in depth, both crucial components of the lives of women of colour'. Palmer interrogates the 'archival silence[s]' surrounding the lived experiences of enslaved women to consider the impact of childbearing and childcare on their ability to achieve manumission, offering compelling examples of how their reproductive capacities both upheld and challenged the power dynamics that allowed slavery to proliferate in the French Caribbean. Palmer extends Gaspar and Hine's framework of the 'double burden' to argue that, in fact, their burdens were 'multifold, as they were not only oppressed in a variety of gendered ways ... but were granted fewer ways in which they could work themselves towards manumission and freedom'.

Moving into the mid-nineteenth century, Megan McLennan's article extends this consideration of how bodies mediate power in an imperial context, this time focusing on a particular figure: that of a bricklayer, whose story Henry Mayhew tells in his

⁵ Cara New Daggett, *The Birth of Energy: Fossil Fuels, Thermodynamics, and the Politics of Work* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), p. 9.

landmark *London Labour and the London Poor*, published between the 1840s and 1860s. The bricklayer finds that he is given more money by London's 'middle-class purses' if he pretends to be a shipwrecked mariner, an identity which, as McLennan argues, offers his middle-class donors 'greater economic and social value than a bricklayer' as it is 'imbued with colonial identification'. Thus, McLennan exposes the affective politics of street philanthropy in Mayhew's work, revealing the internalisation of imperial discourses in even the most chance interactions between London's poor and their more affluent passers-by.

In our fourth article, Rosemary Archer also explores a particular kind of remunerative performance by applying Arlie Russell Hochschild's twentieth-century theory of 'emotional labour' to Margaret Harkness' novellas *Connie* (1893-94) and *Roses and Crucifix* (1891-92), as well as her journalism. Archer argues that both Harkness' fictionalised and non-fictionalised women must 'display appropriate feeling-states [...] to generate a positive feeling-state' in others, and that this kind of affective exchange holds value in an increasingly professionalised end-century labour economy, consequently creating what Macdonald and Sirianni would later term the 'emotional proletariat'. Archer considers Harkness' arbitration of these ideas through her literature and journalism to expose the gendering of affective labour towards the end of the nineteenth century.

Garth Wenman-James then brings us to the very end of the long nineteenth century, stretching the periodisation of the journal ever so slightly with his study of Mary Elizabeth Braddon's final novel *Mary*, written in 1915, but published posthumously in 1916. He positions *Mary* as 'a post-Poor Law text that dismantles the affective power of the male gaze [...] moving away from the strict surveillance the workhouses and the board of guardians represented'. Like Archer, Wenman-James explores the fluid and complex working environments for women in the fin de siècle and turn of the twentieth century: his reading, however, particularly focuses on a facsimile of Pietro Magni's 1861 statue *The Reading Girl*, through which – as Wenman-James notes – Braddon navigates questions of labour, homelessness, gender, sex work, and slumming. In doing so, Wenman-James argues for women's philanthropic labour, and the homosocial spaces

this creates, as a mode of literary emancipation in the later stages of the long nineteenth century.

We round off this issue with John D. Attridge's novel comparative study of Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth* (1905) and Arnold Bennett's *The Card* (1911). Attridge argues that this combination of texts provides a lens for navigating debates surrounding poverty and wealth in the UK and US, both in legislature and social practice, and 'how changing representations of labour at the turn of the twentieth century functioned as imaginative reactions against the moralistic lessons of the popular Victorian social/social protest novel'. Attridge points towards economic and social principles at work in both countries that generated texts ready to re-navigate these pressing social questions for a new century, ultimately identifying Bennett as an author more prepared than Wharton to 'discard the prejudices around work and poverty that were pervasive through the long nineteenth century'.

All six authors in this issue have shown a creativity in both the scholarship of labour and the labour of scholarship, implementing diverse and convincing methodologies in pursuit of re-approaching the nineteenth century using labour as a unifying lens. In this way, labour is both practice and praxis. It is found in the imaginative leap of original research, of taking that germ of an idea and (re)fashioning it via the forms and etiquettes of academic convention, perhaps in the process refashioning those conventions themselves: the editorial work within the Journal's community: and the labour of you, the reader, as you situate this new research within your own field and expertise. It is my hope that this Issue undertakes some of that labour for you, and sparks inspiration for your own labours: may they be as rewarding as possible as we head into 2025.