



Repeat after me: the automatic labours of love

Lee Mackinnon

To cite this article: Lee Mackinnon (2018) Repeat after me: the automatic labours of love, Journal of Aesthetics & Culture, 10:3, 1438735, DOI: [10.1080/20004214.2018.1438735](https://doi.org/10.1080/20004214.2018.1438735)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/20004214.2018.1438735>



© 2018 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.



Published online: 18 May 2018.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Repeat after me: the automatic labours of love

Lee Mackinnon 

London College of Communication, University of Arts London, London, UK

ABSTRACT

Modern romantic love is contemplated in association with industrial forms of production and labour. Attention is paid to the ways in which women are industrialisation's automatic operatives par excellence, as well as the subjects and objects of love.

KEYWORDS

Lee Mackinnon;
feminisation; automation;
romantic love; automata;
dematerialisation; automatic

Introduction

This essay considers love as a symbol represented by the heart, which is also the organ first used to define the term automatic. Love's value as a symbol will be linked to certain forms of automation that indicate the dematerialisation of love's labour and its qualities as a form of life. Key here is the understanding that love's labours are most often associated with the figure of woman and in understanding automaticity as dispensing with causality.

We explore forms of automation characteristic of nineteenth century industrialization, through examples of speaking automata, romantic literature and labour. In the first instance, automata are seen to represent those with least power in Western societies, whose ventriloquized presence indicated a propensity for imitation and repetition. These automata can be seen to evince the magical absorption and disappearance of actual bodies and materials into systems of automation. Thereby, as Esther Leslie and Helen Hester have put it respectively, automated devices appear more animate than their operators or the bodies that they eventually replace (Leslie 2002; Hester 2016). For Marx, it was this quality of *liveliness* that characterised the commodity, being a repository for living labour that was associated with the vigorous, animate qualities of love (Marx 1990, 302). While according to Max Weber (2009), love's animation functions as the "real", vital force and promise that propels workers to accept the rational banality and routine of industrial working life. In this respect, love is an essential part of capital's calculation and subjection to systems of automation.

In claiming that isolating the body of woman was capitalism's greatest invention, Leopoldina Fortunati (1995) suggests that "free" emotional and domestic labour underpin the project of capitalist productivity.

The body of woman itself becomes a machine for reproducing labour powers: a site where production and reproduction find their most "natural" expression. Distinguishing labour from work in accordance with post-Fordist feminist writing (Weeks 2007; Federici 2012, 20), we recall Silvia Federici's claim that in order to remember what love is, we must first define work.

Automatic woman

M. Norton Wise (2007) claims that while human-like automata of the eighteenth century were equally male and female, those of the nineteenth century were most often female, children or non-European (163). These subjects were perceived to have qualities aligning them with primitivism, characterised by qualities of emotion and irrationality, in contrast to their white European paternalist authors and inventors. The demarcation of such groups as the medium for human-like automata signified the state of nature and even "humanness" from which man had elevated himself. In what follows, I will look at several early speaking automata that functioned to naturalise capacities associated with *othered* bodies, particularly of women. It will be seen that the speaking automata is conversant with wider ideas about the capacities and qualities of women in general, especially her ability to imitate and be functional.

In 1791, Farkas Kempelen demonstrated a rudimentary, ungendered speaking machine designed as an aide for the deaf (Brackhane and Trouvain 2011; Felderer and Strouhal 2007). Made of wood, metal, leather, rubber and an ivory reed, it spoke with the voice of a child (Brackhane and Trouvain 2011) as if to demonstrate the relative infancy of its technical achievement and to reiterate the naturalised familial

unions which were the essence of being human in bourgeois society. Thus, despite its motherless origin, at public demonstrations the speaking machine would begin by uttering primary words such as “*Mama*” and “*Papa*” (Riskin 2003, 619). Later in *Kempelen’s* demonstration, the audience could suggest phrases for the device to repeat. Notable among these, the machine was heard to utter, “You are my friend, I love you with all my heart” (ibid). What makes proclamations of love by machines so poignant is not only the desire to humanise machines, but the underlying desire of man to humanise “man.” Indeed, it has been noted that automata came to reflect advancing modes of modern governance and public administration in which *man* became the potential automaton that must fit the new bureaucratic order (Felderer and Strouhal 2007). Small wonder then, that machines were invested with the promise of love as if to integrate the qualities most associated with *humanisation* back into such a system. That machines might love and be loved indicates not only the potential *humanization* of machine-like bureaucratic systems, but the potential humanization of those who, by subjugating others, are themselves *dehumanized*.

In 1845, a second talking machine made its debut in New York city, this time as a musical instrument-cum-cabinet, bearing the carefully sculpted head of a female mannequin. In keeping with a taste for automata that embodied otherness, Joseph Faber’s *Euphonia* followed a prior machine that had famously featured a carved Turk as its ventriloquized subject. While the Turk simulated playing chess,¹ *Euphonia* demonstrated speech through its most idealised chatterbox in a literal example of instrumentalised femininity. A curious hybrid of instrument and furniture *Euphonia’s* ornate legs carved the space beneath her like a bizarre domesticated animal. The machine was operated by a keyboard and bellows that pumped air to manipulate a series of plates and chambers, as observed and recorded by Joseph Henry, who noted 16 levers or keys:

‘... like those of a piano projected sixteen elementary sounds by which ‘every word in all European languages can be distinctly produced.’ A seventeenth key opened and closed the equivalent of the glottis, an aperture between the vocal cords. ‘The plan of the machine is the same as that of the human organs of speech, the several parts being worked by strings and levers instead of tendons and muscles.’ (Millikan, n.d.).

Not only did *Euphonia* reflect a wish for feminine compliance in systems of patriarchy, she also evinced the aspiration for remote speech so critical to systems of telephony and computing. Her disembodied voice has become synonymous with automated communication systems and their female operatives: whether

of the telephone operator or latterly the (often feminised) digital assistant. Anticipating the invention of the telephone, Henry ruminated that Faber’s invention could be imagined in connection with the telegraph: “The keys could be worked by means of electro-magnetic magnets and with a little contrivance not difficult to execute words might be spoken at one end of the telegraphic line which have their origin at the other” (ibid).

Not only could *Euphonia* be “played” by her author, indicative of loving subjects contrived by gentleman scholars (one might think of *My Fair Lady* as one infamous cinematic trope), but her ghoulish appearance bears testament to the more grotesque aspects of cosmetic intervention that continue to characterise women’s ideal appearance to this day.

Euphonia is an illustration of the flow and control of industrial processes, being a conglomeration of materials that indicate the politics of trade. For example, before they had uttered their first syllable, the lips of *Euphonia* spoke much about the importance of rubber in the imperial project. Rubber plantations in India, the Congo and China would become as notorious for the violence of their forced labour as the German war camps that latterly kept Hitler’s war machine in its essential supply of rubber. John Tully (2011) notes that rubber was among a handful of commodities upon which modern mechanised warfare depended (17). The image of trees being milked for their rubber by indigenous slaves under imperial rule presents *nature* as a fickle mother whose nutrients grow nation states with unequal access to industrial processes and military might. Indeed, the marriage of mother and nature has long conspired to turn both over to the interests of paternal stewardship: the labours of women and nature represent the place where automated industry and life itself merge into potential cycles of endless reproduction. In 1939, the president of Goodyear tyres would suggest we:

Think of our industrial structure as a living thing, the skeleton of which is composed of metal and cement, the arterial system of which carries a life stream of oil, and the flexing muscles and sinews of which are rubber (Litchfield in Tully 2011, 17).

This description of a mechanised system as a living body chimes well with the notion that *Euphonia* was the ideal diagram of the industrial machine-woman, where strings and levers replace tendons and muscles. Today, strings and levers are replaced by silicone and electronics, yet the latest permutations of novel female automata have advanced surprisingly little. Crucially, the automaton-woman is a metaphor not only for Marx’s commodity fetish, but for the ways in which women’s agency could be imagined away by technical systems that were credited to male invention. Furthermore, we will see that the value of

labour, skill, calculation and even intelligence, are seen to alter historically according to who performs them. When tasks associated with intellect become the labour of women, they are often *deskilled* and associated with abilities that are innate and automatic. Thus, the figure of woman will be seen to be the automatic operative *par excellence*.

The clichéd tenets of binarised, gender identity can be traced to the natural sciences of the nineteenth century where we find allusions to women's suitability in appending the machines of industry. Charles Darwin himself is noted for aligning women with powers of intuition, rapid perception and imitation (Daston 1992, 227). Such faculties were ascribed to "the lower races and therefore of a past and lower state of civilization" (Darwin in Norton Wise 2007, 180). Rhythm was believed to be the evolutionary basis for imitation, a capacity that also extends "low down in the animal scale" (Wells in Norton Wise 2007, 180). Associated with such traits, a capacity for repetition meant that women excelled in tasks associated with memory and the ability to learn, where learning was associated with "taming" that led to "docility" and "pliability" as well as mutability, being that they were believed to lack the capacity for independent reasoning (Daston 1992, 215–216). In this way, women could be perceived as auxiliary databases whose task was simply to store and reiterate instruction, providing a means of agency that would animate non-human machines. In support of this functionality, Daston states that when calculation was performed by women, it was associated with manual and autonomous function, stripped of any association with intelligence (1994, 195). For the infamous English statistician and eugenicist, Francis Galton (1822–1911), laborious work was the product of "natural ability" rather than any mastery of skill (in Daston 1992, 212). It is notable that proximity to nature, as nature itself, is conceptualised by those who have an exclusive claim upon culture and education. In seeming to lack discernible qualities of intelligence or active will, women were on the side of nature rather than culture. Such capacities have obvious benefits in a system of industry where factory and domestic labour are based upon repetitive tasks and bodies that are no more than mechanisms of industry.

Only once automated systems reduced tasks to mechanical function and workers to anonymous, replaceable operatives, could women flourish in the work-place. The wider deskilling attached to female labour in systems of increasing automation meant that women became entirely interchangeable with the technical objects that facilitated their entry into the labour market. Friedrich Kittler (1999) has elaborated upon the interchangeability of machine and woman. As with Sadie Plant's coupling of feminization and automation (1998, 39), Kittler sees that sexual innovation is linked with technical innovation, seen in the

shift from literary to informational culture in the nineteenth century (Kittler 1999, 183). In Kittler's example, the *typewriter* initially referred to both a typing machine and a woman who types. This conflation of woman and technical object is synonymous with the moment when writing shifts from being the work of professional male secretaries who wrote long-hand, to female workers who transcribed on keyboards (*ibid*). Typists were reliant upon manual dexterity rather than intellect or education, perpetuating the idea of women as robotic drones (*ibid* 186). The ability to transcribe and copy with speed and accuracy were considered attributes particular to women, in keeping with narratives about their innate capacity for imitation. The rhythmic tapping of the typewriter keyboard itself reminds us of women's association with imitation and reproduction. Yet once the keyboard becomes associated with the digital economy, its labours become associated with the *masculine* capacities of programming, coding, and with an ingenious corporate identity that is exclusively the domain of men. Indeed, the term *computer* was initially used to describe those employed to carry out onerous calculations for professional mathematicians, astronomers and military operations and were often women (Grier 2005; 7; Light 1999, 461). Before the advent of digital computing devices during the First and Second World Wars, increasing numbers of women were employed as computers to work on a range of ballistics and military communication problems, including the calculation of firing tables used for precision bombing (Plant 1998, 145). Plant reminds us that the women deployed to compute missile trajectories would soon be employed to assemble components of electronic computers to do the task of computing in their place (*ibid* 146). Only lately, for example, in the movie: *Hidden Figures*, Theodore Melfi's (2016) Hollywood adaptation of the book by Margot Lee Shetterly (2016), has women's expertise in fields of computation been recognized beyond the research of a few dedicated scholars. Yet, the fact that women programmed the first computing machines such as ENIAC (Electronic Numerical Integrator and Computer), was somewhat eclipsed by the notion of them fulfilling a pre-ordained script that was ultimately the invention of men. In these ways, women's achievements were continually undermined by paternalist social structures that claimed authorship of technical systems and endowed them with value. We have seen that even notions of intelligence could alter in favour of those with most power as a means of retaining the status quo. Calculation performed by digital computers could be recognised as a result of man's capacity for inventiveness, its autonomous efficiency rendering women's auxiliary function null and obsolete.

The dream of creating the ideal automaton-woman is a perpetuation of privilege that naturalizes

inequality and forms of paternal subservience. That women were associated with the repetition and internalization of narratives authored by men- which was also their subjugation- meant that their very labour could alter the value of tasks that were uncoupled from intelligence. Women were functionaries whose labours were seen to underwrite the primacy and intellect of male authorship.

The logic of the heart

Before exploring the capacity for literary imitation and internalisation further, I want to define the term *automatic* more succinctly, particularly the way in which its meaning has evolved since its first use in 1749. What are the origins of this word that can disappear chains of causality and legions of workers, attributing action to objects that are “Livelier than its operators”? (Leslie 2002, 90).

A relatively modern word, the term *automatic* is preceded by the Ancient Greek *automaton* indicating that which is self-acting (Harper 2017a). In Greek mythology, *automaton* referred to the inventions of Hephaestus, among them Talos, the bronze giant who watched over Crete and Europa. Standing in fire until his body became burning hot, Talos would embrace his enemies who were incinerated instantly against his chest: the automata’s potential for tenderness is manifest as an indifference to violence. It is somewhat fitting then to learn that the Greek *automatos* refers to that which is accidental or “without apparent cause,” (Harper 2017a.). During the seventeenth century, *automata* described not only moving devices imitative of humans, but machines that functioned according to code (Soanes and Stevenson 2004, 89). It was the English physician and philosopher, David Hartley, who first used the term *automatic* as an adjective in 1749 to refer to the involuntary motions of bodies:

The motions of the body are of two kinds, automatic and voluntary. The automatic Motions are those which arise from the mechanism of the body in an evident manner. They are called automatic, from their resemblance to the motions of automata, or machines, whose principle motion is within themselves. Of this kind are the motion of the heart and peristaltic motion of the bowels (Hartley 1749, iii–iv).

These automatic motions are homeostatic: as a heart beats, the alternation of contraction and relaxation is maintained and modified in response to the needs and experiences of the organism (ibid 100). It is interesting to consider the evolution of the automatic from organic bodies to machines. The quality of automatic function is different in each case, being that one is man-made and generally limited by human operatives, and the other describes innate

qualities associated with forms of life. Yet it is man-made machines that are considered to characterise and precede the organic systems that invent them after their own image.

During the modern period, *automatic* came to describe actions that were not only involuntary, but both *unconscious and necessary* (Soanes and Stevenson 2004, 89). Here we can begin to infer the machines *necessary* to industrial society, as well as the *unconscious* desires and motivations that made them *appear necessary*. We can trace such terms in emergent forms of social psychology during the latter part of the twentieth century, concerned with automaticity in mental processes. If social behaviour, judgement and motivation were themselves unconscious and automatic, might it be possible to deliberately stimulate unintentional behaviour? (Bargh 2007, 2).

In ancient Greek *autos* was a reflexive pronoun meaning “self, same”, and was used as a prefix to proper names, such as “‘autoMelinna’ meaning Melinna herself” (Harper 2017b.). Autoritratto, or self-portrait, became a significant genre of painting in renaissance Italy, at a period when the word “fashion” became a verb in English, referring to the plasticity of identity (see Woods-Marsden 1998, 15). The *autos* of self, highlights the ways in which the subject emerges as a novel form of reflexivity during the early modern period. Notable in this historical corollary is the movement from the *automaton* as “self-acting” to the *autos* of the “acting-self”; and from the *automatic* as the involuntary to the more Freudian positing of unconscious necessity as that which governs the modern subject. Today, we are used to the *automatic* referring to non-human devices that rationalize forms of human labour and extend human capacities beyond the body. *Automation* also marks the redistribution of labour throughout social and global systems, as well as the way in which certain types and class of body can be reasoned away within these systems. In fact, automatic processes might better be considered the products and agents of distinct material events that attempt to do away with causality. In this respect, we can recall that love too, relies upon an obfuscation of material, causal features. It is notable that love as a literary device is often typified by its fatalism, whereby behaviours and actions seem to happen of their own accord. Thus, we often speak of love as *fate*, or *destiny* but at the same time, as being predicated upon coincidence and chance. What these terms have in common is their non-negotiable status as events, and a relation to retrospective justification that appears to be prior to, and to replace, their actual causes.

Kittler interestingly alludes to the imitative function of young women via German literature in the 1800s, where the reading, repetition and internalisation of romantic narratives by male authors served to make love appear

a priori—a background that preceded language and was akin to nature itself (Kittler 1999, 73). For Kittler, *nature*, *woman* and *love* would constitute a web of shifting significance in the nineteenth century; a set of interchangeable values that were defined by essential and unchangeable features. There are a number of ways in which these terms might be seen to triangulate to reinforce patriarchal values, being that each individually has the potential to question and overturn male primacy. While women and nature were the objects of appropriation and colonisation, love could help to make these appropriations seem inevitable and natural. By consigning women, nature and love to an essence characterised by irrationality and instability, each lent itself to exploitation and appropriation. For example, the fact that unpredictability and changeability are associated with women and nature is seen in the context of an essential character that demonstrates the need for further *domestication*. If love was the basis for this domestication then, in keeping with romantic poetry, it served to fulfil the essential conditions already attributed to women as we will see in what follows.

That the terms love, nature and woman were synonymous lends weight to the idea that modern romantic love and woman had become exempt from other social, material or economic considerations and were associated with the *natural*. I want to further demonstrate this naturalisation in romantic fiction typical of the period. Kittler (1990) uses the work of Goethe to exemplify the sort of poetry recited by young German women in order to educate them in the ways of love. Goethe's *Faust* [1831] is salient to our cause here because love and woman feature as the repositories of authenticity and nature. This authenticity- and that of fiction *as fiction*- must be protected from any association with capitalist circulation or the ways in which rarefied modes of authenticity themselves create unquestionable forms of value. Love, and the women that signify it, must remain unconscious of their part in the wider systemic function of romance in order that this authenticity remains intact, as Goethe reminds us:

Ah! That singleness of heart

And absence of all artifice-

Gifts, as they are, above all price,

Heavens holiest blessing- should be thus

Of their own worth unconscious!

That meekness, gentleness and treasure

Which nature, who doth still impart

To all in love and lavish measure

Gives to the child, whom she loves dearest... (Goethe 1988, 171).

Love's traits must necessarily be *unconscious* of their own worth, giving rise to features associated with an authenticity characterized by acquiescence (*meekness and gentleness*). The wish for reproductive acquiescence, both in the text and regarding the body of the woman, extend the "feminine" into a condition of idealized nature, which is also one of moral agency to be rewarded or blessed. Faust claims that love and woman must remain unconscious of their value, in order to function "naturally," which might rather be understood as according to the logic of male authors. In this manner, women retain their affinity with processes that assume an unconscious position in regard to patriarchal interest.

According to Ole Høystad (2007), Goethe's writing is paradigmatic at a historical moment when feelings and agency are features of internalization and individuation (*ibid* 206). Goethe was a key innovator of "Western metaphors" for whom the symbolism of the heart became "so [saturated] with polysemic and polyphonic meaning ... that it goes beyond the limits of metaphors and regains the nature of the symbol" (Høystad 2007, 205–206). Indeed, the symbolization of the heart as love's locus in poetic language further prevents love from being understood as a form of material labour even as it indicates the locus of life. In the twentieth century, the feminist Carla Lonzi claimed that love's symbolic quality was in keeping with patriarchal values that disenfranchised women from love as experience, and objectified it:

Women give love an independent value, while men give it an instrumental one. 'Men [...] recuperate this love as an absolute value in the arts, in poetry, in the artworks that live and grow through these non-relationships. Therefore men, after preventing [women] from living love, offer to them its symbol as an object.' (Lonzi in Fontaine 2013)

In other words, the material qualities and labour associated with love become the burden of women beyond the symbolic attributions that have long been the concern of paternal authorship. This authorship has simply made an art of naturalising love's labours as the work of women.

Love's labours

Evoking the erotic love of Goethe's *Faust*, Marx claimed that the capitalist transfer of living labour into lifeless objects is a process whereby an animate monster works "as if its body were by love possessed" (Marx 1990, 302). Matter and production are made monstrous, invested with the qualities of romantic love that animate the otherwise mortifying system of commodity production. Capitalism has long aspired to the automatic flows and functions of bodily vitality. The throb and circulation of capitalist

production has no organ than the workers own heart- and this heartbeat, claimed Marx, is appropriated by the machines of capitalist production (Marx 1990, 343). We return to the symbol of the heart as one associated with both vitality and love, and by a material, physical function that is characterised by automaticity. Unlike a body made happily animate by the continuous flow of commodities imagined by the president of Goodyear tyres (above) here, objects are gripped by an animate monstrosity that apes the physiological effects of romantic love. In turn, romantic love's disposition as a state of nature is subject to appropriation and corruption. This possession, which might also be described as a *colonization* reflects the appropriation of labour and resources that are suppressed beneath the grandiose image of machines made lively and loving.

For Max Weber (2009) love's relation to capitalist production is a less ambiguous than one posed by Marx. Love's apparent irrationality was posited as a strategy that could rationalize the world of work in industrialisation. Love and eroticism were elevated to a realm of sublime conscious enjoyment during the nineteenth century, appearing "like a gateway into the most irrational and thereby real kernel of life as compared with the mechanisms of rationalization" (Weber 2009, 345). The limitless giving of the self, associated with love, was radically opposed to "functionality, rationality, and generality," and imparted as the *unique meaning* of a specific other:

[...] The lover realises himself to be rooted in the kernel of the truly living, which is eternally inaccessible to any rational endeavor. He allows himself to be freed from the cold skeletal hands of rational orders, just as completely as from the banality of everyday routine (Weber 2009, 347).

While seeming to pitch itself against work and machine, love is a palliative that obfuscates and reproduces forms of servitude, such as factory labour. At the time Weber was writing, there was only one accepted form of love- the heterosexuality that bound individuals to families and nation in a tacit agreement with the norms imposed upon them. Weber's observation that erotic love was a reconnection to a wild and irrational nature serves as part of the capitalist systems overall calculation that utilizes the romantic predisposition of the nineteenth century. It may also remind us of the way in which automatic function aspired to appropriate the very nature of living organisms.

That women's labours and bodies were disappeared by their apparent desire to work for love alone is a point that has been made by a number of scholars over the past 5 decades, particularly those who highlight the exclusion of women's labour from critical accounts of capitalist production, for example

Firestone (2015), Federici (2012, 2014), Hester (2016), and Fortunati (1995). Like Weber, Leopoldina Fortunati (1995) examines the way in which the irrational, incalculable tenets of love have been used to give rational form to capitalist interest, making working life and the invisible labour of women in particular, seem part of a natural life cycle. In her radical polemic, Fortunati (1995) understands love to be the very mask and engine of capitalist production. The traditional female *house-worker* performs invisible labour being that her work is neither named nor waged (ibid 101). The unit of the family is seen to precede the factory, while the acceleration of mechanised factory labour has a direct effect upon all work processes (ibid 119). In these terms, even the house-worker is indirectly subject to factory discipline and must carry out her work with a "continuity, regularity and intensity..." unparalleled by pre-capitalist modes of production (ibid). In this sense, the woman is a machine indiscernible from industrial mechanisms. Fortunati claims that capital is deemed to have "transformed the woman's body with its natural capacities to produce individuals into a machine for producing labour-powers", so that she is "a machine in the continuous cycle of non-material production" (ibid 72, 77).

Women's "naturalised" suitability to unwaged labour was not the only feature that made her amenable to mechanisation. Fortunati draws on Marx's notion that the first effect of capitalist machinery was to attract the waged labour of women, being that women generally provided "a more malleable work instrument," than their male counterparts (ibid 168). Not only did machinery do away with the need for brute muscle power, it often required a suppleness that could be supplied by women and children, who, needing less to sustain them, could be paid less for doing the same work (ibid). This unfortunate application of industrial logic seems to have remained pervasive in many European contexts, even after industrialisation. Fortunati's thesis reflects wider post-Fordist anxieties about the value of so-called *invisible* labour, as well as the difference between labour and work. Such a distinction might be helpful in considering the particular use of labour here. Kathi Weeks (2007) highlights the fact that 1970s socialist feminism helped to recapitulate all forms of labour as forms of work, when work was still "equated with the waged production of material goods" (235). Work indicates a contractual or waged subset of labour, while labour encompasses all forms of production, whether waged or unwaged. Given the valorisation of waged-work over other forms of labour since the industrial period, it is worth considering the realm of *affective labour*. In its broadest sense, affective labour, refers to that which sustains social relations via forms of housework and care

work, most usually ascribed to women. While standpoint feminism of the 1970 and 1980s directed its concern to the domain of affect, Silvia Federici claims that *affect* re-mystifies the feminist analysis of work, being that we return to vague allusions of feeling and emotion rather than concrete forms of material work, and that these vagaries were once referred to as the *labours of love* (Federici 2010, 24). We have noted that qualities of emotion and feeling themselves are often attributed to those who have the least power in social systems. Whether women, children, non-Euro-American subjects, or the lower classes, those that are easily objectified can also be more easily dismissed (Lutz 1986, 292). Elsewhere, Federici cites a respondent who claims that work should be named as such in order that we might rediscover what love is (Federici 2012, 20). Perhaps the aim should not be to reduce all labour to a capitalist exchange, but to acknowledge how concepts of *love's labours* have been consigned to unacknowledged necessity, whilst functioning to keep certain bodies outside of power. Rather than a symbol that evinces vague notions of emotion and feeling, we might reconsider love a realm of material production and a form of life, acknowledging the labour that must be continually expended in order to sustain it rather than presupposing a reserve of automatically generated beneficence. Love perhaps continues to endure as a sign because it presupposes no sake but its own and because its status as a signifier is so mercurial. That women have long worked in the service of love has aligned their labour with *natural* inclination rather than with multiple forms of production and reproduction that include tedious, *necessary* toil. In this manner, such labour retains invisibility and is devalued because it is perceived to be the result of natural necessity, which is to say, impulses that can be deemed as automatic as a heartbeat.

Conclusion

Niklas Luhmann (1998) suggested that during the eighteenth century, “the other” becomes a set of functions relating to the self (25). We can infer that this “other” refers to the idealised figure of woman, expected to assume a range of functions in response to the overtures of the male subject. Luhmann suggests that love could help to foreground the individual against a psychic landscape that had subsumed all other aspects of the environment into itself (ibid 15). In this case, the ego becomes locus of inner experience whilst the environment “loses most of its contours” (ibid). This subsumption reminds us of Marx’s monstrous vitality that is created out of appropriated bodies and resources. Aspects of the environment become little more than symbols and signs that are experienced

as the romantic subject’s interior life. The unique attributes of the beloved as functions directed toward the self, support the cause of individualism above all others, and become a defining feature of Westernized democracies in the global North. Such prioritizing of individuality assumes agency not only over the immediate environment, but naturalizes the appropriation of lands reducible to a *psychic contour* in the project of colonisation. In these terms, the privileging of individual interest over the environment is powerfully reinforced by romantic attachment.

That both woman and nature were figured as machine-like in the industrial period sanctioned the exploitation of either in the service of inexhaustible industrialization. Furthermore, love and woman were idealised as *natural* rather than *cultural*, cementing women’s propensity for functional, automatic processes that were not reliant upon education, autonomy or invention.

In the heterosexual orthodoxy of industrialisation, women represented the fetishized and overvalued qualities of the commodity that turned them into romantic objects of fascination, curiosity and poetry. Euphonia recalls the dancing table of Marx, whose grotesque animation expresses the sum of labour relations between men and their “socio-natural” properties². Love, in its capacity to automate social systems and disappear the bodies that constitute its labours, is engineered toward patriarchy’s distant dream of its own humanisation. Let us remember that this seeming automation has often been reliant upon the invisibility of women’s labour. The suppression of their own fury in its regard can be seen as a placeholder for men’s own invisibility to themselves; invisibility as human subjects with an equal claim upon emotional life and love.

Today, the *automatic* is associated with non-human systems that expedite the alchemical transformation of the world’s resources into economic productivity, as well as with the coming of a robotic workforce. Yet the origin of the “automatic” is barely remembered, being perhaps, that it draws attention to the complex organic bodies behind the novel machines and devices that appear to automate social relations.

The digital economy continues the process of “automating” geographical, class-based and racial borders: its systems and devices obfuscating the materials and bodies that constitute the exploited labour key to its production. Although we are aware of such practices, the bodies that are put to work within these systems become *automatic* in every sense of the word. That is, they are the *unconscious* but *necessary* features of global capital whose subjection is the true face of a deeply embedded nationalistic love of one’s own kind at the expense of all others.

Notes

1. Later discovered to be “directed by human chess players ingeniously concealed in its pedestal.” (Riskin 2003, 621).
2. The form of wood, for instance, is altered if a table is made out of it... as soon as it emerges as a commodity, it changes... It not only stands with its feet on the ground, but, in relation to all other commodities, it stands on its head, and evolves out of its wooden brain grotesque ideas, far more wonderful than if it were to begin dancing of its own free will... The mysterious character of the commodity-form consists therefore, simply in the fact that the commodity reflects the social characteristics of men’s own labour as objective characteristics of the products of labour themselves, as the socio-natural properties of these things’ (Marx 1990, 163–165).

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Copenhagen University Department of Arts and Cultural Studies for their support in funding the conference from which these papers emerged. Thanks also to Nanna, Kristin and team at Copenhagen University for organizing and coordinating the event, and the resulting journal.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes on contributor

Lee Mackinnon is a Senior Lecturer in Photography at University of the Arts London (LCC). Lee’s writing has been included in edited collections by eflux, *What’s Love got to Do with It?* (Sternberg Press 2017); and Amoore and Piotukh, *Algorithmic Life: Calculative Devices in the Age of Big Data* (Routledge 2015). Recent lead articles have featured in *Leonardo* (MIT Press) and *Third Text* (Routledge).

ORCID

Lee Mackinnon  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1448-497X>

References

- Bargh, J., ed. 2007. *Social Psychology and the Unconscious: The Automaticity of Higher Mental Processes*. New York: Psychology Press.
- Brackhane, F., and J. Trouvain. 2011. “Wolfgang Von Kempelen’s ‘Speaking Machine’ as an Instrument for Demonstration and Research.” In *ICPHS Proceedings XVII Hong Kong*. August 17–21. http://www.coli.uni-saarland.de/~trouvain/trouvain_brackhane_2011.pdf.
- Daston, L. 1992. “The Naturalised Female Intellect.” *Science in Context* 5 (2): 209–235. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/S0269889700001162.
- Daston, L. 1994. “Enlightenment Calculations.” *Critical Inquiry* 21 (1): 182–202. Autumn 1994 Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press. doi:10.1086/448745.
- Federici, S. 2010. “Precarious Labour: A Feminist Viewpoint in Variant Issue 37–38 Spring-Summer 2010.” 23–25 http://www.variant.org.uk/pdfs/issue37_38/V37preclab.pdf
- Federici, S. 2012. *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction and Feminist Struggle*. Oakland: PM Press.
- Federici, S. 2014. *The Exploitation of Women, Social Reproduction, and the Struggle against Global Capital Theory & Event* 17 (3) 2014. Interview with Carlin, M. Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press.
- Felderer, B., and E. Strouhal 2007. “Kempelen: Man in the Machine: His Oeuvre.” Hungary Centre for Art and Media Karlsruhe. http://www.kempelen.hu/munkassaga_en.html
- Firestone, S. 2015. *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution*. New York: London Verso Books.
- Fontaine, C. 2013. “We are All Clitoridian Women: Notes on Carla Lonzi’s Legacy.” eflux Journal 47: 2013. <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/47/60057/we-are-allclitoridian-women-notes-on-carla-lonzis-legacy/>
- Fortunati, L. 1995. *The Arcane of Reproduction: Housework, Prostitution, Labour and Capital*. New York: Autonomedia.
- Goethe, J. W. V. 1988. *Faust*. Translated by J. Anster. London: Bloomsbury Books.
- Grier, D. A. 2005. *When Computers Were Human*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Harper, D. 2017a. “Etymology Online Dictionary: Automatic.” <https://www.etymonline.com/word/automatic>
- Harper, D. 2017b. “Etymology Online Dictionary: Auto.” <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=auto->
- Hartley, D. 1749. *Observations on Man, His Frame, His Duty and His Expectations*. London: S. Richardson for James Leake and W.M. Frederick.
- Hester, H. 2016. “Technically Female: Women, Machines, and Hyperemployment.” *Salvage*. August. <http://salvage.zone/in-print/technically-female-women-machines-and-hyperemployment/>
- Hoystad, O. M. 2007. *A History of the Heart*. London: Reaktion Books.
- Kittler, F. A. 1990. *Discourse Networks 1800/1900*. Translated by M. Metteer and C. Cullens. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Kittler, F. A. 1999. *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Leslie, E. 2002. *Hollywood Flatlands: Animation, Critical Theory and the Avant Garde*. London: Verso.
- Light, J. S. 1999. “When Computers Were Women.” *Technology and Culture* 40 (3): 455–483. John Hopkins University Press.
- Luhmann, N. 1998. *Love as Passion: The Codification of Intimacy*. Translated by J. Gaines and D. L. Jones. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Lutz, C. 1986. “Emotion, Thought, and Estrangement: Emotion as a Cultural Category.” *Cultural Anthropology* 1 (3): 287–309. The American Anthropological Association. doi:10.1525/can.1986.1.3.02a00020.
- Marx, K. 1990. *Capital: Vol 1*. Translated by B. Fowkes. London: Penguin Books in association with New Left Review.
- Melfi, T. 2016. *Hidden Figures*. CA: Twentieth Century Fox.
- Millikan, F. R. n.d. “Joseph Henry and the Telephone.” Archives. http://siarchives.si.edu/sites/default/files/pdfs/jhpp/JHP_Joseph_Henry_and_the_Telephone.pdf
- Norton Wise, M. 2007. “The Gender of Automata in Victorian Britain.” In *Genesis Redux: Essays in the History and Philosophy of Artificial Life*, edited by J. Riskin, 163–195. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Plant, S. 1998. *Zeros and Ones: Digital Women and the New Technoculture*. London: Fourth Estate.

- Riskin, J. 2003. "The Defecating Duck, Or, the Ambiguous Origins of Artificial Life." *Critical Inquiry* 29 (4): 599–633. (Summer 2003). Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press. doi:10.1086/377722.
- Shetterly, M. L. 2016. *Hidden Figures: The American Dream and the Untold Story of the Black Women Mathematicians Who Helped Win the Space Race*. New York: William Morrow and Harper Collins Limited.
- Soanes, C., and A. Stevenson. 2004. *The Concise Oxford English Dictionary Eleventh Edition*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Tully, J. 2011. *The Devil's Milk: A Social History of Rubber*. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Weber, M. 2009. *Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. Translated and edited by H. H. Gerth and C. W. Mills. Milton Park: Routledge.
- Weeks, K. 2007. "Life within and against Work: Affective Labour, Feminist Critique and Post-Fordist Politics." *Ephemera: Theory and Politics in Organisation* 7 (1): 233–249. <http://www.ephemerajournal.org/contribution/life-within-and-against-work-affective-labor-feminist-critique-and-post-fordist>.
- Woods-Marsden, J. 1998. *Renaissance Self-Portraiture: The Visual Construction of Identity and the Social Status of the Artist*. New Haven: Yale University Press.