

# The uses of film and visual sources in labour history

Pamela Cox\*

**Abstract:** As soon as film technology was invented in the late nineteenth century, it was used by European film-makers to record, document and represent local working lives. The films were typically short, silent and monochrome. They were made and funded by different people for different purposes, including by business owners to promote their enterprises, as well as by showmen who charged those depicted to pay to come and see the spectacle of themselves and their friends on screen. The films were shown in a variety of settings, including traditional fairs and early cinemas. This article analyses a selection of films featuring a range of early twentieth century British workers compiled as part of a recent British TV history series to which I contributed – *Edwardian Britain in Colour* (Channel 5). The original films have been restored and colourised in order to bring them to life for a new audience. The article explores the complexities of capturing workers and workplaces on film and suggests how labour historians in Britain, Brazil and beyond can use films like these and other visual materials as valuable sources.

**Keywords:** Edwardian Britain in Colour; labour history; TV history; film; visual sources.

1

## Introduction

In 1895, the world's first projected film was shown to a small paying audience in Paris. Entitled “La Sortie des Usines Lumière à Lyon” or “Employees Leaving the Lumière Factory”, it now occupies a unique place in film history.<sup>1</sup> The film, made by Louis Lumière, was shown at the Grand Café on the Boulevard des Capucines. It consists of a single scene in which workers, mostly female, exit the large building 25 rue St. Victor, Montplaisir on the outskirts of Lyon, as if they had just completed a day's work. It was the first of many early films depicting the world of work.

In this article, I will explore some of the fascinating connections linking film history and labour history, and will suggest how greater engagement with the visual, aesthetic and sensory possibilities opened up by film sources might further enrich labour history.<sup>2</sup> I will draw on my recent experience contributing to a British history

\* Professor at the Department of Sociology, University of Essex, UK. Pamela Cox has written and presented two BBC history series on women's labour – *Servants* (2012) and *Shopgirls* (2014). E-mail: [pamcox@essex.ac.uk](mailto:pamcox@essex.ac.uk). ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0276-5421>.

<sup>1</sup> For a broader discussion, see LANZONI, Rémi Fournier. **French Cinema: From Its Beginnings to the Present**. New York; London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015. The film itself may be viewed via this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BO0EkMKfgJl>.

<sup>2</sup> This article is based on a paper presented at the Associação Brasileira de Estudos do Trabalho (Brazilian Association for Labour Studies) conference, Bahia Federal University, Salvador, 3-6 September 2019.

documentary series, *Edwardian Britain in Colour*, which included discussion of many short films made in the early twentieth century depicting work, workers and workplaces.<sup>3</sup> The first episode was framed around work, production and hardship while the second focused on reform, consumption and pleasure. The historical narrative invited viewers to walk in Edwardian shoes – to experience the height of Britain’s imperial power, to understand more about the domestic labour force on which that power was built, to see for themselves how people lived, worked, relaxed and protested, and to imagine – with the benefit of hindsight – what it felt like to live through the tipping point into the First World War. The series took its cue from a landmark programme made for the BBC by film director Peter Jackson in 2018 to mark the centenary of the end of that war. *They Shall Not Grow Old* colourised and digitally re-mastered original war-time footage and audio track, bringing both vividly to life for a modern audience.<sup>4</sup> In my discussion of the work-related themes of *Edwardian Britain in Colour*, I draw on recent studies of visual approaches within labour history but also within a range of other disciplines.

## Workers on film in early twentieth century Britain

Once we separate the history of film from the history of cinema, new analytical possibilities emerge for historians – particularly for labour historians. Cinemas appeared in the early 1900s as designated spaces for the commodified viewing of films and newsreels made for an emerging commercial market. However, before and after this, films were projected in a variety of settings, having been made by a variety of people, including employers, for a variety of purposes.

Early workplace films fall into three broad categories: (i) those following the “La Sortie des Usines Lumière à Lyon” model showing workers leaving their workplace at the end of a working day; (ii) those capturing the complex working landscapes of streets, markets and docks; and (iii) those showing workers engaged in specific tasks within their delineated workplace. The first category – known in Britain as “factory gate films” – were made by showmen who used the new technology to turn a quick profit. They would inform local factory workers that they were going to film them as

<sup>3</sup> This two part series was made by Make Waves, an independent production company, for Channel 5, a British commercial television channel. It aired in February 2019 and was directed by Alison Grist and produced by Leo Gizzi. For more details, see <https://www.channel5.com/show/edwardian-britain-in-colour/>. Two follow-up series made by the same team and focusing on the 1890s and 1930s respectively will be aired in winter 2019 and spring 2020.

<sup>4</sup> This programme was made for BBC One, a channel of the British Broadcasting Corporation, and aired in 2018. It was based on films preserved in the archives of the Imperial War Museum in London, many of them previously unseen.

they left work on a particular day, and then they would invite them to buy a ticket to watch themselves on screen – typically at their town hall, local fair or fete. Two men dominated this market in Britain: Sagar Mitchell and James Kenyon, who were quick to emulate Louis Lumière’s techniques. Advertising their own short films as “Local Films for Local People”, they effectively pioneered what would later become reality television. Between 1900 and 1913, they made hundreds of films, some of which survive today, many of them available on YouTube.<sup>5</sup> A number of their films fall into the second category of early workplace films. Mitchell and Kenyon were among the first film-makers to capture everyday documentary scenes of crowded commercial streets, busy docks and bustling markets. Some of their most well-known work was shot by cameras mounted on the front of trams and buses as they wove their way through the everyday traffic of people, goods and services. The resulting images are an important resource for historians of labour and consumption, capturing workers and consumers in action within their own spheres, and in interaction with each other.

The third category of films depict workers engaged in specific tasks within the delineated space of their particular workplace. They were more likely to be made by film-makers commissioned by business owners and employers or by emergent commercial news outlets like British Pathé News, than by showmen like Mitchell and Kenyon. British Pathé News was founded by Frenchman Charles Pathé in 1910, as a spin off from his initial venture, Société Pathé Frères established near Paris in 1896. Pathé effectively created the new format of the newsreel, short silent factual films curated for early cinemas and forerunners of the news bulletins with which we are familiar today.

The series *Edwardian Britain in Colour* featured all three types of early workplace films. The first episode, for example included clips from Mitchell and Kenyon factory gate and street scene films, such as the Alfred Butterworth Cotton Mill near Manchester, the London docks and Covent Garden market. It also featured footage showing women working at the Wotan Lamps Factory, in Dalston, East London, believed to date from 1908-1911 and filmed by British Pathé. The factory was opened in 1908 to produce the newly developed tantalum filament lamps invented by the German parent company, Siemens & Halske. The factory was closed in 1923, but the building still stands today. The clip used in the series focused on a single woman carefully crafting a single lamp. It invites us – as labour and allied historians – to look

<sup>5</sup> TOULMIN, Vanessa; POPPLE, Simon; RUSSELL, Patrick. **The lost world of Mitchell and Kenyon: Edwardian Britain on film.** London: British Film Institute Publications, 2004. Many of these films have been restored and preserved by the British Film Institute’s National Film and Television Archive in collaboration with the University of Sheffield National Fairground Archive. To view examples of these films, see the television documentary *Electric Edwardians: The Films of Mitchell and Kenyon* via [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oTf9o\\_mIE4I](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oTf9o_mIE4I).

carefully at the sequence of her actions and her deft interactions with the required materials and technologies. A further clip depicts the production of felt hats made of rabbit fur at Jackson's manufacturing company in Stockport in the northwest of England. The company had over 80 outlets across the UK at the time, and also made and sold boots, shoes and raincoats. Filmed in 1910 and held in the North West Film Archive, the clip takes us into a hot and steamy workshop, where young men and boys clean, shape and shrink piles of rabbit fur, while women workers prepare the satin linings and trimmings. It also shows us another scene where the finished hats, polished and packed, lie ready to be dispatched to Jackson's outlets across the UK.

It is often said that "a picture paints a thousand words". The brief images of Jackson's factory reveal a huge amount of historical detail about the firm's production, distribution and sales processes, and – crucially – about the division of labour between the men, women and children who worked there. That said, there is much that these films – like all films, like all historical texts – cannot tell us. It is not always clear why they were made, for whom they were intended, or, indeed, who actually viewed them and how viewers responded to them. Nonetheless, these and other early workplace films offer new methodological possibilities for labour historians, as I will go on to explore.

The second episode of *Edwardian Britain in Colour* included a focus on everyday leisure, including community events. It therefore offered a further valuable perspective on workers' lives. Clips featured large groups enjoying "works outings" to seaside resorts, like Blackpool, and to new pleasure gardens. If viewers look closely, they are also able to see service workers in action here within Britain's burgeoning leisure industry. Clips also featured civic parades and town pageants, many of them – like the Preston Guild parade - dating back centuries and typically involving local traders showcasing their goods and services. Labour history can clearly benefit from the broad lens offered by these films and their invitation to us to look at experiences of production and consumption that extend beyond the factory and organised labour.

## Using film as a source for labour history

Relative to other branches of history, labour history has made relatively little use of visual sources. Matt Perry argues that although, in his landmark book, *Theatres of Memory*, Raphael Samuel encouraged labour historians to make use of historical photographs, "it is fair to say that his suggestion has gone relatively unheeded".<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> SAMUEL, Raphael. **Theatres of Memory**: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture. London: Verso, 1994: p. 38; PERRY, Matt Introduction: Visualizing Labour (special issue). **Labour History Review**, v. 84, n. 2, p.105-113, 2019.

A special issue of *Labour History Review* published in 2019 consequently set out to address this gap and offers a convincing case for the value of images within labour history – albeit one that focuses on photography rather than film. It is a useful introduction to this topic for those new to the field of visual history.

Similarly, sociologists of work have only recently turned to visual methods. In 2004, Tim Strangleman memorably argued that “the visual” was “a blindspot” in studies of work, employment and society.<sup>7</sup> He has since suggested that sociologists of work can enhance their research by “visualising labour, place and space” and by “picturing work”. In order to do this, however, they “need to develop and expand a sociological language of the visual in order to better understand cultural and other aspects of work and employment”.<sup>8</sup> More recently Strangleman has suggested that this can be done by approaching visual sources and materials in the following ways: “as illustration, in reflection theory, content analysis, photo [or image] elicitation, semiology and iconology and visual ethnography”.<sup>9</sup> Applying these approaches to analyse footage featured in *Edwardian Britain in Colour* opens up new analytical possibilities for historians. A systematic content analysis would reveal much about the composition of (and exclusions within) filmed images, while a semiological analysis would allow a new focus on the material and symbolic meanings of particular working practices, rituals, inputs and outputs. Both offer new multi-layered possible readings of the short “factual” films of Wolton’s lamp factory and the Preston Guild parade.

From the mid 2000s on, a range of new projects have extended the field of visual labour studies. Carol Wolkowitz’s *Bodies at Work* is a fascinating and influential study spanning historical and contemporary images of workers; including Arthur Munby’s photographs of nineteenth century British women workers, Lewis Hine’s photographs of American workers (most famously heroic white construction workers sitting astride girders atop emergent skyscrapers), and photographs produced by the Manhattan Project during the Second World War.<sup>10</sup> To relate this to *Edwardian Britain in Colour*, a key and obvious difference between photographs and film is that the latter captures (working) bodies moving in space, enabling an even deeper focus on the performative physical elements of the tasks involved. Further, Stephen Jones

<sup>7</sup> STRANGLEMAN, Tim. Ways of (not) seeing work: The visual as a blindspot in WES. **Work, Employment and Society**, v. 18, n. 1, p. 179-192, 2004.

<sup>8</sup> STRANGLEMAN, Tim. Representations of Labour: Visual Sociology and Work. **Sociology Compass**, v. 2, n. 5, p.1491-1505, 2008; and Picturing Work in an Industrial Landscape: Visualising Labour, Place and Space. **Sociological Research Online**, v. 17, n. 2, [no page numbers in online journal], 2012.

<sup>9</sup> STRANGLEMAN, Tim. Visual sociology and work organization: a historical approach. In: BELL, Emma; WARREN, Samantha; SCHROEDER, Jonathan E. (eds.). **The Routledge Companion to Visual Organisation**. London: Routledge, 2014, p. 243-258, p. 252.

<sup>10</sup> WOLKOWITZ, Carol. **Bodies at Work**. London: Sage, 2006.

has re-issued his 1987 book on the British labour movement and film in the interwar period, a study exploring how unions used, and were represented by others on, film.<sup>11</sup>

Broad developments in visual labour studies are captured at a more global level in a useful summative piece by industrial relations researcher Cathy Bridgen. Her piece explores “the representation of work and workers in both feature and documentary films”, paying particular attention to oral history and the concepts of “place memory and body memory” as well as to the “sensory impact of sound in film”, “labour’s songbooks” and “soundtracks of work”. Like all the authors discussed here, Bridgen argues that incorporating film into labour studies opens up a more “nuanced analysis of the history of working people”.<sup>12</sup> This raises exciting opportunities for historians in Britain, Brazil and beyond.

Documentary film-making began in Brazil in the early twentieth century, with one film-maker occupying a key place in the global history of this genre. In 1917, Luis Thomaz Reis, a Brazilian army officer, released what many view as the world’s first ethno-documentary: *Rituais e Festas Borôro* follows the funeral ceremonies of the Borôro, an indigenous people of central Brazil.<sup>13</sup> Others followed Reis’ lead, cementing the place of this documentary mode in early Brazilian and Latin American film-making. Whereas in Britain in the same period, white urban working class communities were the focus of many of the short commercial films made by Mitchell and Kenyon, the gaze of Reis and his successors was firmly directed upon Brazil’s rural indigenous peoples.<sup>14</sup> Notably, too, much Brazilian documentary filming was funded by state bodies such as the National Council for the Protection of Indians (Conselho Nacional de Proteção aos Índios), which supported Reis. In Britain, there was no or little corresponding high-level state sponsorship for domestic film-makers. That said, there was certainly state support for British ethnographic film-making abroad, where the medium became a tool of British imperial governance. From 1939 onwards, for example, the Colonial Film Unit recorded thousands of hours of footage in Africa and other imperial locations.<sup>15</sup> The Unit’s film archive is another rich

<sup>11</sup> JONES, Stephen G. **The British Labour Movement and Film, 1918-1939**. London: Routledge, 2018 (first published, 1987).

<sup>12</sup> BRIDGEN, Cathy. Representations of labour: Images of work and workers in film, 22nd Association of Industrial Relations Academics in Australia and New Zealand (AIRAANZ) conference, 2008 [PDF available via Google Scholar].

<sup>13</sup> NOVAES, Sylvia Caiuby; CUNHA, Edgar Teodoro da; HENLEY, Paul. The First Ethnographic Documentary? Luiz Thomaz Reis, the Rondon Commission and the Making of *Rituais e Festas Borôro* (1917). **Visual Anthropology**, v. 30, n. 2, p.105-146, 2017. Please note that this film is available online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ein6eKqMBtE> courtesy of the Museu do Índio, Rio de Janeiro.

<sup>14</sup> For an overview, see PARANAGUÁ, Paulo Antonio. **Le Cinéma brésilien**. Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1987; ARENILLAS, María Guadalupe LAZZARA, Michael J. **Latin American Documentary Film in the New Millennium**, Springer, 2019.

<sup>15</sup> For more, see <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/production-company/colonial-film-unit>.

if controversial visual source for global labour historians, not least because the sheer range of working practices featured within it should encourage labour historians to lift their own gaze from the factory and (manual) organised labour. As Lynne Pettinger argues in her new book, *What's Wrong With Work?*, that gaze necessarily excludes alternatives forms of labour and unnecessarily restricts labour studies' analytical and theoretical range.<sup>16</sup>

Closer examination of all these film sources may yield important insights for labour historians, offering new ways of seeing workers, employers, workplaces, supply chains, distributors, retailers, consumers and more. This type of historical research depends, of course, on archivists, historians and others being able to locate, preserve, restore, digitize and open up access to surviving footage. It can also be facilitated by historians making their own documentary films as part of their routine academic activity, in collaboration with others. Beatriz Mamigonian, for example, is the researcher and screenwriter on a forthcoming documentary tracing the role of African-Brazilian politicians and labour activists in Florianópolis in the early twentieth century.<sup>17</sup>

A further documentary co-produced by Matthias Röhrig Assunção traces the Angolan roots of Brazilian capoeira and, via connected projects, the surveillance of African Brazilian workers and others who came together to practice it, often as act of defiant self-definition.<sup>18</sup> As Gustavo Procopio Furtado argues in a recent book, these forms of documentary filmmaking in contemporary Brazil can be said to represent “cinematic archives of the present”.<sup>19</sup>

Cinematic film-making has an equally rich history in Brazil, of course, and might also be more extensively used by labour historians and those working in allied fields. Analysis of early and more contemporary feature films by cultural scholars offer a taste of the possibilities here. The 1929 silent film *São Paulo: Sinfonia da Metrópole* is an extraordinary and stylised “documentary” of the fabric and rhythm of life and work in the city. Directed by Adalberto Kemeny and Rudolf Rex Lustig, it was modelled on their previous city-symphony portrait of Berlin. Cultural scholar, Maite Conde describes one *São Paulo* scene shot in a factory:

<sup>16</sup> PETTINGER, Lynne. **What's Wrong with Work?** Bristol: Policy Press and British Sociological Association, 2019.

<sup>17</sup> MAMIGONIAN, José Rafael G. and MAMIGONIAN, Beatriz. **Em nome de Cruz e Sousa**, 2020, distributed by Atalaia Filmes.

<sup>18</sup> ASSUNÇÃO, Matthias Röhrig et al. **Jogo de Corpo** (Body Games, Capoeira and Ancestry), 2014, <https://www.capoeirahistory.com/angolan-roots/>.

<sup>19</sup> FURTADO, Gustavo Procopio. **Documentary Filmmaking in Contemporary Brazil: Cinematic Archives of the Present**. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.

The film...zooms in on workers hands moving precisely and purposefully as they operate different machines. Such scenes reveal a controlled and collective use of machinery. Individuals' actions are repetitive, rigid and disciplined...and seem to replicated the mechanical movements of a machine, evidencing the productive force of their bodies.<sup>20</sup>

The directors of São Paulo were clearly contesting labour alienation, but not through any kind of organised labour movement. A further sequence shows prisoners at work in the city's penitentiary, making clothes, shoes and furniture and undertaking farm labour. As Conde points out, "the grim realities of incarceration are absent; instead, convicts are little different from the workers outside, and the penitentiary appears as a reflection of the city beyond its walls."<sup>21</sup> This early classic film is a palimpsest for labour historians, offering multiple analytical possibilities. Modern films offer the same possibilities. Nicolás Hernández, to give just one example, takes Sergio Giral's 1974 film, *El otro Francisco* (itself a parody on Anselmo Suárez Romero's nineteenth century abolitionist novel, *Francisco: Or the Delights of the Sugar Mill*) to underpin his multi-layered exploration of the cultural politics of colonial slavery.<sup>22</sup>

Perhaps one of the best starting points, however, for historians of Brazilian labour to engage more directly with visual sources would be to draw on the pioneering work of Brazilian photojournalist, Sebastião Ribeiro Salgado. Trained as economist, Salgado worked in international organisations, including the World Bank, before moving into photojournalism and later joining the Magnum agency. From the outset, he focused on workers and working class communities around the world, taking some of his earliest photographs whilst on World Bank missions to Africa. In 1993, Salgado published a landmark book, *Workers*, featuring searing images of global manual workers.<sup>23</sup> The collection has been much discussed by artists and academics and, together with his other outputs, offers many possibilities to labour historians in Brazil and beyond. Significantly, Tim Strangleman credits this collection as a key stimulus for British labour sociologists to turn their attention to visual sources. The 2001 Work, Employment and Society conference on representations of work was one of the first in Britain to attract a small group of papers on visual representations. Their submission was inspired, Strangleman suggests, by the images on the conference

<sup>20</sup> CONDE, Maite. **Foundational Films: Early Cinema and Modernity in Brazil**. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2018, p. 231.

<sup>21</sup> CONDE. op. cit. p. 233.

<sup>22</sup> HERNÁNDEZ JR., Nicolás. "Quilombo" and "El Otro Francisco": A Post-Modernist Attempt to Re-Write Contemporary History and Colonial Slavery in Brazil and Cuba. **Brazilian and Spanish American Literary and Cultural Encounters**, v. 34, n 1, p. 97-112, 2005. For an overview of over 350 global films featuring labor-related story lines, see ZANIELLO, Tom. **Working Stiffs, Union Maids, Reds and Riffraff**. Expanded edition. Ithaca: ILR Press; Cornell University Press, 2003.

<sup>23</sup> SALGADO, Sebastião **Workers: An Archaeology of the Industrial Age**. London: Phaidon; 1993; and **Trabalho, uma arqueologia da era industrial**. Amadora (Portugal): Editorial Caminho, 1993.



poster, including Salgado photographs. This raises the question of how historians of labour have drawn, not only on Salgado, but on other photographic sources.

Given their global significance, Salgado's photographs of workers have been rather under-used by labour historians to date. This may well be due to the costs and other challenges of obtaining copyright permissions to reproduce these and other images within academic books and journals. Some of his photographs do feature to very poignant effect, however, in selected studies in this field. For example, Berger and Alexander's recent edited collection on the international history of mining includes Salgado's images of gold miners at Serra Pelada in the Venezuelan Amazon.<sup>24</sup> Miners are depicted descending a rock-face with no protective clothing or safety equipment. As "bodies at work", to draw on Wolkowitz, they appear precarious, vulnerable and dispensable. Notably, the collection advocates the use of such images within mining history on the grounds that the "timeless" scenes they depict collapse the "ancient past" into the present, foregrounding past and present forms of labour exploitation (ibid).

A 1990s study of labour and the North American Free Trade Area (NAFTA) closes with reference to Salgado's then new book on workers.<sup>25</sup> In his review of the NAFTA study as part of a wider comparative piece on labour internationalism, Peter Waterman notes that:

Salgado's work could be seen as a memorial to a disappearing race (sic). Except, of course, that manual labour, often in peripherally waged forms, customarily consigned to women, children and ethnic minorities, is not disappearing. Mention of this photo book reminds us that what workers – and even non-workers – need to surpass a resilient and sometimes resurgent nation-state identity is not simply new transnational or internationalist discourses (rational, calculative) but a new global solidarity culture (aesthetic, emotional).<sup>26</sup>

Here, then, Salgado's images are pressed into the service of, in Waterman's words, "proletarian internationalism". Within this framework, their primary contribution to labour history and to labour studies is simply to illustrate – quite literally – the shared exploitation of manual workers around the world and the self-evident need for global labour movements to resist this. However, as argued earlier in this article, although this will always be a vital part of labour studies, photographs and films of workers offer a much richer range of analytical possibilities than this. Salgado's *Workers* collection is surely not solely reducible to the struggle/solidarity paradigm.

<sup>24</sup> BERGER, Stefan; ALEXANDER, Peter (eds.). **Making Sense of Mining History: Themes and Agendas**. London: Routledge, 2019. Figure 2.1a, Gold Mining at the Serra Pelado, Venezuela (copyright Sebastian Salgado/Magnum).

<sup>25</sup> FRENCH, John D.; COWIE, Jefferson; LITTLEHALE, Scott. **Labor and NAFTA: A Briefing Book**. Miami: Center for Labor Research and Studies, Florida International University, 1994.

<sup>26</sup> WATERMAN, Peter. The second coming of proletarian internationalism? A review of recent resources. **European Journal of Industrial Relations**, v. 4, n. 3, p. 349-377, 1998, p. 359.

Alternative and complementary views drawing on the work of Wolkowitz, Strangleman, Pettinger, visual anthropologists and others would offer a broader range of ways for labour scholars to attend to the aesthetic and emotional worlds of those they study.

Recent interdisciplinary work on Brazilian slavery offers interesting possibilities here. Marcus Wood's *Black Milk* is a rich study, for example, of how slavery was imagined and represented in Brazilian and Latin American visual cultures.<sup>27</sup> Wood is a painter, performance artist, film maker, and a professor of English but his work is surely of great interest to labour, social and cultural historians. Brazilian artist and digital colourist Marina Amoral has broken further new ground here with her recent photographic collection, *In Colour: Slavery in Brazil*. The online collection features colourised photographs of enslaved and free workers in Brazil originally taken by German-Brazilian photographer, Alberto Herschel in 1869. For Amoral, "Henschel's most important contribution to the history of photography in Brazil is the portraits he took of people of African origin, slaves and free". Further, Henschel sought to portray his subjects as "people and not as objects", emphasizing their self-hood and dignity. For Amoral, colourising these images further enhances these elements of the original photographs. She argues that "[c]olor has the power to bring life back to the most important moments".<sup>28</sup>

Amaral explores this theme further in her recent book, *The Colour of Time*, co-authored with British historian, Dan Jones.<sup>29</sup> The book re-tells key moments in world history through 200 colourised photographs plus commentary. Aimed at a general audience, it has attracted little academic attention to date. However, reviews by journalists have rightly explored the impacts of colourisation on our perceptions of history, arguing that colour "adds layers of meaning" to history, deepening our response to those pictured<sup>30</sup>, and "breathes new life, immediacy and human connection" into the subjects concerned<sup>31</sup>. The *Colour of Time* focuses on well-known historical figures and includes very few images of ordinary communities or workplaces. However, as Amoral's recent work on Brazilian slavery indicates, the use of colourised images –

<sup>27</sup> WOOD, Marcus. **Black Milk**: Imagining Slavery in the Visual Cultures of Brazil and America. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

<sup>28</sup> I am grateful to Luigi (Gino) Negro for this reference to Marina Amoral's work on Brazilian slavery: <https://marinamaral.com/about/>.

<sup>29</sup> AMARAL, Marina; JONES, Dan. **The Colour of Time**: A New History of the World, 1850-1960. London: Head of Zeus Books, 2018.

<sup>30</sup> DEGROOT, Gerard. Review: The Colour of Time: A New History of the World 1850-1960 by Dan Jones and Marina Amoral - the past in full colour. **The Times**, London, 4 August 2018, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/review-the-colour-of-time-anew-history-of-the-world-18501960-by-dan-jones-and-marina-amaral-the-past-comes-alive-xqwm18bxm>.

<sup>31</sup> CAMPBELL, Jonathan. In Pictures: New book turns historical black and white photos to colour. **The Irish News**, Belfast, 23 August 2018. <https://www.irishnews.com/arts/2018/08/23/news/history-in-living-colour-1406603/>.

along with the use of visual sources more generally - has much potential within social and labour history. Of course, that potential is complex, contradictory and should be treated with caution.

## Conclusions: colourisation and emotional connections

This discussion of colourisation brings me back to my starting point for this article: my involvement with the 2019 British television history series, *Edwardian Britain in Colour*. Colourisation is a tactic, a tool, an artifice. It is a device designed to create the illusion that we can break down the barriers between the lives of those represented on screen and our own. A common response to the Peter Jackson film that inspired the series was that it made the young men of 1918 seem more like young men today – with similar if not the same hopes, dreams, smiles, frowns, fears. Jackson's title - *They Shall Not Grow Old* – is taken from a poem that is still read every year on 11 November at “Remembrance Day” services across Britain to mark the sacrifice of those killed in the First World War and subsequent conflicts:

They shall not grow old as we that are left grow old. Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.

At the going down of the sun and in the morning, we will remember them.<sup>32</sup>

Colourised footage of First World War fighters means that they “shall not grow old” not only because we will “remember them”, but also because the footage suggests that they were “just like us”, and therefore, “live on in us”. Colourisation allows us to “see” khaki uniforms, blood red battlefields, flashing yellow mortar shells, muddy marching boots, the whites of frightened eyes, the steam rising from a tin mug of tea. It invites the audience – as all television and film arguably does – to make an emotional connection with the stories told. In many ways, the team behind *Edwardian Britain in Colour* wanted to repeat the seduction. They sought to use colourisation to present early twentieth century Britain as we had never seen it, to make us look into Edwardian eyes, and walk in Edwardian shoes. They encouraged the historical commentators, of whom I was one, to use these digitally enhanced films as a chance to offer new reflections on the differences and similarities between life then and now.

Of course, colourisation is a device used to draw a popular audience to a historical television programme. As such it is part of a wider range of tools used by those in the creative industries and academia who “translate history for television”.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>32</sup> BINYON, Lawrence. *The Fallen*, 1914.

<sup>33</sup> For overview, see COX, Pamela. *Translating Labor History for Television*. *Revista Mundos do*

It would be naïve to suggest that visual sources and colourised sources bring us ineffably “closer” to the past lives of those represented, or that active empathy is separable from a more passive sympathy. However, as I have argued here, films and photographs offers rich scholarly opportunities for labour and allied historians. As Strangleman rightly puts it, visual materials can be used “as historical record, as mode of investigation, as stimulus to reflection or as a tool of analysis.” By using these materials in these ways, we can understand a great deal more about how work is “organised, carried out and managed” as well as about “the meanings and identities that have attached to labour.”<sup>34</sup> In short, film and visual sources offer labour history new ways of seeing (un)familiar topics and of crafting new enlivening interdisciplinary possibilities.

Recebido em 03/11/2019

Aprovado em 12/11/2019

**Trabalho**, Florianópolis, v. 10, n. 19, p. 17-30, 2018; COX, Pamela. História do Trabalho traduzida para a televisão. **Revista Mundos do Trabalho**, Florianópolis, v. 10, n. 19, p. 17-30, 2018; and COX, Pamela. Inaugural Professorial Lecture, Translating History for Television, University of Essex, December 2014, video available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8N92huO7b0I>.

<sup>34</sup> STRANGLEMAN. op. cit., 2014, p. 255.